Entertainment

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 sincerity of 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 rear 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 "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

Human Touch

र्भ सं र्भ (out of 5)

Lucky Town

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

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.

The song is undeniably autobiographical, as the native hears about the small town hero who eventually packed up and left for the "real world."

The rest of Lucky Town revolves around Springsteen's new family; from his marriage to singer Patty Scialfa to the recent birth of his son, Evan James.

The ballad "If I Should Fall Behind" (a slower version of Tunnel's "All That Heaven Will Allow") begs for a promise of faith, while the gentle "Book of Dreams" takes an outside look at

the celebration of his second wedding day.

"Leap of Faith" finds the Boss letting go of his reservations about commitment, and "Souls of the Departed" -- a vision of dead soldiers cut down in their prime -- stabs at every parent's deepest fears.

"Tonight as I tuck my own son in bed / All I can think of is what if it would've been him instead," he contemplates.

The disc's centerpiece (and the number that inspired it, in fact) is "Living Proof," a wide-eyed account of the birth of Springsteen's second child.

'In his mother's arms it was all the beauty I could take / Like the missing words to some prayer that I could never make," he sings with a gut-wrenching honesty.

'In a world so hard and dirty so fouled and confused / Searching for a little bit of God's mercy / I found living proof."

The number completes Springsteen's maturation as a songwriter. With Lucky Town, he's finally caught up with his dreams of a brighter future and a better life. At 42, the young punk who was born to run finally finds himself content by the 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)

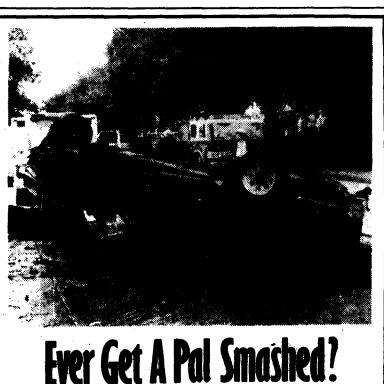
-- Live 1975/85 --Box Set (1986)

-- Tunnel of Love (1987)

-- Chimes of Freedom -- EP (1988)

- Human Touch (1992)

-- Lucky Town



Springsteen, Matthew Sweet, Cowboy Junkies, PIL, Guns 'N Roses, Jules Shear, Live, Nirvana, the Reivers, Jim Carroll Band, the Pixies, Ned's Atomic Dusibin, Toad the Wei Sprocket, Richie Sambora. Robin Hitchcock, Lenny Kravitz, Animal Logic, U2, Bonnie Raitt, R.E.M. Rush. Blues Traveler, Infectious Grooves Psychedelic Furs, Robbie Roberston, OMD, G.W. McLennan, Kitchens of Distinction, David Lantz, Red Hit Chili Peppers . .

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