



If anyone should be surprised at this latest turn in Springsteen's career, it's Mike Appel, who was The Boss' first manager.

"Nobody could have predicted the future, but he always loved playing in intimate atmospheres like Broadway theaters," says Appel, who guided Springsteen's career from early 1972 through 1975, when the pair's professional relationship dissolved amidst an acrimonious legal battle. He adds that as he sees it, "It was only a matter of time" before Bruce wound up in such a setting.

"I think there's always been a balance with Bruce. After playing so many tours and so many countries, he may be looking for a more intimate atmosphere rather than in the grand revue style."

Appel, who recently attended a performance of Springsteen on Broadway as the guest of Jon Landau, the man who succeeded him as the star's manager and who produced the show, can't contain his enthusiasm for what he witnessed.

"He was self-deprecating...he was loveable," says Appel. "The sound of his voice and guitar were rich and perfectly balanced. The sonics were beautiful."

However, Appel, who produced Springsteen's first two albums, "Greetings From Asbury Park N.J." and "The Wild, the Innocent & the E Street Shuffle," was most impressed by the freshness of the show's content. He explains he expected to hear "a bunch of stories" with which he was familiar, and "that there'd be no new angles, so to speak, that I wouldn't already know. Well, that's not true. He said a lot of things I didn't know. There were all sorts of aspects of his life that were unknown to me."

Appel was likewise moved by what he says was the deft way Springsteen navigates potentially incendiary remarks on current events. Addressing "where we are as a country at this moment in time," says Appel, Springsteen speaks "not from a particular vantage point. It was like he is upset about the way things are at present, but he wasn't going to take a stand, left, right or middle. He wasn't going to do that. He wasn't going to fall into those kinds of traps, start bashing this guy or start bashing that guy and cause unnecessary ire between himself and certain audience members who are there for his music and don't care about his politics."

A particularly interesting aspect of Springsteen on Broadway is that he sticks to the same script at every performance. This wouldn't even be worth mentioning if Springsteen was not

legendary for his electrifying live performances that almost always include a huge assortment of spur-of-the-moment numbers.

But for radio guy Cunningham, that is no big deal. "This is a Broadway show," he reasons. "When you go see 'Hamilton,' you're going to see 'Hamilton' the same way every night. You go to see 'Springsteen on Broadway,' you're going to see 'Springsteen on Broadway' the same way. That's what this is – a Broadway show, not a Bruce Springsteen concert."

And what about those purists who might see Springsteen on Broadway as the proverbial sell-out?

"Well, yeah," quips Cunningham. "He sells out every night."