

A HUGE HIT IN THE U.S.A.

By Charles Apple
THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

Forty years ago, singer-songwriter Bruce Springsteen released his seventh studio album. While his lyrics dealt with tough times for blue-collar Americans — a bit of a Springsteen trademark — he strived for a bolder, brighter, more pop-oriented feel with the music and production this time around.

The result — “Born in the U.S.A.” — would become his most successful album ever, selling more than 30 million copies worldwide.

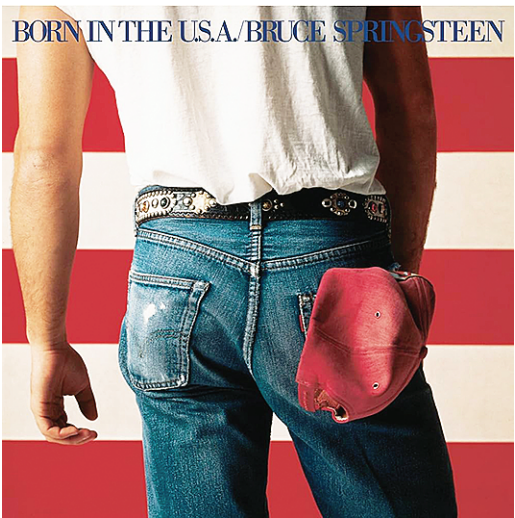
A BIG SELLER, BUT SOME MISUNDERSTOOD THE MESSAGE

For his 1982 album, “Nebraska,” Bruce Springsteen dropped his usual colleagues, the E Street Band, and recorded at his home, singing solo and accompanying himself on guitar and harmonica.

Springsteen wanted his next project to have more punch. He brought back his band and recorded more than 60 songs, from which he eventually selected a dozen to include on “Born in the U.S.A.”

“In the end,” he would write in his 2016 autobiography, “I circled back to my original group of songs. There, I found a naturalism and aliveness that couldn’t be argued with.

“They weren’t exactly what I’d been looking for, but they were what I had.”



The album’s cover shot of Springsteen’s butt and a U.S. flag was by famed photographer Annie Liebovitz.



Dancing onstage with Springsteen at the end of the “Dancing in the Dark” video: Courtney Cox, 10 years before she starred in “Friends.”

Springsteen kept his focus on the blue collar man, struggling to support himself and his family in a nation pitted with crumbling cities and that had become increasingly

unfriendly to the middle class. The recurring themes of hopelessness and resignation juxtaposed with lively background tracks caused some listeners — especially older

ones or those with a political agenda to advance — to misunderstand the message Springsteen’s album presented.

“America’s future rests in the message of hope,” Ronald Reagan said at a campaign stop in New Jersey during his 1984 re-election campaign. “In the songs of a man that so many young Americans admire: New Jersey’s own Bruce Springsteen.”

“Records are often auditory Rorschach tests,” Springsteen would later write. “We hear what we want to hear.”

“Born in the U.S.A.” was wildly popular, selling more than 30 million copies worldwide and residing at No. 1 on the Billboard album chart for 22 non-consecutive weeks over the next year and a half.

TWELVE TRACKS. SEVEN HIT SINGLES.

Of the 12 songs included on the album, seven went on to become Top-10 singles over the next 18 months.

SIDE 1

TRACK 1	TRACK 2	TRACK 3	TRACK 4	TRACK 5	TRACK 6
Born in the U.S.A.	Cover Me	Darlington County	Working on the Highway	Downbound Train	I'm on Fire

SINGLE RELEASED
Oct. 30, 1984



#9 ON THE CHART FOR **17 weeks**
3x Platinum

“ ‘Born in the U.S.A.’ remains one of my greatest and most misunderstood pieces of music,” Springsteen wrote in his 2016 autobiography.

“The combination of its ‘down’ blues verses and its ‘up’ declarative choruses, its demand for the right of a ‘critical’ patriotic voice along with pride of birth was seemingly conflicting (or just a bother!) for some of its more carefree, less discerning listeners.”

In the summer of 1984, a chagrined Springsteen asked President Ronald Reagan to stop playing the song at his campaign rallies.

SINGLE RELEASED
July 31, 1984



#7 ON THE CHART FOR **18 weeks**
Gold

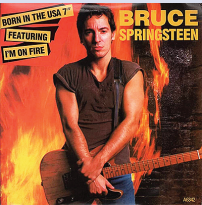
Springsteen originally wrote “Cover Me” in the late 1970s for former disco queen Donna Summer, but he liked the demo he recorded so much that he decided to keep it.

He made up for this by giving her a song called “Protection,” which Summer recorded for her 1982 self-titled album.

“She could really sing,” he later wrote. “And I disliked the veiled racism of the anti-disco movement.”

The lyrics are an impassioned plea by the singer for his lover to stand by him against the outside world.

SINGLE RELEASED
Feb. 6, 1985



#6 ON THE CHART FOR **20 weeks**
2x Platinum

Springsteen based the sparse production style of this track around a slow Johnny Cash guitar riff he had heard earlier that evening. He, pianist Roy Bittan and drummer Max Weinberg recorded it while the rest of the band was taking a break.

In the song’s video, Springsteen plays an auto mechanic who wants to hook up with his rich client. It was the first time he had acted a role in a music video. Previously, he had sung or lip-Synced.

The result would win him Best Male Video at the second MTV Video Music Awards in September 1985.

SINGLE RELEASED
Aug. 27, 1985



#9 ON THE CHART FOR **13 weeks**

This was one of the first songs written during production for Springsteen’s “Nebraska” album, back in 1982. Songfacts notes that the word “down” appears 80 times on this single.

He very nearly didn’t include it on “Born in the U.S.A.,” either. At the last minute, he used this track instead of “Pink Cadillac,” which appeared on the B-side of “Dancing in the Dark.”

Billboard magazine’s Caryn Rose wrote she felt this song was the most underrated on the album, with “a deceptively sad tale of faded love despite the bouncing rhythm.”

SIDE 2

TRACK 1	TRACK 2	TRACK 3	TRACK 4	TRACK 5	TRACK 6
No Surrender	Bobby Jean	I'm Goin' Down	Glory Days	Dancing in the Dark	My Hometown

SINGLE RELEASED
May 13, 1985



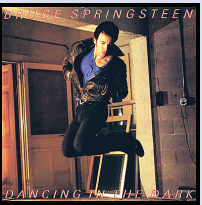
#5 ON THE CHART FOR **18 weeks**
Platinum

This was a true story: The star baseball player stuck in the past was Joe DePugh, a classmate of Springsteen’s at St. Rose of Lima School in Freehold, New Jersey. They had run into each other in 1973 outside a bar in Neptune, New Jersey.

Originally, there was a fourth verse in which Springsteen mentioned his dad working on a Ford assembly line.

This is reportedly one of Springsteen’s favorites. He often plays it at the impromptu bar gigs he plays along the Jersey Shore. He’s been known to extend it to more than 10 minutes.

SINGLE RELEASED
May 8, 1984



#2 ON THE CHART FOR **21 weeks**
4x Platinum

Springsteen biographer Peter Ames Carlin writes about how Springsteen’s manager said they needed one more song for the album — something that could be a smash hit single. Springsteen went away disappointed but then came back the next day with “Dancing in the Dark.”

Columbia records chief Al Teller was ecstatic. “I don’t know if I wet my pants, but I may have,” he recalled.

The track became the first single released from the album and the video was filmed by director Brian DePalma at the first concert of Springsteen’s next tour.

SINGLE RELEASED
Nov. 21, 1985



#6 ON THE CHART FOR **15 weeks**
Platinum

In his 2017 Broadway show, Springsteen admitted, “Everybody has a love/hate relationship with their hometown.”

“My Hometown” includes a series of true stories about Springsteen’s home town: Freehold, New Jersey. He mentions factory closures, people thrown out of work and the bit about “two cars at a light on a Saturday night” which is about a racial incident he witnessed himself in 1965.

The B-side of this single was “Santa Claus is Coming to Town,” which boosted sales of “My Hometown” significantly.