

Why Bruce is boss

It's no illusion; he's back big with twins

by Robb Frederick
The Collegian

He doesn't sing, he screams. He writes like a daydreaming eighth grader. His songs are always about cars -- fast cars, used cars, cars with girls in the back seats. He's from the same state as Bon Jovi.

So why is the music industry abuzz over Bruce Springsteen's new twin darlings?

It's simple: beneath all the smug jokes and critical barbs, Springsteen remains one of rock music's most honest, energetic performers. He's the essence of the middle class struggle, a dreamer who never quite gets his hands on the prize. And he sells records. A lot of records.

In the nearly five years since Springsteen's introspective *Tunnel of Love*, the Boss divorced his wife, married his back-up singer, became a father (twice, the busy guy), and dissolved his long-standing E Street Band. For an artist who so consistently draws from personal experience, that adds up to quite a bit of new material.

Enough material, in fact, to fill two albums. Hence the arrival of *Human Touch* and *Lucky Town*, a combined 24 songs that chart Springsteen's phobia-filled step into the 90's.

The first step -- the single "Human Touch" -- is a timid one, banking on the success of the *Tunnel of Love* title track. Like that earlier number, "Human Touch" yearns for warmth and security, for that last piece of the puzzle.

The song is a terrific single, balancing Roy Bittan's keyboards (he's the only E Street alumnus to appear on either disc) against Springsteen's subdued, jangled guitar licks. The reprise near the

track's end is the clincher, though; by raging back for another reading of the chorus, Springsteen shows that although he's not exactly sure what he wants, he's going to fight like hell to get it.

That point established, we don't doubt the rationale behind "57 Channels (And Nothin' On)," in which our frustrated narrator, unable to make the transition to the L.A. social scene, tosses aside his remote control and aims a pistol at the screen instead.

Nor do we question the sincerity of "Gloria's Eyes," a confessional barn-burner that teaches a tough lesson about honesty. This time around, our faithful narrator's tripped himself up one

time too many, loosing his girl in the process.

"I was your big man your prince charming / King on a white horse now look how far I've fallen," he bellows over a scorching guitar. The plea is a respectable one, but even before the song's end we know it's coming too late.

The tone takes a more passive turn on numbers like "With Every Wish," a sleepy-eyed ballad, and "Cross My Heart," which weighs the risks of committing to a relationship.

"Well life ain't nothin' / But a cold hard ride / I ain't leavin' 'till I'm satisfied," Springsteen sings.

The problem is, Springsteen can't quite pin down what it is he's after. These early songs easily rival the material from *Tunnel of Love*, but from here the album unravels.

Numbers like "Roll of the

Dice" and "Man's Job" never really come into focus; they sound more like haphazard fillers designed to push *Human Touch* over the 60-minute mark.

With nothing at stake in the songs that follow, Springsteen resorts to writing arena-rock anthems, distanced fodder that undercuts the emotion of the earlier tracks and "blazes" down a path that's already been paved.

With *Lucky Town*, however, Springsteen quickly finds himself back on track.

Hammered out in an inspired 8-week burst of creativity, the 10 songs assembled here brim with the vitality of *Born to Run*, the personal reflection of *Tunnel of*

Love, and an optimism never before seen in Springsteen's music.

Lucky Town weighs in some 20 minutes under *Human Touch*, but the tracks here pull together and grab hold of the unity that Springsteen missed the first time around.

"I'm tired of waiting for tomorrow to come," he sings on the disc's opener, "Better Days." The song reeks of contentment, a theme that resounds throughout the remaining tracks.

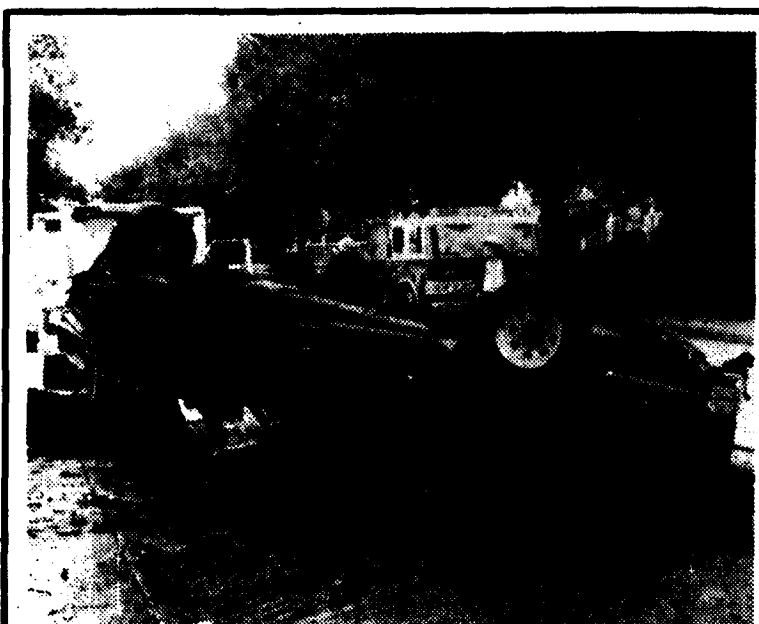
While *Human Touch* gleams with a slick, polished production, *Lucky Town* relishes in the rough, most notably during the gruff title track. (The fantastic pitch changes in the chorus are enough to certify this as a hit.)

The Boss again returns to his roots for "Local Hero," a sentimental trip back down his neighborhood streets.

Human Touch
☆☆☆ (out of 5)
Lucky Town
☆☆☆☆

Discography

- *Greetings From Asbury Park, New Jersey* (1973)
- *The Wild, the Innocent and the E Street Shuffle* (1973)
- *Born to Run* (1975)
- *Darkness on the Edge of Town* (1978)
- *The River* (1980)
- *Nebraska* (1982)
- *Born in the U.S.A.* (1984)
- *Live 1975/85 -- Box Set* (1986)
- *Tunnel of Love* (1987)
- *Chimes of Freedom -- EP* (1988)
- *Human Touch* (1992)
- *Lucky Town* (1992)



Ever Get A Pal Smashed?

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