Course Title: Bruce Springsteen: America’s Poet Laureate

Course description: Instructor: Pete Elman
“...Last Thursday, I saw my rock’n’roll past flash before my eyes. I saw rock and roll future and its name is Bruce Springsteen. And on a night when I needed to feel young, he made me feel like I was hearing music for the very first time...” Jon Landau, 1974.

Landau would go on to become Bruce’s manager. He didn’t believe Springsteen’s music was simply retro soul and rock and roll, but that he took his musical influences, i.e. Presley, Berry, Orbison, Spector and Dylan, and formed his own distinctive sound. Springsteen didn’t reinvent rock and roll; he made his own stamp and developed his own signature. Just as you can listen to any Berry song and say,” that’s the Chuck Berry sound.” you can listen to a Bruce song and say “that’s the Springsteen sound.”

*   *  ` *

Pete will break the course up chronologically into six distinct periods in the life and career of Bruce Springsteen, now 72, from his birth in 1949 to the present, celebrating 50 years—and counting--in what may be the most remarkable career in rock and roll.

Week-by-Week Course Outline and Syllabus
Suggested reading and viewing for the course, suggested listening by week, plus audio playlist and video clips for each week with songs and performances specific to that week.

Reading for entire class:
Born to Run: The Bruce Springsteen Story, Dave Marsh, 1979
Springsteen, Robert Hilburn, 1985
Springsteen: Point Blank by Chris Sandford, 1999
Bruce Springsteen: Songs, 2001
Bruce Springsteen: Two Hearts: The Definitive Biography, Dave Marsh , 2005
The Ties That Bind: Bruce Springsteen A to E to Z. Gary Graff, 2005
Bruce, Peter Carlin, 2012
Talk About a Dream: The Essential Interviews of Bruce Springsteen, Chris Phillips, editor of Backstreets magazine, 2013
Springsteen on Springsteen: Interviews, Speeches, and Encounters, 2013
Boss: Bruce Springsteen & E Street Band --Illustrated History, Gillian Garr, 2016
Born to Run, Bruce Springsteen, 2016

Viewing (documentary films) for entire class:


**Week 1: 1949-71; “He only wanted to play the goddam guitar.”** Childhood in New Jersey: Catholicism, family life, alienation, the loner. His first bands; *The Castiles, Earth, Child, Steel Mill, Dr. Zoom and the Sonic Boom.* Columbia comes calling; John Hammond and the legendary audition, *Greetings from Asbury Park.*

**Listening:** These five albums represent the roots/influences of Bruce’s music:
- Elvis Presley, *30 #1 hits,* (released in 2002)
- Chuck Berry, *The Great Twenty-Eight* (released in 1989)
- Roy Orbison *Greatest hits,* 1962
- Phil Spector, *Wall of Sound: The Very Best of Phil Spector* 1961-1966
- Bob Dylan, *Highway 61* 1965

*Greetings from Asbury Park, N.J. 1973*

**playlist for week one:**
- Born to Run
- Seaside Bar Song, 1973, outtake from Wild Innocent—Paradise by the “C”
- Mary Queen of Arkansas,
- For you
- Does this bus stop at 82nd street?
- Blinded by the light
- Growin’ Up

**special video clips for week one:**
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=COFHGFZxtnY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=COFHGFZxtnY) Elvis, 1956 “Hound Dog”
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jenWdylTtzs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jenWdylTtzs) Beatles, 1964, I want to hold your hand”
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YjVh89sHDnI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YjVh89sHDnI) Bruce live: So hard to be a saint in the city
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aNNJh1fLRx8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aNNJh1fLRx8) Bruce live: Spirit in the Night
Week 2: 1973-75: “I have seen rock and roll future, and its name is Bruce Springsteen.” The “new Dylan” strays from his rock and roll roots, and returns with a vengeance with *The Wild the Innocent and the E Street shuffle*. *Thunder Road* and the endless highway: The musically diverse and commercial triumph that was *Born to Run*; An in-depth look at the members of the legendary E Street band, and a look at the accompanying tours that established them as rock and roll’s premier live act.

**Listening:**
- The Wild, the Innocent & the E Street Shuffle 1973
- Born to Run, 1975
- Hammersmith Odeon, London ’75
- Live/1975–85

**playlist for week two:**
- E Street shuffle
- Incident on 57th street
- NYC Serenade
- She’s the one
- Meeting across the river

**special video clips for week two:**
- Sandy, 4th of July, Asbury Park, from London, live
- Rosalita, live, Phoenix 1978
- Thunder Road, live 1975
- Backstreets, from London 1975
- Tenth avenue freeze-out, from Tempe
- Jungleland—from London 1975

Week 3: 1976-82: Legal limbo and professional purgatory. Bruce writes dozens of powerful songs while the lawyers put his career on hold. *Darkness on the Edge of Town* is released to unprecedented critical acclaim, as the live show reaches epic levels. The double album, *The River*, cements Springsteen position as the face of American rock and roll as the Reagan years commence; the political Bruce emerges;

**Listening:**
**playlist for week three:**
Badlands
Prove it all Night
Racing in the Street
Ties that Bind
Sherry Darling
Hungry Heart
Independence Day
Cadillac Ranch

**special video clips for week three:**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P8HXvt-v5v0
Houston ’78, Darkness on the Edge of Town

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XRdNwHmUiiQ
Promised Land, Tempe, 1980

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=utVR3EgQkHs
No Nukes, The River 1982

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RrZ-F-NzWT0
Music Cares/Because the Night, with Patty Smith

**Week 4: 1982-85: Introspection, and then superstardom beckons and Bruce responds.** The acoustic album *Nebraska* and its brutal depiction of American life during the Reagan years.; the seven hit-single phenomenon that was *Born in the USA*; indoor coliseum and outdoor stadium tours and pop culture calls; fan magazines, remixes, a live double LP hits #1, and love and marriage—with the wrong girl. With the help of therapy, Bruce confronts his depression.

**Listening:**
Nebraska 1982
Born in the USA, 1984
Live/1975–85
18 Tracks, 1999

**playlist for week four**
Nebraska
Johnny 99
Born in the USA
Cover Me
I’m on Fire
Darlington County
No Surrender
Bobby Jean
My Hometown

**special video clips for week four:**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M3eu1gW-bQ8
Official music video, Atlantic City 1982
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6OjW1TDANxk&list=TLPQMTkwMzIwMjBi6JE9iXuuWA&index=6
“Taxi Driver” clip, ‘you talkin’ to me?’ 1976
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6vQpW9XRiyM
Glory days official music video 1984
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=129kuDCQthS
Dancing in the Dark official music video 1984

**Week 5: 1986-2001: The aftermath of the hurricane:** Bruce tries new things and “breaks up” the E Street band. The brilliant break-up album, Tunnel of Love, Exit actress Julianne Phillips, enter Jersey girl Patti Scialfa. Bruce moves to LA; CBS releases Human Touch and Lucky Town on the same day; The Ghost of Tom Joad thrusts Bruce back into America’s conscience.

**Listening:**
Tunnel of Love 1987
Human Touch 1992
Lucky Town 1992
The Ghost of Tom Joad 1995
Bruce Springsteen & The E Street Band: Live in NYC, from 1999-2000 tour, 2001

**playlist for week five**
Tunnel of Love
Brilliant Disguise
All that heaven will allow
Walk Like a Man
Ghost of Tom Joad acoustic
Sinaloa Cowboys—with photos
Youngstown medley
Galveston Bay
special video clips for week five:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M9BNoNFKCBI
We are the world 1983
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=idnJnjV_8rg
Brilliant Disguise 1986
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MkFQHScyti0
One Step Up 1986
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=85cNRQo1m3A
Human Touch 1992
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ueIYdZrglVo
Living Proof 1992
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4z2DtNW79sQ
Streets of Philadelphia

Week 6: 2001-2020: the rock and roller grows up: Back to Jersey to raise a family. The horror of 9/11 and Bruce’s heartfelt, heroic and historic response, The Rising; the introspective Devils & Dust gives way to the rootsy Seeger Sessions album and subsequent tour. The rock and roll poet turns 60: E Street Radio, The title song from the Wrestler, the deaths of Danny and Clarence. Barack Obama—with Bruce on board—brings hope and change to America, the Kennedy center and numerous other awards; a slew of albums, each to fit the times. Meanwhile, the greatest rock and roll band on the planet continues, incredibly, to improve with age, conquering the landscape, one city at a time, delivering hope, love, inspiration and community—and kick-ass rock and roll. Born to Run; the definitive autobiography, Bruce on Broadway, Western Stars, Letter to You.

Listening:
The Rising (2002)
Devils & Dust (2005)
We Shall Overcome: The Seeger Sessions (2006)
Magic (2007)
Wrecking Ball (2012)
Western Stars (2019)
Letter to You (2020)

**playlist for week six:**
Lonesome Day
The Rising
Into the Fire
Radio Nowhere
We Take Care of our Own
This American Land
Tucson train
Letter to You

**special video clips for week six:**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NKYYChoQIvI
Nothing Man 2002
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CapO4lucqH4
My City of ruins, Barcelona
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nKIBLJtYigE
Barack awards Bruce the presidential medal of freedom, 2016
Western Stars, a film by Thom Zimny (2019), available on Amazon Prime Video
Letter to You, a film by Thom Zimny (2020), available on Apple TV
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ajbJqfNS0aA
Born to run, from London 1975
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FN0wMm50hzs
Detroit medley from Tempe 1980