

CULTURE

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 2010

[THE WEEKENDER]

The Boss springs back

It took a bit of help for Bruce Springsteen to become a star. He'd already released two admired but underachieving albums when, in September 1975, Columbia Records finally threw its weight behind the scruffily handsome 26-year-old and his third album, *Born to Run*. Wrapped in its distinctive sleeve image of the guitar-toting Springsteen leaning on the back of saxophonist Clarence Clemons, *Born to Run* became an instant sensation: the US record industry's first designated platinum album, signifying sales of one million copies. Springsteen appeared simultaneously on the covers of *Time* and *Newsweek*. In the sales parlance of the day, this boy was a hot property. But *Born to Run*'s success raised a problem: who owned the property?

On 27 July 1976, Springsteen filed a lawsuit against his manager and publisher Mike Appel, who had co-produced *Born to Run*, with Springsteen's future manager, Jon Landau. Two days later, Appel countersued, seeking to prevent Springsteen working on his next album with Landau. The dispute had been brewing ever since Springsteen, recklessly naive about business matters, had been made aware that the contracts he had signed with Appel in 1972 meant he would never see the full benefits of his work. When New York Supreme Court judge Arnold Fein granted Appel his injunction, Springsteen in effect found himself banned from entering the studio with his preferred collaborator. The legal battle that ensued placed his recording career on hold for 12 months, at the very point he should have been capitalizing on *Born to Run*, and the impact on Springsteen's life would be profound. Although he emerged from the court case victorious, inasmuch as he regained control of his professional destiny, Springsteen's innocence was gone. He entered the recording studio in June 1977 wary of success and the consequences.

When his next album did emerge, exactly a year later, it revealed a very different Bruce Springsteen to the one who had so enraptured America with *Born to Run*'s grandiloquent urban romance fantasies. Although flecked with uplifting motifs, the music's predominant character was downtrodden. *Born to Run*'s sonic template had been a rock variant on Phil Spector's star-spangled Wall of Sound, whereas this new record's narrative felt dour and its instruments harsh. Idealized city glamour had been replaced by small-town social realism ("I'm riding down Kingsley/ Figuring I'll get a drink/ Turn the radio up loud/ So I don't have to think"). The album's title, meanwhile, suggested the writer's lovestruck characters had nowhere left to run, and now found themselves mired in an existential void: the *Darkness on the Edge of Town*.

The extent to which Springsteen himself was acquainted with this place would define his work from here on, as he has embarked on a journey that has seen him accrue riches beyond most people's imagination, and his reputation for integrity survive all manner of turbulence.

"The whole force of *Darkness* ... was a survival thing," he says. "After *Born to Run*, I had a reaction to my good fortune. With success, it felt like a lot of people who'd come before me lost some essential part of themselves. My greatest fear was that success was going to change or diminish that part of myself."

Springsteen is in Toronto, where *The Promise*, a documentary about the making of *Darkness on the Edge of Town*, is receiving its world premiere at the city's film festival. Prior to the gala screening, Springsteen and his wife, E Street Band vocalist Patti Scialfa, walk the red carpet. If his easy manner is an affectation, then he's a better actor than plenty of the professionals in town. The notion of "authenticity" will always attend Springsteen, owing to his espousal of the basic human values of community and civility in tandem with material wealth, a paradox that coalesced around *Darkness on the Edge of Town*. Consequently, *The Promise* offers a valuable insight to Springsteen's motivation at a key moment in his

A documentary about the making of Darkness on the Edge of Town and a new album look back over Bruce Springsteen's rocky road to stardom

BY KEITH CAMERON
THE GUARDIAN, LONDON

life. In the mid-1970s, before the industrialization of the music business's promotional machinery prolonged the lifespan of albums, a three-year gap between records was unthinkable even to a behemoth like Led Zeppelin, far less a one-hit wonder. But for Springsteen, still flinching from the accusations of hype that surrounded *Born to Run*, the personal stakes were high: during his exile from the recording studio he had kept his E Street Band at work, either on the road or in the rehearsal space at his house in Holmdel, New Jersey, and once the resolution of the lawsuit freed him to enter the studio he was in no mood to rush.

One result of his enforced absence from the studio was that by the time Springsteen did begin recording his next album, he had amassed a huge reservoir of material. For *Born to Run*, Springsteen had eight songs and recorded them. His maniacal perfectionism resulted in the process taking longer than most bands might have considered tolerable, but otherwise it was a relatively conventional exercise. Now, however, finally ensconced at the Record Plant in New York, the band began the process of working through the songs they had rehearsed during the previous year, to which Springsteen would then add yet more as he formed his vision for the new album. Estimates vary as to exactly how many songs were taped, but E Street Band drummer Max Weinberg puts the figure at 40 or 50.

"We were recording typically from three in the afternoon to three in the morning, five days a week," Weinberg said. "There was this stream of material — and lots of takes. There were moments of frustration for everybody, individually and collectively, but you wanted to do so well, for Bruce. There was a crucible aspect to it: under the pressure we grew, both as young men and a band."

As work proceeded throughout the second half of 1977 and into 1978, Springsteen's conception for the new album hardened. He had become influenced by the film versions of John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* and *East of Eden*, and John Ford westerns such as *The Searchers*, whose themes of essentially decent men assailed by external forces resonated on a personal and increasingly political level with this shy product of working-class New Jersey. He began posing himself Big Questions: "How do you make a way through the day and still sleep at night?" "How do you carry your sins?" Since *Born to Run*, Springsteen had also met Martin Scorsese and Robert de Niro, the vanguards of a new American cinema. In the wake of *Taxi Driver*, Springsteen felt his next statement demanded the whiff of real sweat and blood, as opposed to the impressionistic street dazzle his records had hitherto dealt.

"The record was of its time," he says. "We had the late-1970s recession, punk music had just come out, times were tough for a lot of the people I knew. And so I veered away from great bar band music or great singles music and veered towards music that I felt would speak of people's life experiences."

Thus Springsteen jettisoned many compositions — love ballads, soul stompers and beery singalongs — simply because they didn't fit his ascetic vision. The material's quality can be gauged by the songs recorded for *Darkness* but donated to other artists: with the addition of some of her own lyrics, *Because the Night* gave Patti Smith her only hit single; *Fire* became a US No. 2 for R&B

trio the Pointer Sisters. Then there are the songs that have never made it beyond live bootlegs or fevered discussion by Springsteen obsessives. Twenty-one of those *Darkness* outtakes will soon be released as a two-CD set, also titled *The Promise*, after a song widely regarded as one of Springsteen's greatest, taped at the *Darkness* sessions and slated for inclusion until it was dropped at the last minute. Evoking the stary-eyed protagonists of *Born to Run*'s *Thunder Road* watching their dreams turn toxic, Springsteen now concedes *The Promise* would have fitted the record's mood perfectly, but that he felt uncomfortable with the self-referential tone. "It's about fighting and not winning ... the disappointments of the time," he says in the film.

While the hardcore fan community will devour the newly released songs, the original *Darkness* album remains the bedrock of both the Bruce Springsteen legend and the ethical code by which he, now 61, continues to abide. The scope of his career confirms him as a man of many parts, but in order to resolve life's eternal dilemmas requires a journey to the heart of *Darkness on the Edge of Town*.

"I was never a visionary like Dylan, I wasn't a revolutionary, but I had the idea of a long arc: where you could take the job that I did and create this long emotional arc that found its own kind of richness," Springsteen says. "Thirty five years staying connected to that idea. That's why I think the band continues to improve. You can't be afraid of getting old. Old is good, if you're gathering in life. Our band is good at understanding that equation."

A file photo of Bruce Springsteen on stage at the Paramount Theater in New Jersey, 2007.



PHOTO: AP

Small is beautiful

WCdance fulfils the promise it showed in earlier work with its most recent production of "Small Puzzles"

BY DIANE BAKER
STAFF REPORTER

With his latest work, *Small Puzzles* (謎), Lin Wen-chung (林文忠) proved he is more than ready for the big time. He has really raised the bar, not just for his own work and his company WCdance (林文中舞團), but for other small troupes in this country.

The 70-minute long *Small Puzzles* was packed with enough choreography and ideas for two or three more shows and the dancers hardly ever stopped for more than a few moments at a time.

After confining his dancers (including himself) to really small spaces for the first two pieces in his *Small* series — the 3m² Plexiglass cube used in *Small* (小) and the 4m², 20cm-high platform

used in *Small Songs* (情歌) — Lin took up almost the whole stage floor in the Experimental Theater, although he then filled it with the enlarged squares, rectangles, triangles and half-moon shapes of children's building blocks that the dancers had to dance with, over and around when they weren't building mini-sets.

The show opened with Chiu Yu-wen (邱鈺文) walking out among the piled up blocks and opening up a bag filled with a small set of building blocks and beginning to play with them as the rest of the troupe slowly took up their places. It was just about the only time the dancers moved slowly in the entire show.

Lin manipulated the blocks and the dancers, light and shadows, in creating solos, dynamic group sections and, as always, beautiful duets — I especially loved the three pairs of couples dancing together in the "Loop" segment, with its circle, swing and repeat motif. He alternated bursts of activity with quiet moments — just as Johann Sebastian Bach did in crafting *The Well-Tempered Clavier* used as the score — that built in intensity until the dancers were running in circles at the end.

His dancers showed terrific clarity and coordination, especially veterans Chiu and Lin Hsiao-yuan (林筱園), although newcomers Hu Chien (胡謙), Hsieh I-chun (謝宜君) and Chen Hsin-yu (陳欣瑜) delivered equally expert performances.

Fang Ting-jui's (方廷璿) costumes could not have been drabber — one piece gray matte jersey outfits that hugged the body — but their quiet simplicity was beguiling. The intricate ribbed piping down the arms, the sides of the legs and across the chest provided texture, while the overall plainness kept your eyes focused on the dancers' movements. The material also must have been extra-absorbent, because the sweat was flying off of foreheads but the outfits never sagged.

Kudos also to stage designer Yao Jui-Chung (姚瑞中) and lighting designer Li Chien-chang (李建常) whose work was so subtly supportive you might question what exactly it was that they did.

Small Puzzles proved the promise that Lin showed with earlier works like *Evil Boy* (for Dance Forum Taipei) and *Small*. Perhaps a DVD of it should be saved to show US immigration officials, who denied the troupe's dancers visas when they were invited to perform at the Japan Society's annual Contemporary Dance Showcase in New York last January on the grounds that the company was neither "internationally recognized" or "culturally unique." I guess Lin's fine blend of Western contemporary technique and Eastern aesthetics was too nuanced for the immigration bureaucracy to understand.

Meanwhile, WCdance begins a four-city tour of *Small Puzzles* on Saturday, Oct. 23 at the Ilan Performance Hall that will also take them to Taichung, Chiayi and Kaohsiung. If you live in one of those four cities, this is a show that should not be missed.



WCdance members get a workout in the company's latest production, "Small Puzzles."

PHOTO COURTESY OF WCDANCE

TOP FIVE MANDARIN ALBUMS

SEPT. 17 TO SEPT. 23



1 Jolin Tsai (蔡依林) and *Myself* with 39.37% of sales

2 Chen Wei-quan (陳威全) and *Goodbye, Single* (再見, 單身) with 17.58%

3 Fahrenheit (飛輪海) and *Super Hot* (太熱) with 11.99%

4 Kuo Shu-yao (鄒書瑤, aka Yaoyao) and *Honey* with 5.05%

5 Yuan Zi-fei (袁子霏) and *Hua Hua Shi Jie* (花花世界) with 2.84%

ALBUM CHART COMPILED FROM G-MUSIC (WWW.G-MUSIC.COM.TW), BASED ON RETAIL SALES

PLANET POP

Lindsay Lohan was freed from a suburban Los Angeles jail late Friday night, well short of the nearly month-long stay a judge had intended for the actress following a failed drug test.

Lohan was released posting US\$300,000 bail, a Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department spokesman said early Saturday.

The actress is not entirely free. She will be required to wear an ankle alcohol monitor and stay away from establishments that primarily sell alcohol.

She is also due back in court on Oct. 22, when the judge who curly sent her to jail will decide what her punishment will be for failing a drug test roughly two weeks after he released her early from rehab.

Friday marked the third time Lohan has been sent to jail in a three-year-old drug and drunken driving case. She spent 84 minutes at the jail in 2007 and 14 days of a three-month sentence earlier this summer.

After news of her positive drug test broke last week, Lohan seemed to acknowledge an addiction problem on her Twitter feed.

"Substance abuse is a disease, which unfortunately doesn't go away over

night," Lohan posted on Twitter on Sept. 17. "This is certainly a setback for me but I am taking responsibility for my actions and I'm prepared to face the consequences."

A star who is putting his fame to better use is Hollywood actor Leonardo DiCaprio, who will help raise global awareness about India's dwindling number of tigers. DiCaprio and India's Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh met at a reception Friday in New York organized by the Coalition of Rainforest Nations, an inter-governmental organization.

Earlier this year, Bollywood actor Amitabh Bachchan joined a campaign to protect the tiger.

On what would have been his 80th birthday, Ray Charles joined the likes of past presidents Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan with his own namesake library in Southern California.

The Ray Charles Memorial Library officially opened its doors Thursday night. Housed in the studio and office building Charles built in South Los Angeles in the early 1960s, the library features interactive exhibits about the musician's life and career.

Its main aim is to educate and inspire disenfranchised children who

have seen arts education cut from their school curricula, said president of the library the Ray Charles Foundation Valerie Ervin.

For his latest album, guitar god Carlos Santana took on some timeless songs from others. *Guitar Heaven ... The Greatest Guitar Classics of All Time* was created by Santana and music mogul Clive Davis as a collection of covers of some of the best known songs in rock.

"These songs ... to me, are like women that belonged to Jimi Hendrix and Eric Clapton," said Santana in a recent interview. "I had the courage to take them out on a date. I feel very grateful, and pretty certain that if I take them out they will go out with me again."

Santana is also ready to make a biographical film about his life. After being approached by Hollywood many times, Santana has given brothers Peter and Benjamin Bratt the green light. Benjamin Bratt is set to star in and direct the film, aiming for release in 2011.

Legendary Swedish pop group

Lindsay Lohan is not the cute little thing she used to be after years of hard partying and substance abuse.

—AGENCIES

PHOTO: AP

