

Bruce Springsteen - United Center, Chicago 2009

Written by bluesever

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CD1: 1 *Seeds* 2 *No Surrender* 3 *Johnny 99* 4 *Cover Me* 5 *Outlaw Pete* 6 *Hungry Heart* 7 *Working on a Dream* 8 *intro to complete Born to Run album* 9 *Thunder Road* 10 *Tenth Avenue Freeze-out* 11 *Night* 12 *Backstreets* 13 *Born to Run* 14 *She's the One* CD2:
1 *Meeting Across the River* 2 *Jungleland* 3 *Waitin' on a Sunny Day* 4 *The Promised Land* 5 *Radio Nowhere* 6 *Lonesome Day* 7 *The Rising* 8 *Badlands* 9 *encore break*
CD3:
1 *Hard Times* 2 *Raise your Hand (instr)* 3 *Da Doo Ron Ron* 4 *figuring out the next song* 5 *Rockin' Robin* 6 *I'm Goin' Down* 7 *American Land* 8 *Dancing in the Dark* 9 *Rosalita*
United Center, Chicago, IL USA 20-Sep-2009

Familiar name, new face. He's the teenage son of longtime E Street Band drummer Max Weinberg, and he and dad have been sharing timekeeping duties on the current Bruce Springsteen tour, which played to a sold-out house Tuesday at the United Center.

With the younger Weinberg in the drum chair for the final two-thirds of the three-hour show, the band's chemistry was slightly unsettled for the better. Jay Weinberg hits just as hard as his father, and is touch looser, less predictable. His fills during "Radio Nowhere" kicked the song, and the concert, into a higher gear, and galvanized a band that was starting to pace itself.

Springsteen smiled in approval. He had to love the kid's energy.

Springsteen is about as consistent as a performer gets. You pay, he plays until he drops. You may not love all the songs, you may wish he'd play "Glory Days" or that obscure B side no one else knows except you, but Springsteen always works his tail off.

All of that was still true Tuesday, but his longtime E Street Band is in transition. They're a band of pros, and they do their jobs well, but they lack the physicality, the sustained urgency of their prime. Slowly, the band is being retooled. Stellar organist Danny Federici died last year, and has been replaced by Charles Giordano. Patti Scialfa, Springsteen's wife and backing vocalist, was back home in New Jersey with their three children. Violinist Soozie Tyrell, a relative newcomer, has assumed a larger role, and longtime saxophonist Clarence Clemons a smaller one, in part because he's been hobbled by ailing hips (he had double hip replacement surgery in 1998).

Springsteen has always played his band like a small orchestra, and their versatility allowed him to explore the widest contours of his catalog. He ranged from the stark blues of "Seeds" to the Celtic celebration of "American Land." The E Streeters expertly negotiated the ebb and surge of Jimmy Cliff's "Trapped" and the gospel drama of "The Rising." And they figured out the chord changes for Tommy James and the Shondells' 1968 garage-rock classic "Mony, Mony" during the audience-request portion of the concert.

"Doesn't it have some weird bridge?" Springsteen asked guitarist Steve Van Zandt. It did, and they crossed it unscathed, in one of those smile-inducing moments that echoed the band's early days, when Springsteen used to shout out impromptu covers with mischievous regularity.

If there was a disappointment, it was that Springsteen didn't make a stronger case for his latest album, "Working on a Dream." I'm not a fan of the album, but I always look forward to how the singer reinvents his studio work on the stage. In this case, however, he barely touched the new material, which was a shame, because he did a marvelous job of turning "Outlaw Pete" into a theatrical, Old West showpiece while doffing a black cowboy hat with Spaghetti Western guitars, Tyrell's campfire fiddle and Grand Canyon reverb on the vocals.

As usual, Springsteen divvied up the show into thematic sections. Among the strongest was the topical trinity of "Seeds," "Johnny 99" and "The Ghost of Tom Joad," a seething commentary on blue-collar citizens brought to the brink of desperation by hard times. Each was punctuated by nasty guitar solo: Springsteen channeling the mantra of "It's gone, gone, it's all gone" on "Seeds" with a vengeance through his instrument, then Van Zandt riding hard with "Johnny 99" and Nils Lofgren spinning out from Max Weinberg's surging drums on "Joad."

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The show started to settle a bit after the midway point, but Jay Weinberg took care of that problem. During "Waitin' on a Sunny Day," one of his more enthusiastic fills brought an arched eyebrow and a smile from bassist Garry Tallent. The newcomer wanted to run, and the band had no choice but to rise to the challenge. --- leisureblogs.chicagotribune.com

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