

Book Review

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Bruce Springsteen: Born to Run (510 pp.; ISBN Number - 978-1-4711-5779-0). Simon and Schuster UK Ltd: London, 2016

Bruce Springsteen has been inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, the Songwriters Hall of Fame, and the New Jersey Hall of Fame. He is the recipient of 20 Grammy Awards, an Academy Award and the Kennedy Center Honours.

This is what we learn about Bruce Springsteen from the sleeve of his elegantly presented hardback, things many will already know. Yet when you crack the cover you get the opportunity to delve deep into the life of 'The Boss'. From his upbringing in New Jersey to his early years as a musician through to his struggles with mental illness and his eventual rise to stardom we watch Springsteen grow and become the household name he is today.

The book itself is divided into three sections, *Growin' Up*, *Born to Run*, and *Living Proof* each divided into many short chapters. Springsteen tells his story with a heartfelt honesty rarely seen from someone of his profile.

The book starts in Freehold, N.J. where he grew up surrounded by family. He gives us a vivid and frank description of his early childhood experiences. We learn that childhood for Springsteen was not uncomplicated and was defined by poverty, strict Catholic rules, and an unpredictable alcoholic father. Springsteen illustrates this with many insightful reflections on how these experiences affected the development of his personality and the nature of his future relationships.

Springsteen describes how his love of music developed. He began striving for a life in rock 'n' roll when he was only 7 years old on the night in 1956 that Elvis Presley premiered on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. The next day Springsteen's mother allowed her entranced son to rent a guitar. This was the beginning of the legend.

Springsteen goes on to talk about his early experiences in the music industry and how he craved fame, fortune, and recognition. He started playing small gigs in Asbury Park where members of his band cleared \$3 a night. He describes the trials and tribulations of working his way to the top of the industry and the difficulties this caused in his personal life. He discusses disagreements within the newly formed E-Street Band, life on the road, problematic recording contracts and

some peculiar but exhilarating stories about driving without a licence, forgotten dogs and trips packed in the back of a van with the equipment. As fame arrived so too did feelings of regret as the fame he once craved turned into a longing for privacy once again.

Springsteen speaks about his struggle with intimacy and how he was emotionally distant for many years. 'I wanted to kill what loved me because I couldn't stand being loved', he writes. He had been fiercely independent for most of his life and speaks fondly about the freedom of the road. Yet a point came when an intimate relationship appealed to him and in 1985 he married model Julianne Philips. However their union was short lived and soon after his marriage breakdown he began a relationship with his now wife the musician and fellow E-Street Band member Patti Scialfa. The pair began to date in 1988 and Springsteen felt that Patti understood him and the things most important in his life such as his love of music and desire for the road. They got married in 1991 and have three children Evan, Jessica, and Sam.

A recurring theme throughout the book is Springsteen's sense of self-loathing. He describes feeling how he didn't deserve to be loved or feel happy. He has a tendency toward self-criticism and a negative view of himself. He outlines his battle with mental illness and speaks perceptively about the origins and effects of his behaviour. However as the years went on he became increasingly able to cope with his perceived shortcomings and began to display affection towards his father who was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia. He started to forgive others although he seems less ready to forgive himself. He tells us how he began to cope with his mental health difficulties and credits his improved mindset with years in therapy and antidepressants but also and most importantly the supportive presence of his wife Patti Scialfa. 'In my life, Patti is a singularity'.

Springsteen's book is a must read for fanatics and newbies alike. It gives a nod to Springsteen's famous 4-hour concerts while also providing a more rounded view of Springsteen's multi layered personality. The overarching theme of this book is that irrespective how successful, rich, talented, motivated, or driven one is, there is no immunity from mental illness.

Conflicts of Interest

None.

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