

Hello again, and welcome to As It Is. I'm June Simms in Washington. Our show today is all about Bruce "The Boss" Springsteen. A new book about the musician sheds new light on his life, and the issues that helped shape his music. Christopher Cruise joins me today for that report.

Bruce Springsteen - "We Take Care of Our Own"

"Bruce" Tells How Springsteen's Past Shaped His Music

Bruce Springsteen has been making music for more than 50 years. Many books have been written about his life since he rose to fame in 1975. But, a new book about the singer has new details about his past and how it shaped his life and music. Unlike other biographies, the new book "Bruce" was written with his cooperation. Peter Ames Carlin wrote the book.

Bruce Springsteen - "She's The One"

"He and his family really opened up. I mean, besides Bruce, he opened the door to his mom and his sisters and his cousins and aunts and stuff."

That openness gives readers a whole new look at the issues that drove Bruce Springsteen. And it gives them an idea of how those struggles touched his life and shaped his music.

For example, Peter Ames Carlin notes stories about the emotional problems that troubled Bruce Springsteen's father, Douglas. He says there is a reason for all the conflict and anger in songs like Bruce Springsteen's "Adam Raised a Cain."

"A lot of that goes back to how chaotic his family was, as a result of his father. But the fact that they were also really a hop skip and a jump from the poverty line for most of his childhood, that also informs his sociocultural perspective."

Bruce Springsteen - "Adam Raised A Cain"

Mr. Carlin says those experiences had long lasting effects on Bruce Springsteen.

"His perspective on society and politics is about protecting the people who are the most disenfranchised, because that's how he felt, entirely disenfranchised, both from his father and from the society around him."

The writer was also able to pull together and then confirm some classic stories from Springsteen's life. Like the night 19-year-old Bruce waited backstage at a Janis Joplin concert in New Jersey. He had hoped to meet and spend time with the singer.

"She came out stage and caught a glance at Bruce and all of her lights seemed to ignite. And by the end of the show, Bruce sort of noticed her ardor and blew out the door as fast as he could because I think he sensed that, at 19 years old that he could not handle the tornado of Janis Joplin."

Bruce Springsteen - "Prove It All Night"

Peter Ames Carlin also tells how "The Boss" and his band faced financial problems shortly after "Born To Run" made them the biggest act in rock music.

"They were bankrupt. They were more bankrupt than they were before."

Bruce Springsteen had taken legal action against his manager at the time. The lawsuit affected his creative energy and destroyed his finances. During those days, the international rock star would stand in line outside the club he used to play at on New Jersey's Atlantic Shore.

"At the Stone Pony, he would just line up with everybody else. And the owner of the club told me that he saw Bruce at the end of the line sort of digging into his pockets for change so he can make the two dollar cover charge."

Bruce Springsteen - "Born to Run"

The writer also got Bruce Springsteen to explain why, for so many years after he became famous, he refused to write songs with popular appeal.

“He thought, ‘You know, enough of that.’ He didn't want to get into that trap like Michael Jackson fell into of even after you have created this huge, smash -- magnitudes bigger than anything you have done before, he didn't want to get stuck in the groove of trying to re-create that, or be bigger and better the next time out.”

Bruce Springsteen - “Hungry Heart”

It is often said that Bruce Springsteen has never let go of his working class roots. And that, despite his wealth, he still sides with the “little guy.” Carlin says he came away with that same feeling after researching his book.

“When he gets up in the morning, and stumbles to the mirror, the guy he sees in the mirror is still the same loser, lower working class kid that the other kids taunted because he was so weird.”

The New Jersey coastal communities where he blossomed as a musician, and the struggle of the people who still live there, are still part of Bruce Springsteen. And it is still part of his music.

Bruce Springsteen and his E Street Band just finished the European part of a year and a half long concert tour in support of his CD "Wrecking Ball." The CD is the 17th studio album for the longtime musician.

His manager and record producer, John Landau, had high praise for the album. In his words, "the lyrics tell a story you can't hear anywhere else, and the music is his most innovative of recent years. The writing is some of the best of his career, and both veteran fans and those who are new to Bruce will find much to love on "Wrecking Ball."

We leave you with the title track from that CD.

Bruce Springsteen - "Wrecking Ball"

That is As It Is for today. I'm June Simms in Washington. Thanks to VOA's Christopher Cruise for joining me on the show. VOA world news is coming up at the beginning of the hour, Universal Time. Enjoy your weekend!