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Around the corner from the Record Plant, in the last few days of recording the album Born to Run, near 8th Ave. and 44th St. Bruce Springsteen, in Karen Darwin's pants (his clothes were at the laundry), with Mike Appel, Jimmy Iovine, and Jon Landau. Background courtesy of the City of New York.

"I stepped off the curb, looked back, and knew it was a moment in history," says photographer Eric Meola.



ERIC MEOLA interviews MIKE APPEL

In 1975, photographer Eric Meola captured an image of Bruce Springsteen and Clarence Clemons that would become one of the most iconic album covers of all time. That album, *Born to Run*, was the last that manager and “stone-cold believer” Mike Appel would have a hand in producing with Springsteen before their infamous legal rift.

Some 34 years later, Meola was astounded to discover that the rift, somehow, appeared to have healed. Springsteen dedicated the 2009 Buffalo, NY performance of *Greetings From Asbury Park, NJ* to his former manager: “the man who got me in the door. Mike Appel is here tonight—Mike, this is for you.” At first, Meola honestly thought it was a joke. Since they clearly had some catching up to do, we asked Meola to take the wheel for the first *Backstreets* interview with Mike Appel in 20 years.

Eric Meola: Let’s start with the Super Bowl. It’s 1972, and from what I understand, you suggested to the NBC producer in charge that instead of opening the Super Bowl with the national anthem that they should have Bruce Springsteen do “Balboa vs. the Earth Slayer.”

Mike Appel: That’s correct.

Now, to put that in perspective—and talk about living in the future—Bruce was 23 years old then. He’s past 60 now. Thirty-six years and 36 Super Bowls later, Bruce does the halftime show in 2009. Did you happen to watch it?

Yes, of course.

What did you think? Did you feel vindicated, or did that never enter your mind? What did you think of the performance?

Well, his performance is always electrifying. He’s the greatest live performer that ever was—probably, in my estimation, ever will be. So his performance is always great. You can never find fault with that.

As far as feeling vindicated, I actually never gave it a thought until somebody mentioned it to me, and I said, “Well, look... it’s a long time coming.” I said, “I’m not prescient....” I mean, I couldn’t foretell the future. It’s just that we were so excited at that time with his talent and with his ability to write sterling lyrics, highly poetic lyrics, that we just felt the sky was the limit.

But he didn’t even have an album out at the time.

My attitude always was, and I guess it always will be, that if you’re excited about something, it’s contagious, and other people will see it, too. Any literate person up

at NBC will see this—that was my attitude. And when I took Bruce to see John Hammond, Sr., and later Clive Davis, they did see it.

I can’t say that I’m the only guy that ever “saw” Bruce Springsteen. There were... devotees, shall we say, and they supported him. That’s why we hated it when Clive Davis was relieved of his duties at Columbia. We felt we lost an advocate, a champion for Bruce Springsteen—and that was no joke, because we actually did.

I think it was late ’71 when Tinker West brought him into your office. First of all, during 1972, Don McLean’s “American Pie” was the number one song in America. Looking back at some of the songs that Bruce walked into your office with, some the titles of his unpublished songs were “Tokyo,” “The Song Mother,” “The Ballad of Elmer the Pea,” and the one we just mentioned, “Balboa vs. the Earth Slayer.” And he walks into your office....

Did you see the movie *I Walk the Line*?

Sure.

There’s that scene where Johnny Cash, played by Joaquin Phoenix, has an audition with Sam Phillips at Sun Records in Memphis. And he sings a song, but he has no conviction whatsoever, and Sam interrupts him and lectures him about putting

his heart and soul into the words and making it his own song. That scene reminds me of your version of that day. And you told Bruce, in effect, to go home and write some more songs.

Well, there’s no question about it. I had listened to two songs, and neither song hit me. But the second song had something about he and some woman dancing to a silent band, because she was deaf, dumb and blind. I thought that was kind of interesting. And it provoked me—it provoked my thought process for a moment. I said, “If we’re gonna have an album deal here, we need way more songs than these two. Is that all you got?” And he said, “Well, I gotta go write more songs.”

I said, “Well, yeah, if you want an album, you’re gonna have to, and maybe a few more commercial ones as well.” So that was what my lecture was to Bruce, if you can call it that. But he didn’t take it as a lecture—he just took it as solid advice, and he was going to go back and do something about it. And he did.

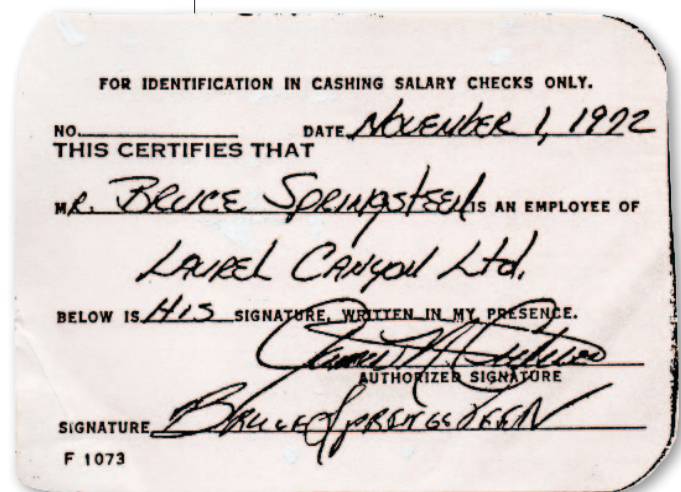
I guess that’s what happens when raw talent runs into people that are “in the business,” if you will. All of a sudden, that raw talent has to suddenly realize, you know, you’re gonna have to shape it a little bit this way and that way to get through this filtering system.

I think to Bruce’s credit—first of all, to your credit, for what you told him, and then to his credit—he took your words seriously, and his whole style changed. He became more focused on writing good songs, and...

Traditional song criteria.

Right.

Absolutely correct. He did do that. I will say this, though: he certainly was not prevented from stretching the normal criteria for songwriting in any way whatsoever. If you look at “Incident on 57th Street,” these are not what I would call normal pop song structures. He pushes the envelope just about as far as you can. And then certainly on the third album he did that as well, with





"Jungleland" and "Thunder Road." These are not what I would call normal pop songs.

They were more operatic.

Yeah, they were anthems, to some extent.

I want to get rid of a myth or two here. It's nearly 40 years since you signed Bruce to a long-term contract. The story that's filtered down is that it was signed on the hood of a car. True?

When I heard that, I said to myself, "I didn't know that." I had no idea. I read it somewhere, maybe it was *Backstreets*, I don't remember where, and I said, "On the hood of a car? For Christ's sake, I had no idea."

I just wanted to know what kind of car it was [laughs].

I wasn't present. I have no idea.

Given your own background as a songwriter and that Bruce was virtually unknown at the time, did you consider the terms of the contract to be egregious? And given the passage of time, do you see it any differently now?

No. Let me lay it all out for you. I looked at myself as a producer/publisher at the time, and the people that I had signed myself to were also producer/publishers, so I was acting just like the people who signed me as an artist. I was doing the exact same thing that I had been doing my whole life, so there was nothing new there.

The only thing new was the management situation. The management contract got signed months later. Because I told Bruce, "I'm not a manager." He said, "But I want you to manage me." I said, "But there are guys out there... I just want you to know, I don't know anything about managing."

He didn't care. The managers he had met, he didn't like. He just wanted me to focus on him. To some extent I think Bruce knew when he entered my life—in fact, I *know* he knew this—there were other artists in my life. He was entering an area with other artists. I had just finished an album for Leiber and Stoller down in Nashville for the group called Montana Flintlock, which Tinker [West] also brought to me. We had just signed an artist by the name of Tony Azito to Epic Records. Bruce realized that we were guys that had relationships with record labels and other producers, with publishers, writers... that, hey, these guys are *in*. So we were guys that had "the in" in the record industry, and he knew that.

From what I understand, you had a band yourself called the Camelots. You played, at one point, even if it was for one song, with Jay and the Americans, with Link Wray & His Ray Men... and tell me a little about Hugo & Luigi.

Oh, sure. Hugo & Luigi—in fact, I went to lunch last year with Luigi Creatore.

Hugo has passed away?

Hugo Peretti passed away. Luigi Creatore's still alive, and to make a long story short, he's the guy—he, George David Weiss, and Hugo Peretti wrote "Can't Help Falling in Love" for Elvis. Bruce sings that song. See, there are these little connections with all of us guys in the music industry.

Six degrees of separation.

Yeah, you're damn straight. Like Ralph Gleason, when he was interviewing Hank Williams, Sr., he asked him a question. He said, "Hank, who are your favorite singers?" So Hank mentioned this guy by the name of Bill Darnell. Bill Darnell signed Mike Appel.

Bill Darnell signed me to his label and then later took me over to Herald and Ember Records. Herald and Ember had songs like, you know, Maurice Williams and "Stay." Bruce Springsteen sings that. Jackson Browne had a big hit with "Stay." Al Silver, who owned Herald and Ember, also had "Get a Job," he had "In the Still of the Night." He had all those hits, and he got me over there, and I had this band called The Camelots. We'd play with, like you say, with Jay and the Americans, Link Wray & His Ray Men and all sorts of other people. We played in the south shore of Long Island, and also we went down to Virginia in the case of Link Wray. I played over in New Jersey in front of black audiences. We backed up The Marvellettes. I mean, we were musicians, we did a lot of that stuff. And finally I ran into Hugo and Luigi.

They had just signed Melanie, who was big—she had that "Lay Down (Candles in the Rain)." She was on Columbia. Clive Davis loved her. I wrote some songs with Melanie for Bobby Lewis, who had that "Tossin' and Turnin' All Night," so I was, like you say, involved. And Hugo &

Luigi knew that I had my own band, The Balloon Farm, which recorded a song called "Question of Temperature" on Laurie Records, which was Dion's label, and we had a Top 40 hit.

And then I toured with The Box Tops. I toured with Sly and the Family Stone.

I'm glad that we're getting some of this in here, because I really think that it's important that younger readers who don't know about those times get some sense of your background.

The thing is, nobody comes out of no place. You know, every person has to report from somewhere.

Which brings us to *The Making of Bruce Springsteen*—that's the subtitle of Marc Eliot's book, *Down Thunder Road*. You met Bruce in late '71 for the first time, asked him to go back and write some more songs, and then there were the sessions for *Greetings* at 914 [Sound Studios]. Barely 12 months had gone by, and yet here was this artist with a record contract, about to release his first album—*Greetings* came out in early January of '73. Can you talk a little about what you feel your contribution was in that first year towards, as Marc says, "*The Making of Bruce Springsteen*"?

Well, what was... sometimes these book titles are...

Well, obviously, I know—I think there are many connotations around the phrase "*The Making of Bruce*..."

Exactly. But in essence, what we tried to do was keep Bruce and us *alive*. In other words, we tried to get him booked as often as possible and for as much money as possible—and there certainly wasn't much of that at that time. He couldn't command a lot of money. There were some places—you know, if you went down to Virginia, he could even play at a theater and damn near sell the whole place out. So it wasn't like he was a nobody everywhere.

But you're talking about relegating his success to the Northeast—and that was it, basically. You couldn't take him anywhere else in the country. So we tried to book as much as we could here to keep the band alive so that everybody had money and we could get to our next album. And then we'd get an advance toward the recording budget for that next album, and that would keep us alive for a little longer.

So we went hand-to-mouth, day-to-day, and you tried to do everything you possibly could. You tried to set up foreign publishing deals. Hopefully somebody might cover one of his songs—which eventually did happen in the case of "Blinded by the Light" and Manfred Mann. You tried to set up things like that around the world. And of course, you tried to keep the fires stoked at Columbia, especially in the face of the fact that *Greetings From Asbury Park* was no measure of success by anybody's standards.

I mentioned Don McLean and "American Pie," and there was James Taylor—he was the big thing then. He was on the cover of *Time* Magazine, and here you are trying to push this guy Bruce Springsteen.

And again, when we lost Clive Davis—when Columbia dismissed him—that was a big blow to us. He went to what they called Bell Records at the time, then he changed that name to Arista, he signed Barry Manilow, and the rest is history. But it was terrible for us. We were just about forgotten completely, and it forced us to start thinking about how we were going to survive.

There were times when I went back to my office, threw my bag down on the couch, and I just sat there, staring in the dark... and you know, it was funny, because we had wallpapered the entire office with

WHEN WE LOST CLIVE DAVIS, THAT WAS A BIG BLOW TO US. THERE WERE TIMES WHEN I WENT BACK TO MY OFFICE, THREW MY BAG DOWN ON THE COUCH, AND I JUST SAT THERE, STARING IN THE DARK.

Greetings From Asbury Park postcards, right? And I'd sit there in the evening, not knowing what to do with Bruce Springsteen, my life or anything, stare at the walls and say, "Could one man be right and everybody else be wrong?"

And I actually answered the question. I said, "Yes," and I'd storm out the door, knowing that I was right and everybody else was wrong.

On the *Born to Run* 30th anniversary DVD [*Wings for Wheels*], you graciously gave a lot of credit to Jon Landau, which was really nice, and it was nice of them to have you on there. And on that DVD, Bruce says, "Mike was a stone-cold believer."

Right.

I look at that period and I realize how passionate you were, and I suppose it could be seen as abrasive. But on the other hand, I think it was what you felt needed to be done to get this guy seen.

I always said to myself, "If it's truly great and the guy is truly great, then it's not artifice." It's not a lie. It's not just some advertisement. It's not some company trying to push itself. I'm not a pitchman, so to speak.

Now, it may come off initially as a pitchman. "Oh, he's just talking about his client. Well, what do you expect? He's got a vested interest." The truth of the matter is, I didn't even really think about that at all. My attitude was, "This guy is the greatest. You gotta go see this guy. The songs are killer. You're gonna love this." And that's the way I went out into the world, just *boom*, single-mindedly, wearing blinders, as I've often said.

That's what you do when you're excited, when you are passionate about things, and that passion is contagious. Sooner or later, somebody else listens to it.

One of the anecdotal things that's been passed down is you telling John Hammond, "So you're the guy who signed Dylan, let's see how good you are," or something to that effect. Do you remember, as closely as possible, just what you really said to John?

I said to him, "If you are the guy that discovered Bob Dylan, then you won't miss this." That's what I told him. And he hated that. He had dark sunglasses on the top of his head, right, on his gray crew cut, and he put them down over his eyes. I thought, "Oh god, now he hates my guts." But I had already said it, and he waved me to sit down, and then he asked Bruce to just play.

Bruce played "If I was the Priest." It was the first song, and John Hammond, being a Vanderbilt and presumably a Protestant, was probably predisposed against the Catholic Church. And of course Bruce is singing basically an anti-Catholic song, and they just hit it off beautifully. There couldn't have been a better song to start with.

Hammond puts the glasses back up on his head again, and he turns to me and he says, "You're right. Play me another song, Bruce."

He did not miss a thing. He was as excited as we all were. He was just like a big kid. So it didn't matter that he might have been in his 60s or whatever, that didn't mean a damn thing. That guy saw it right away.

Can you talk a bit about the production and the making of *The Wild, the Innocent & the E Street Shuffle*? Because I think a lot of fans feel that it's truly one of the greats. It came out just eight-and-a-half months after *Greetings*, and it's a very different album. There are only seven songs, and as you mentioned, they're very operatic, and on average, they last like seven minutes. The feeling I have is that I'm sure you had a lot of input, but in a way, you let Bruce do what he wanted to do.

Yeah. Well, we always let Bruce do what he wanted to do, because 99 times out of 100, he was right. He has artistic instincts



Springsteen, Appel, and Clive Davis at the Bottom Line, 1974.

that are very good. And in this case, other people's artistic instincts lined up with his. Therefore, there was unanimity in production decisions, and in songwriting direction.

In your Guest DJ spot on E Street Radio, you talked about the genius of Davey Sancious, and how upset you were when he and Boom [drummer Ernest Carter] left. And personally, I think Davey pretty much made the second album—at least musically, in terms of that genius and his piano playing. His soloing on “New York City Serenade” is incredibly soulful.

Oh, yeah. Davey Sancious was a one-of-a-kind character. You're not going to find these guys growing on trees, because they don't.

The violins and the orchestra in “New York City Serenade”—was that your idea? Was that Bruce's? Was it Davey's?

It just came out of where we were: all of a sudden... yeah, let's try the violin, you know? Somebody suggested it—I don't know whether it was me, Bruce, whoever—

and we just tried it, and we said, “Oh, that works. That's in. Let's not even think about that one anymore.”

Things manifest themselves to you artistically, and then they become part of the foundation of the song. There it is. There's no sense questioning that. We know that's right.

My own personal feeling is, you know, the first album's always the first album, and it's a growing pains kind of thing. That second album... I'm not a music critic, and not that I have to be, but in my humble opinion, it's one of the best he's ever done.

It's more musical than the first one right away—it just is. The first album is a bunch of little songs, so to speak, strung together. The second album starts to be where Bruce tests the limits of some of his abilities. And he starts to experiment and go here, go there—and like you said, nobody stops him.

In those days, you've got to understand... of course, it's nothing like today. Today, they're so consumed with trying to make something palatable for the masses. I don't

mean Bruce Springsteen and Jon Landau—I'm just talking about record companies in general and A&R departments in general, and that's the way it's been now for the last ten or 20 years. And when you're so absorbed with trying to take something and shrink it and cut it and edit it and squeeze it into this little hole here, you take all the goodness out of it. And nothing becomes unique, and everything becomes the same old, same old. There is nobody doing anything cool like that where you say, “Hey, this is artistic. I really like this. I'm drawn to this.” And then that's the doldrums that the record industry finds itself in today, and you haven't produced a new Davey Sancious anywhere.

I think you might have a Davey Sancious, but as happened with him anyways, someone like that has his own album, and it either sinks or swims on its own.

Well, it's difficult for an album from someone like him to be a mainstream success because, first of all, obviously, you're

PETER CUNNINGHAM PHOTO



Bruce Springsteen

**THE REFERENDUM ON WHETHER OR NOT
BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN AND THE E STREET
BAND SHOULD PLAY THEIR SCHEDULED
ENGAGEMENTS OR NOT**

WHY WE SHOULD

1. We will not be able to afford Studio Instrument Rental to even continue the auditions that we are now undertaking.
- The cost of the auditions plus salaries and no other expenses considered is \$2,000 per week. At this rate we will last one week and a half longer. The expected income from publishing could come as early as Sept. 15 or as late as never if any of these prospective publishers have second thoughts.
2. Clarence Clemons will be tarred and feathered by the Internal Revenue Service come monday of next week.
3. We have to buy new amps and equipment, not to mention, new cases to protect those new amps and equipment.
4. We have to at least be able to provide salaries for everybody involved with the band, now else will everybody be able to pay their rent.
5. Cancelling all these gigs could give Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band a bad reputation. No artist can stand up for long with a reputation for cancelling gigs. I don't like to cancel dates even for the best business reason in the world, but we have in the past so much that, believe it or not, we've only worked 20 nights out of a possible 123 nights in the last four months.
6. We must sell more records or we'll never reach the charts. We'll never reach the charts unless we work. CBS has taken the single that we worked on for three months, to be frank, lightly.
7. We must build up a cash reserve for touring in areas of the country where we are virtually unknown (e.g. the midwest and the west coast, even the deep south).
8. I was going to headline us in Hartford, Conn. at the Bushnell Auditorium with NRBQ or THE FABULOUS RHINESTONES opening to us on Oct 14. I won't be able to finance it if we don't work in September.
9. If we are going to pay Davey his \$500 share for work done on the 2nd Lp we could pay him a lot sooner if we worked September. Plus Boom and Davey would be making their salaries also. I don't think their so well off or established as to be independent enough to say no to working with us during September and early October. We could at the same time, in between gigs, be auditioning just like we are and we could literally continue it for week without it starving us out. If we don't have to do something the hard way, then let's not. October is going to be affected as well as September and October is Philharmonic Hall on the 4th. Even if we found the right member by middle end of September, I don't think it would be a good idea to go to Philharmonic Hall with such untried new members of the band. Cancelling Philharmonic Hall is only one more way to piss CBS, as well as, Wm Morris off after they've worked hard at getting these dates for us in the first

place.

10. The record company is already annoyed for having advanced us the money for an Lp that they won't receive for months yet. By not playing at least some live gigs the record company sees nothing happening at all and will treat us as such.

11. In my opinion we are on the brink of a great success but if we fail to realize the importance of working September we could jeopardize our situation somewhat.

12. Giving the band a day off before and after each gig in September and October we still have fourteen days a month to audition people. Since most all the dates are weekend dates we would not be auditioning people anyway, so why not work!

In short I think we should work these months and still carry on serious auditions for the new members of the band. Just because we or Davey and Boom may have said to people it's over, and it is for them with us, does not seem to be enough to negate or make null and void all the above points I have made. If they work with us for a month or month and a half more we all prosper by the move.

I humbly submit this for your consideration,

Letter from Mike to Bruce written in late August 1974. David Sancious and Boom Carter had just quit, following the August 14 gig, and the E Street Band is in trouble. Appel makes his case.

dealing with an instrumentalist. And when he does his own thing, he becomes more self-absorbed and a little more obscure than if he's forced into a Bruce Springsteen song structure. Then, he only has a little bit for himself, a little spotlight for himself to shine—and I have found that there are a few musicians who are extraordinary musicians when they're forced into that situation. It's almost like what Duke Ellington says, you know, "I don't need more time. I need a deadline."

So it's like, "Davey, look, we need a little something here, can you help us out?" And then he just listens, and he doodles a little bit, and the next thing you know he comes up with some extraordinary thing. You say, "That's it, Davey. You couldn't have done anything better, and nobody could have." And that's what I love about working with musicians like him: forcing them into an area where they would never be in a million years if left to their own devices.

The lyrics were on the first album and left off the second album. Was that a conscious decision or an oversight?

Never an oversight. Everything's conscious. We just didn't feel it was necessary.

That's obviously changed since then—I think the lyrics have been included on every album ever since.

Yeah, but everything was done according to however Bruce wanted it to go down. We took our cue from him.

If I remember correctly, your offices were at 75 East 55th.

That's correct.

Was your office actually [Bob Dylan manager] Albert Grossman's office, or was it above or below his office?

We were above him by, I think, two floors.

And was that just coincidence or a deliberate choice?

Just coincidence [laughs]. I always look at it as a part of destiny, like these little things that keep happening and you keep saying to yourself, "How is it that Albert Grossman—of all the people, of all the places he could have picked—he's two floors beneath me and I never know that until months later?" Until I finally run into him in the elevator. You couldn't possibly miss him, because he was pretty big, and he had that big long,

gray-haired ponytail. We had a precious small elevator in that building—and KISS, of all people, [had offices there]. Can you imagine what a motley crew that was? [Laughs]

One of my fondest memories is walking into your office, which as you mentioned was wallpapered with the *Greetings from the Asbury Park* cover, and you were on the phone with someone and telling them how Bruce had just come up on the bus from Long Branch. I remember thinking, my god, this guy's coming up from Long Branch on the bus. I'd had this picture in my mind of this rock star [laughs]....

And the part that you were so excited about was this line, "I walked into a Tenth Avenue Freeze-out." I remember you repeating it over and over, and you were so enthusiastic. You were always into the words.

I also have this memory of walking down Madison Avenue with you one day, and you were going on and on about Bruce and comparing him to all these different people. And strangely enough you compared him to Wordsworth, and I was like, *what?* [Laughs] Now, I

*Appel, Danny Federici, and Springsteen in the studio
for The Wild, the Innocent & the E Street Shuffle,
914 Sound Studios, Blauvelt, NY, 1973.*





Recognize those boots?
914 Sound Studios,
Blauvelt, NY, 1973.

PETER CUNNINGHAM PHOTO

assume you knew nothing about William Wordsworth...

Oh, I knew something about Wordsworth, so it wasn't totally inappropriate [laughs]. But yeah, Bruce called up one day just out of the blue and says, "Look, I got this new title called 'Tenth Avenue Freeze-out.'" I said, "Love it. Write it." Just like that. "Love it. Write it." And he did.

Another line that I remember that really blew you away was, "We sat with the last of the Duke Street Kings."

Oh god, yeah. That was just a killer line. When he says things like that, all of a sudden it just captures the moment and picture. Such graphic lyrics... like that old song "Last Night When We Were Young." All of a sudden... *last night when we were young*, Jesus... it gives me a certain kind of feeling. There's an aura about it, and an awe. Things like that are things that other artists relate to immediately—and the public, too.

Yeah, everyone gets it.

That's it, everyone gets it. That's right.

In your last interview with *Backstreets*, you spoke with Charles Cross in 1990, and this is a personal thing that I think I knew at one point but had forgotten about: you mentioned that it was your black leather jacket that's on the cover of *Born to Run*.

Right. Though I don't have it anymore, and he doesn't have it anymore.

Was it your idea at the time for him to wear it on the cover?

I just gave it to him, and he decided. He made his mind up about that all by himself. I didn't have much—I don't remember saying, "Hey, you know, you ought to wear that leather jacket for the cover."

Did you guys discuss what would be on the cover, or have any ideas for it at the time?

Well, not entirely. You knew you had song titles, but just "Born to Run," "Jungleland" and "Thunder Road," and those were three pretty big and all-encompassing kind of titles. So you say, well, what is the cover going to do? How is it going

to express that, if at all? Should we try to express those titles somehow through some picture or portrayal of that on the cover?

But, no, let's start off by taking some photographs... let's just sort of do that, and then we'll talk about it. And then, the next thing we knew, the famous *Born to Run* photograph—as you well know!

I went over to... what's his name, John—I forget his last name.

[Art director] John Berg.

That's it, John Berg, over at Columbia, and there was your famous picture of Bruce and Clarence leaning against each other, a black and white cover, and we looked at it, and he just folded it over and said, "How about this, Mike?"

And I said, "Geez!" I said, "Goodness sakes.... That's great. That's... you're a genius." That's what I told him.

And he told me he was a genius [laughs].

It's funny, because he lives out near me, and we run into each other every once in a while.

Oh, my goodness, that's great. Well, tell him I said hello. That's funny.

In the Fred Goodman book, *Mansion on the Hill*, Goodman quotes a huge fan of yours: Peter Philbin, Bruce's former Columbia A&R man. Not speaking negatively of you, but trying, like a lot of us have, to come to terms with what happened during that period and to express it in words, he said, "You have to envision the success. You have to try to envision the room that you'll end up in."

If Jon Landau had not come along at that particular point, most likely someone else would have. You beat your head against a wall trying to make someone successful, to get people to listen, and with no success, or little success; and then, all of a sudden, everyone's there at the same time. Was a changing of the guard inevitable?

I would say yes. I'm an artist and a writer myself with my own set of criteria. And when one is to be a producer and/or manager, one has to kind of take a backseat to one's own ideas. Not totally, but one has to sacrifice those ideas at the altar of whoever the artist is that wants producing or managing. What I always felt was—and it's a very delicate line here that I'm about to try to explain—in many instances because I have my own artistic sensibilities, and I would make those clear to Bruce, he wrote better songs because of it.

But down the road, if he, for instance, wanted to make his songs more palatable to a mainstream audience, he might have run into problems with me on that. That might have always been a friction point. Maybe I would've acquiesced and said, "Well, it's his record. It's his songs. It's his life. Who the heck am I to say what's to be artistically here for him?" He's the one that's got to make those decisions, not me.

In my estimation—and I'm trying to look through a crystal ball here—maybe it would've been difficult for me to swallow certain things that artistically I didn't feel were up to snuff down the road. I think that it would've been very hard for us always to be together.

What have been your favorite Springsteen songs down the road?

I always loved "Brilliant Disguise." I always liked "If I Should Fall Behind." Those are some wonderful songs that he's had over the years. I love those songs. I told him so, and he told me that Faith Hill was going to record "If I Should Fall Behind." I don't know if she did, but she should have because it was a great little song. [Hill's cover of "If I Should Fall Behind" appears on her 1999 album *Breathe* —Ed.] In any case, those are a couple off the top of my head that I loved.

Not to compare you and Jon, but everyone has made a big thing about what they think Jon's influence has been in terms

of getting Bruce to read certain things or taking him to certain movies. Were you more of a hands-off guy and just let Bruce do what he wanted to do? Or did you ever try to focus him, or, I don't know, make him aware of themes outside of the Jersey shore, take him to movies or get him to read books, or were you even aware that he was reading books at the time?

Well, Bruce was a voracious reader. We always knew that he was reading books, all kinds of old books—he liked to read books back from the '30s and '40s. We knew he was an avid reader, so I didn't feel any necessity to say, "Why don't you read this book by this guy or this book by that guy." I wasn't pushing him in those directions, and we were so involved in trying to promote him at the same time.

WHAT BOTHERS ME THE MOST IS THAT I NEVER GOT TO DO A FOURTH OR FIFTH ALBUM TO FIND OUT WHERE WE WOULD GO AFTER BORN TO RUN. WHAT WOULD WE HAVE DONE, HAD I BEEN IN THE MIX?

Remember, I had a lot of managerial duties and other duties that had nothing to do with being Bruce's friend and hanging out with him. I didn't have the kind of time that Jon Landau did to hang out with Bruce. And that was great for him. Not necessarily so great for me, because if you just hang out with a guy, you tend to be more friendly with him than if you're this, you know, *business guy*, who's doing this, doing that, doing this, doing that.... And you know, I'm the guy that brings you the bad news: "Well, we didn't get this," or, "We didn't get that." I guess it may have even strained our relationship, finally.

When *Darkness on the Edge of Town* came out, Bruce left the song "The Promise" off of it. But "Streets of Fire" is on the album, and the first line is, "When the night's quiet and you don't care anymore." This may be a little out there, but sometimes I get the feeling that your relationship with Bruce, at least at that time,

was sort of like a spurned lover—someone who you love dearly, but we know it was a painful time for Bruce, and it had to be a really painful time for you as well.

Sure.

It's not something you've talked a lot about. I know your feelings were all over the place, with the lawsuit and with this person that you really had, obviously, dearly cared about and tried to promote. Can you talk a little about your feelings at the time?

Well, there's no question that there was a great deal of hurt, and there was a great sense of abandonment. Everybody's gonna go with him, because he's the artist. He's the star. He's the one that goes out on stage. Everybody sees him. They don't see you. [Nobody] saw me, one way or the other, even when I was with Bruce. So you're totally, totally out of the picture now, and now you're left to, like... good luck trying to find another one and build yourself up and find a life.

So, it was very, very, very... you felt deserted. You felt abandoned. It was a hurtful time. I would certainly admit that. And I'm sure it was a hurtful time for him, too. It's not like you can go through these things and one person is fine and the other person is devastated. Usually, both people are devastated to a certain extent.

I guess what bothers me most, from a creative standpoint, is that I never got to do a fourth or a fifth album to find out where we would go after *Born to Run*. What would we have done, had I been in the mix? That's always a little question mark that... you know, it doesn't absorb my time 24 hours a day, seven days a week, but it's something that when I'm talking about it like this, it crops up again.

I want to mention what is, to me, my favorite Mike Appel story of all time. Peter Philbin and I have talked about this before, and to his credit, every time Peter tells the story, he gets a smile on his face, and there's no animosity whatsoever—it's just like, to him, this is the story that really says who Mike Appel was at that time in terms of his passion.

So, the picture is that the auditions are going on—to replace Boom and Davey and eventually choose Max and Roy. I guess this was at Studio Instrument Rentals, not at the Record Plant.

Right, they were at Studio Instrument Rentals.

So you guys were headed back, and you offered Peter a ride. And in the car you said to him, "Look"—you were so excited and thinking about this, about *Born to Run*, and asking, "How many records do you think Bruce is gonna sell?" And at that time, for an album to sell 500,000 records was almost unheard of [laughs]. And Peter didn't want to be sort of pushed into this

corner, and he said, "Well, I don't know, Mike...." And you pushed him, and you said, "How many?"

And he goes, "I don't know... like, maybe 600,000?" And you go, "Oh, come on, Peter!" So Peter ups the ante to 700,000.

You screech to a halt, pull over to the curb and say, "Get out of the car."

Out of the car. Get out of the car!

You leave Peter on the side of the road [laughs].

We are not on the same page [laughs].

And you peel out, and Peter's there sort of scratching his head.

And I love Peter.

And what came out of that from Peter was, "I love this guy. This guy is amazing." I still cannot believe that story, and I can't believe his reaction—because he just says, "God, he was so passionate, and he really believed. We all believed... but not like Mike."

Well, that record, I think, has sold about 12 million, or 15 million, so it was a little shy.

So you can laugh at it?

Oh, for goodness' sakes, I can laugh at that, sure! Because that was just crazy youth on my part. But I love Peter Philbin—and of course I love Peter Philbin, because he loved Bruce Springsteen. Anybody who loved Bruce Springsteen was a friend of mine, that's for sure. We were kindred spirits.

That's probably the story that best expresses your conviction and what you really believed. Out of all of us, you were the person who was the most visionary in that regard. Yet even if you're Bruce, I don't think any of us ever expected him to not only have as much success, but for it to go on as long as it has. I mean, I know you saw this as almost a never-ending thing and that he was going to be the greatest artist ever; but still, there were days, and months, and literally years of doubt that this was all going to come to pass.

Well, there was a great deal of doubt, but it depends on the personality. My personality is naturally optimistic, naturally up. If you are that kind of person, by definition, you're not subject to as much negativity as

others are. When the name Bruce Springsteen came up between the second and third album, there was a great deal of doubt from people at the record company, and a great deal of, you know, "Geez, what do we do with these turkeys?" So I had to circumvent that, but I never got down too bad.

And Bruce, even if he was down, he wasn't a guy to whine too much. He never would get on the phone and say, "Oh, Mike, man, that news... what you just told me, oh, I'm so devastated." He never was like that. The worst you could say about Bruce, if it's anything negative at all, is that he'd be very quiet and somber all during the day, and then at night when he'd

get on that stage, he'd just explode. I guess that was just his way.

But I had an awesome responsibility myself to deliver the goods.

I remember being crazed, personally, and I saw this in anyone who "got" Bruce at the time: everyone was jumping up and down and waving their hands, metaphorically, and people wouldn't listen.

Right. Again, I felt an awesome responsibility there. Bruce used to say, "I carry the psychic load," and I used to say, "Well, geez, I got a load, too. You're not the only one carrying around a burden." That was true. I always felt that I had to make sure that I got this done.

Once he was on the cover of *Time* and *Newsweek* I knew I was done, as far as making mistakes.

We've got to touch on the Anne Murray concert. I know you've told this a million times, but still....

It's like this: we were told by the William Morris agency that we'd have an opportunity to play Central Park and the Wollman Skating Rink, and I said, "Gee, that's great. I'd love to do that." They say, "But Anne Murray would have to headline." I said, "Well, that's terrible." [Laughs]

And I tell Hal Ray, who was the William Morris agent at the time, I said, "Hal, it's never going to work because blah, blah, blah...."—I tell him how great Bruce is live.

He's a smoothie, so he says, "Okay, Mike, here's Shep Gordon's telephone number." Manager of Anne Murray. "Give him a call. If he doesn't care, I don't care."

So I called Shep Gordon and he says, "Mike, if you're right, my road manager for Anne Murray will be able to ascertain that. So where is Bruce playing so we can see him?" I said, "Okay great, he's playing at the Bottom Line."

So this guy—and I don't remember his name, he was the road manager for Anne Murray—comes down and sees Bruce. Introduces himself to me, I walk him in, and he sees Bruce, like I always say, tear the wallpaper off of the Bottom Line. He's dancing on tables, it's the greatest live act that anybody could have ever seen in the history of rock 'n' roll, okay? I run right after this guy when he walks out, and I say, "Okay, do you see what I'm talking about?" He says, "There's no problem. She could certainly handle this."

I said, "Are you kidding me? Are you kidding me?" I was just adamant about it. "You're going to let Anne Murray close the show, is that what you're saying to me?" He says, "Yeah, and I'm going to tell Shep Gordon she can handle this." I just stood there in front of the Bottom Line, right on Mercer Street, saying this guy's nuts. He's totally nuts. I mean, he's stark-raving-mad nuts.

So I called up the William Morris Agency, I told them that they're all nuts, this is ridic-

Rehearsing in Jersey, Winter 1973.



PETER CUNNINGHAM PHOTO

ulous. I told Shep Gordon. He says, "I gotta go by what my road manager says, Mike." I said, "All right, Shep, okay."

I tell Bruce, "Bruce, you're going to be the opening act, but don't you curtail your show one bit. You do whatever you do, just like you were headlining, okay?"

"Okay, no problem, Mike." That's it, never a thought. He's not trying to bust her chops or anything—he was told go do his normal thing, so he goes out and does his normal thing.

Well, midway into that set, all of a sudden Hal Ray comes over and says to me, "Mike, you've got to get him off the stage." I said, "Are you kidding me? Are you kidding? I'm going to go out there and tell this guy to get off the stage? Are you out of your mind? He's got to complete the show, and then Anne Murray can come on. I warned

WHEN BRUCE LEFT AFTER RIPPING UP THAT PLACE, MAYBE A DOZEN PEOPLE WERE SITTING THERE WAITING FOR ANNE MURRAY. IT WAS THE WORST DISASTER I EVER SAW. BUT EVERYBODY WAS FOREWARNED.

all you guys, I *told* you—you know I did that, Hal."

He says, "Yeah, but I didn't know it was going to be this bad." Yeah, well what did I tell you? You didn't know it was going to be this bad.... So I told him to just go away—Hal, don't keep annoying me. You're wasting your breath, I'm not going to do a thing. Then Johnny Podell from the William Morris Agency came over. I said, "Johnny, don't go there. Just go away Johnny, it's not going to happen. I'm not going to change my mind for a second, all right?" So he disappears into the night.

Then I'm going up to the lighting booth to be with Marc Brickman, who was doing Bruce's lighting at the time. As I was going up to the lighting booth, climbing this ladder, who's down below me but Shep Gordon, following me up: "You gotta get him off, you've gotta get him off!"

I said, "Shep, will you stop this? There's not enough room on this ladder, and the weight's liable to collapse us, okay? Will

you get off the ladder." He's below me—he's literally below me scratching at my feet, hitting my feet, telling me, "You gotta get him off, you gotta get him off!"

I had this little drill instructor hat on, and I banged him over the head with it several times, right? And then he screamed out, "You're hitting me, you're hitting me, how could you hit me?"

"You're bothering the hell out of me. You were forewarned about everything, and now you want to change everything. It ain't going to happen, Shep, get used to it." [Laughs] "Okay?" So he backed down and got off the ladder, and that was the end of it.

Of course, everybody knows that when Bruce left after ripping up that place, maybe a dozen people were still sitting there waiting for Anne to come out. It was the worst disaster I ever saw. But everybody was forewarned.

Now Irving Azoff, he represented John Sebastian at the time, and when I had the same problem with [Sebastian headlining],

I called Irving and I said, "Irving, Bruce Springsteen is a killer. You're going to want John Sebastian to go on first." He said, "Let me make a few calls." I said, "Why don't you do this—you call [concert promoter] John Scher, okay? You ask him about whether John should go on first, okay?" He said, "Okay."

He called me back and he says, "No problem, Mike." [Laughs] No problem, John will go on first—and he survived. [Laughs] John went on, did his songs, walked off, and then Bruce came out and tore the place apart.

That's funny!

Some managers pay attention, some don't. But it wasn't really Shep Gordon's fault. He was relying on somebody else. And it wasn't Anne Murray's fault.

I think very few people know the story of Sing Sing Prison. Can you tell me about how that came about and what happened?



COURTESY OF MIKE APPEL

I remember Peter Knobler went, and Greg [Mitchell, for *Crawdaddy!*].

What happened was this: we knew that we had to start promoting, and so I said to myself, "How can we promote?" Somewhere in my day I ran across something about doing a concert in an unusual place, or something like that. And it struck me: prison. Why don't we do a concert in a prison? Maybe I thought of Johnny Cash and Folsom Prison... but I wasn't thinking of doing a recording there, just a concert.

Sing Sing was something I knew from movies and the news. I finally got in touch with the warden's office, and they liked the idea. I said, "Okay, great." We had to go through all this security, but we went.

And this would have been, what, '72?

Something like that, yeah. Somewhere in '72. [December 7. —Ed.] Maybe it was a dining hall at one time, or maybe they'd show movies in that hall. And maybe it could take 800 people, something like that. To make a long story short, we go there with our sound equipment—no lights, just our sound equipment—and we're having audio problems. We're not able to get Bruce's vocals, so he can't sing. He can't sing in Sing Sing! And Clarence just steps right up and just rocks out with Vini on drums and Garry on bass—[they] played instrumentals. An hour, an hour-and-a-half of instrumentals... and they *loved* it.

You're kidding me.

Just loved it. I was so annoyed, I was furious. If I had been 60 years old, I would have died of a heart attack.

Did Bruce ever end up singing?

No. Couldn't. Everybody just rocked and played all kinds of instrumentals. And it worked out absolutely great. That's what I mean about those guys. Those guys are not like... can you imagine any other recording act today, if you put them up and did something like that, and you had a problem like that? They'd *die*. Okay? These guys *make it work*. God almighty, that's what I mean about these guys. They're veterans, they know what to do. They've been on stage, they have a history of instrumentals that they could play.

And they just had a great... attitude is the wrong word. They just had a great feeling about life and everything. I mean, if you look at the back of the second album cover, that shot where they're on the porch and it looks like they just came from surfing, that expresses who those guys were.

Exactly. It does.

Bruce delivered a eulogy when Danny died and talked about—and I'm quoting here—"the geography of our youth." And I'm thinking of some of the titles of his recent songs, which are so totally different

than his earlier things. And just from the titles alone—"Life Itself," "If I Should Fall Behind," "Kingdom of Days," "Working on a Dream"—we've grown up with this guy. We've gotten married, divorced, made friends, lost friends, and had some of our best times with him always sort of there in the background.

As adults, it seems we're sort of condemned to this purgatory where everything is deadly serious. Were you surprised to see Bruce finally become involved with issues, to become more political? With songs like "The Ghost of Tom Joad," and the songs that are on *Magic*?

America's in a very bad place and has been for a long, long time—20, 30 years at least. We're going downhill, and we're going downhill very fast. So Bruce

**EVERYBODY GROWS.
LIFE IS A CONSTANT
UNFOLDING. I'M
CERTAINLY NOT THE
SAME PERSON THAT
I WAS BACK IN 1975.
NEITHER IS JON, AND
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THAT'S JUST NOT THE
CASE. HOPEFULLY
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Springsteen, even though I don't know every aspect of his thinking, I think that he has to stand up and take a position. All I think he's doing is, he feels the necessity to speak up. I think he just feels he just can't let it go by without putting his two cents in, and if he wants to interpose himself in that way, then that's what he's gotta do. He's gotta follow his heart.

I wrote a song in my new musical, "Truth Will Out," and in that song, I address Washington and everybody there. And I think that artists have to do that. I think that they have a responsibility. I don't think they can be just sitting there on the sidelines and allowing their voice to be trampled by the Wall Street greed.

Can you talk about your musical? You describe *In the Shadows of the King* on your website as being about everyone finding out what is unique about themselves.

Yeah, and I wrote five or six songs that drive that point home, "Stage Door Johnny"

being one of those songs. You don't want to be a "stage door Johnny" in your own life, you've got to take control. You've got to see yourself as the center of your life and know what that is.

Most people—like, I'll be at a wedding and I'll start to talk to people. I'll say, "Did any of you guys ever think about what you really loved in life? Did you ever do that?" "No, I just drifted into work, and the next thing I know, I'm working over here and that's what I'm doing with my life." And that's the problem: people drift. Nobody makes a conscious decision about what they want to do. Very few do, let's put it that way.

I started off by thinking about that one day. I had written this song "In the Shadows of the King," and it touches upon that whole idea. In one sense it's like us guys when we all started out. We saw Elvis as, geez, this guy's got everything: the good looks, and the great voice, and the great guitar playing. He's got the songs, he's got the girls... he's got everything any male ever wanted, right?

And you say to yourself, How am I going to ever challenge that? How can I find me? That's him—I can't keep copying this guy. Yeah, I can go out with my band and copy his songs for a while, that's okay. But if I'm going to be in the record industry and I'm going to make records, I can't keep doing that. I've got to find who the hell I am. To successfully come out from the shadows of the King, one has to find one's own originality in the music business, in a musical sense, in a writer's sense, in an artistic sense.

Talking about the general public in a broader way, you have got to think about what it is that you really love—what's close to your heart? And if you find that out, and you're doing something else diametrically opposed, you gotta get out of there. You gotta get out of there and pursue the other thing. I don't say the minute that you discover you want to do something different, you drop everything and you can't afford your rent... you can't do that, no. But you've got to start making the moves to get out from where you are.

Which is what you're doing yourself with this project, with *In the Shadows of the King*, in the first place.

That's right. So I finished it—now I want to launch it. I want to raise the money for it and get it off the ground. That's something I absolutely must do. That's a burden that I feel that I must get off my shoulders, as was Bruce Springsteen at one time. But this is my own particular creation, and I do have to see it through.

Now, that brings up a question in my mind: in 1982, you still owned publishing rights to some of Springsteen's songs, or all the songs on the first three albums.

Right.



How far we've come: Appel with Springsteen and Landau, all smiles, at the Greetings show in Buffalo, November 22, 2009.

And you finally sold them to Bruce. Right.

Why did you do that? Aside from maybe needing the money, did you also just need to move on from that relationship at the time?

That is part of it. In other words, you knew that that was causing this rancor, this angst between you and him. And you said to yourself, "It's not worth it." Even though every single artist who ever signed to a record label, they gave up half the publishing, period—I don't care who you were, you gave it up. Over time you might get your songs back, but that's a whole other—that's ten or 15 years later.

But the fact is, I knew that was always a problem. So yeah, I needed some money, but I also knew this was going to be a good thing. This'll stop the angst, the rancor... there won't be any negativity on that score anymore. So let's do that. Let's be intelligent here. And that's what I did. I did that with the production rights as well.

It's been 20 years since you did the last *Backstreets* interview, and it seems that you and Bruce made up since then. You attended the final show of the last tour in Buffalo [November 27, 2009], you got a call from Bruce, as you tell the story on your website. And it blew my mind to hear that Bruce sent out the performance of *Greetings* to you during the show that night: "Tonight's performance is dedi-

cated to the man who got me in the door, Mike Appel." How far we've come!

Did you ever get together and just talk it through? Or have things just evolved through the years?

Kind of both. It has evolved through the years. Everybody grows—you know, life is a constant unfolding. I'm certainly not the same person that I was back in 1975. Neither is Jon, and neither is Bruce. That's just not the case—hopefully. Hopefully, you've grown.

But we have also met any number of times, and I told him I was happy to be part of something that was so strong and has lasted for so long and has reached out to so many people—something that's been a source of joy and exuberance for so many people, besides than the band and Bruce. I'm talking more about his audience and the many people that he's reached.

I said, "You're good for people. When you go and play a gig somewhere, these people come to those gigs with all kinds of problems. There's nobody there without some baggage, everybody's got some problems, but during the course of that two-, three-, four-hour concert, they are totally in love again. They're totally innocent people. They're totally absorbed in what you're doing, and it's positively healing."

You can talk about this diet, that diet, this is healing, this is good for you, take these pills, take the.... Just go to see Bruce Springsteen, okay? You'll feel better, you really will.

Besides Buffalo, have you been to any other E Street shows recently? I mean, do you go once in a while?

Well, I don't go very often. The tickets—getting tickets is a little bit more difficult these days than it was in the past, and I usually give the tickets to my son, who is a complete fanatic and crazy.

It's funny, because I get a lot of friends calling me up, asking me to get tickets, and I say, "Do you know how hard it is to get..."

Yeah, right! It's no easy deal.

Who would've thought it would've come to this, Mike?

Yeah! [Laughs] It is what it is, you know? So I don't go that often. But when we were at the Buffalo show, he throws himself into the audience, and they carry him up in the air. They carry him all the way back, and then he runs around, and he runs right by me. I didn't think that he would spot me, because I was just crowded with a load of other people around me—you know, another 400 or 500 people standing all around me. And he sees me, and he comes back by, slaps me right on the hand, boom. *Boom*. You know, just like that. You know, "Hey, Mike, I'm having a ball. Glad to see you here tonight," just like that. And you just say to yourself, "Can one man be allowed to have so much fun so often?" And I said, "I guess so. Here he is. Here's the proof." 🐾