

Will Ferrell | 50 Cent | In Defense of Frenchie

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EXCLUSIVE

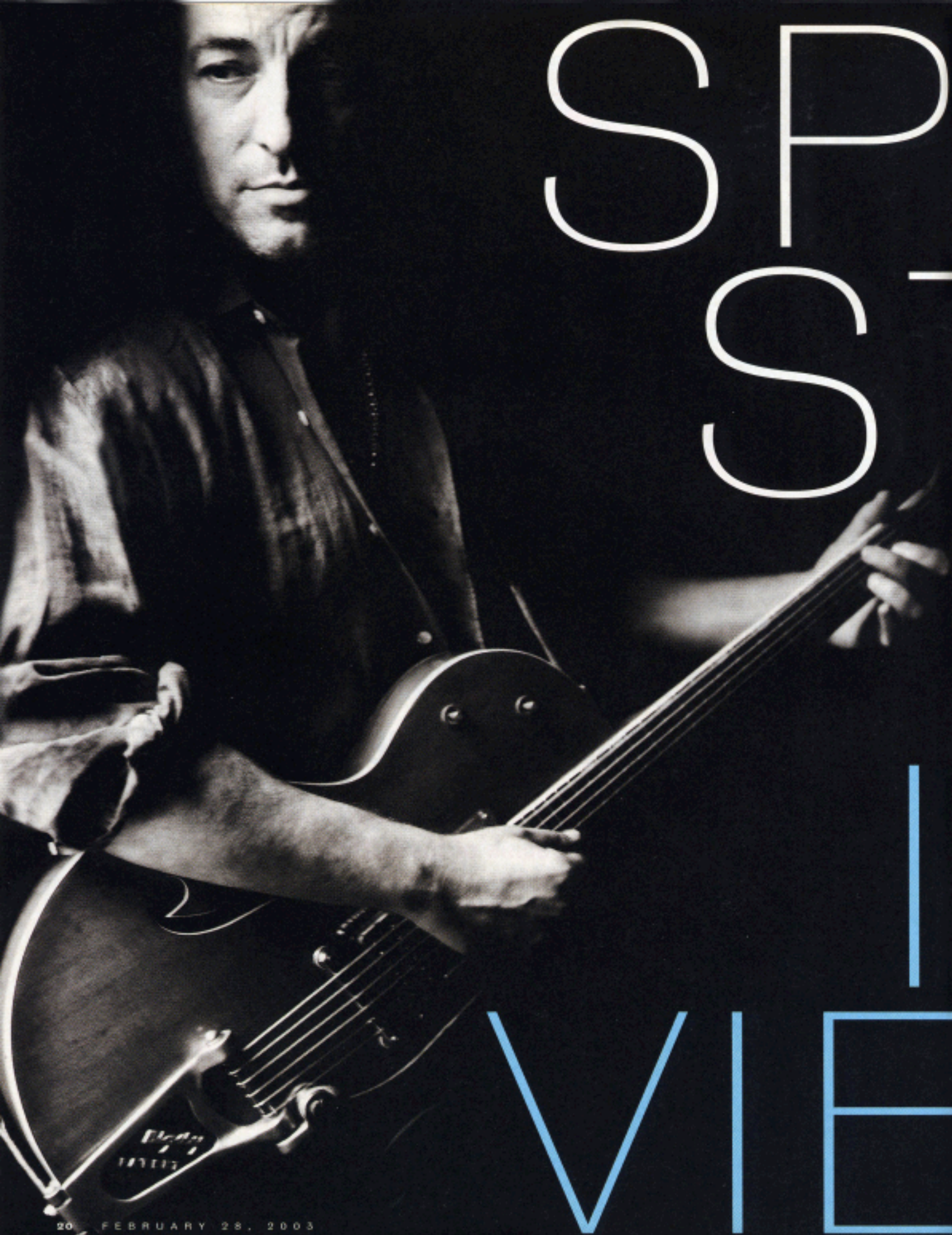
SPRINGSTEEN TALKS

▶ The Grammys ▶ His 30-Year Career
▶ The Music Biz Mess ▶ War With Iraq
(PLUS: His Take on Eminem, Norah Jones & 'American Idol')

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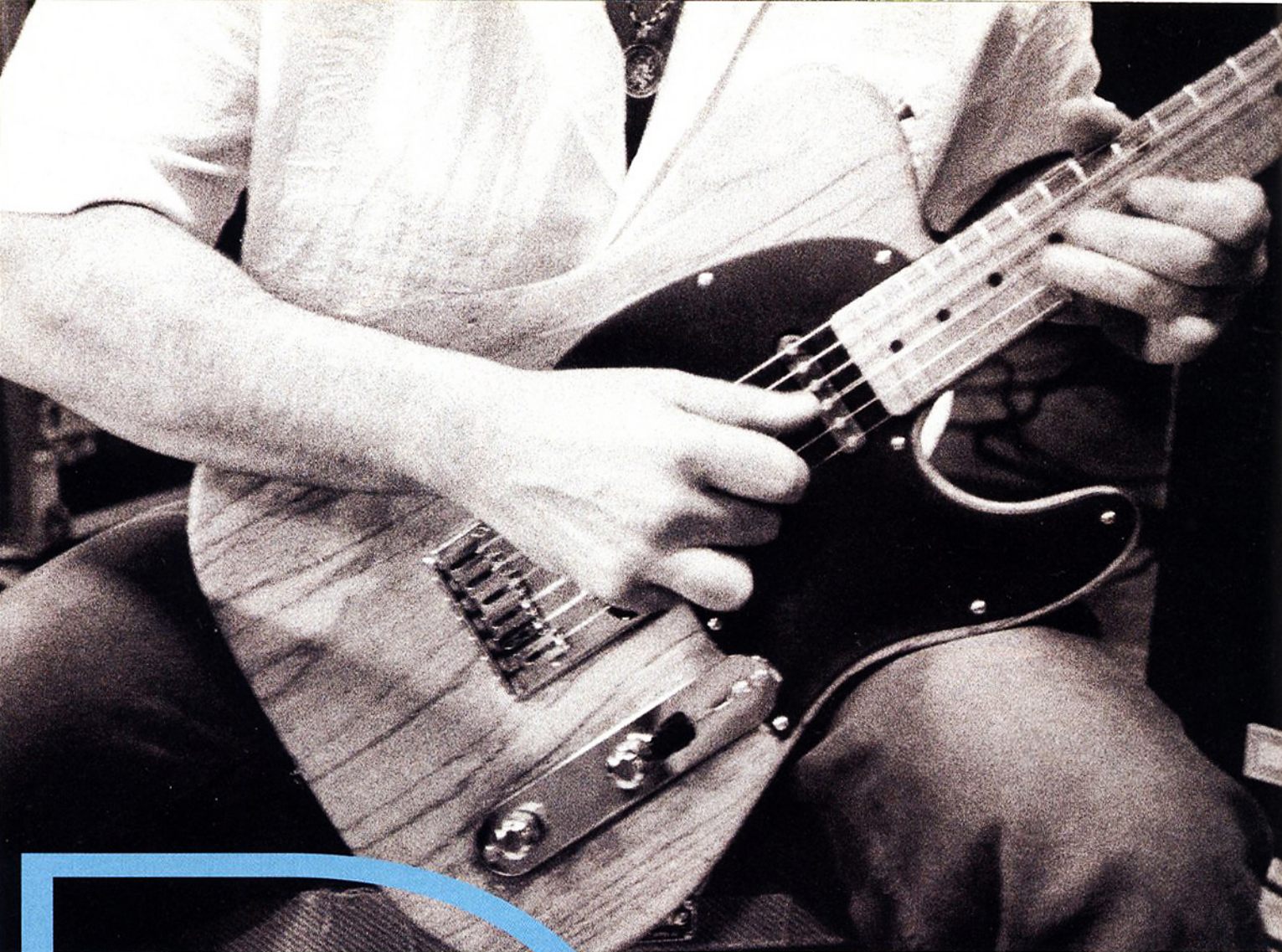
SPRING STEEN

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THE INTER VIEW

- ▶ THE GRAMMYS
- ▶ HIS 30-YEAR CAREER
- ▶ IRAQ & AMERICA
- ▶ THE MUSIC BIZ MESS
- ▶ ...and Eminem and 'American Idol'



DRIVING TO TALK WITH BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN, ONE PASSES SMALL BUSINESSES THAT MIGHT POP UP in one of his songs: *Two Men and a Truck: Movers Who Care*, and the Cree Mee Freeze ice-cream stand. This is rural Monmouth County, N. J., where the Boss lives surrounded by vast cornfields cleared for the winter, and a short distance from his seminal Asbury Park. On a cold day in early February, the living room of his converted farmhouse is warmed by a glowing fireplace; three guitar cases and a keyboard sit in the hallway. Springsteen, dressed in Johnny Cash black (quilted jacket, shirt, pants, boots), has just come from his home recording studio, where his wife, Patti Scialfa, is completing her second solo album—a decade after her first. “Yeah, a bit of a gap between, but”—Springsteen pauses—“that’s the way we do things in this family!” he says, laughing. • Springsteen went seven years between his last two studio albums—1995’s spare *Ghost of Tom Joad* and last year’s 9/11-themed *The Rising*—and 18 years between collaborations with a fully constituted E Street Band. He seems at peace with that pace. After 30 years of hard work and harder playing, he’s got a realistically skeptical view: While grateful for *The Rising*’s Grammy nominations, he scorns a music industry that seems focused solely on quick, hit-single careers; his kinship with the bedrock beliefs of his fans has grown, but he thinks the Bush administration is headed in the dead-wrong direction; and out of this troublesome world he’s done his best to carve a haven for his family—wife and E Street Band member Scialfa, and their three children, Evan, 12, Jessica, 11, and Sam, 9. With all the accolades, and sales of just under 2 million copies, *The Rising* has revived his career while maturing

the man. As became clear during our interview, Springsteen has worked strenuously to find a strategy for survival, and almost welcomes the notion that even if he has peaked as a mass-culture phenomenon, he can still passionately connect to an audience with shared values and concerns.

Readying himself for his first in-depth interview since last August's media blitz in support of *The Rising*, he plops into a rocking chair and vigorously musses his already-mussed hair. He's eager to hear what Secretary of State Colin Powell has said earlier that morning to the U.N. about possible war with Iraq. Foreign travel, among much more pressing things, is on his mind. (A new album, in case you're wondering, is not.) After the Feb. 28 airing of a CBS concert special taped recently in Barcelona, Springsteen will resume his "barnstorming tour"—the first leg of which took him and the E Street Band across America through the fall and early winter—with U.S. dates in March. Then, at least through June, he and the band head overseas, to everywhere from Australia and New Zealand to Germany. Rocker, reader, and peace-seeking road warrior, Springsteen refuses to be pinned down. He holds within him all the surprises and contradictions of an artist not just born in the USA, but now set loose in the world.

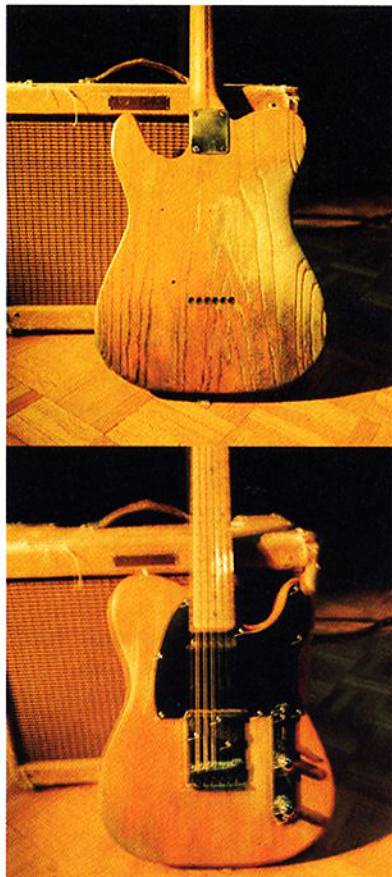
ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY By the time most readers see this, *The Rising* may have won a Grammy for Album of the Year and Song of the Year. Are you excited to have been nominated?

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN I don't put a whole lot on it, 'cause I've been around a long time, and I made some pretty good records [that didn't get] an Album nomination: *Darkness [on the Edge of Town]*, *Born to Run*, *The River*, *Nebraska*.... But this is nice. It probably means a little more to me now than it would have back then, y'know?

EW Why?

SPRINGSTEEN Because maybe I would have said, "Wait a minute, maybe I'm doing something wrong." That kind of acceptance might not have fit my idea back then about whether a rock & roll rebel, or whatever I thought I was, should be winning awards. [*He laughs.*] But [*The Rising*] is an important record to me. It's the first record in such a long time with the band, and I wanted to make it really good, a record that could stand shoulder to shoulder with all our others. The whole idea with the band was to get back together but move very consciously forward.... [If you] saw the band on this tour, your older brother or dad couldn't say, "Oh man, I saw them back when they were *really* good." The band's playing as good—as committed and intense—as at any time in its history, and making a record that carried on those values and ideals was very important. So the [Grammy] recognition is nice, it's enjoyable.

"People continue to be taken with America, with its bigness and its drama, its myths and its values."



EW Are you familiar with your Grammy competition?

SPRINGSTEEN Yeah, I've heard probably just about everybody. Norah Jones is terrific. Eminem, he's good: intense—*intense*—and committed. He's got a lot to say and says it. *Vehemently*.

EW You did a ton of publicity for *The Rising*, appearing on TV everywhere from the *Today* show to *David Letterman*.

SPRINGSTEEN Current reality is that you can't count on radio [to play your music] when you're my age; that's just the way it rolls. This was a record I felt very strongly about and I wanted it to be heard; I wanted people to know that it was out there.... So we immediately said, there are some things I would be comfortable doing. [But] *Letterman* threw me a little. They said, "Ya wanna come over and sit on the couch?" I said, "Ahhh, ya sit on the couch ya gotta be *funny*. That's too much pressure." But *he's* funny, so you don't have to be too funny yourself.

EW You really thought a Springsteen album with songs about the aftermath of September 11 wouldn't sell or attract attention?

SPRINGSTEEN Hey, it's a big tent out there [in pop culture]. I take my kids and we buy popcorn and see the big movies. The problem is that [the marketplace] pushes to the margins things that may not be immediately accessible.... It's like, you're either in the mall or the little tiny theater downtown.... The hegemony of a certain type of movie or a certain type of music at any given time isn't a good thing.

That's the way the game is played, I understand that. But you have to fight for your place—the audience is not brought to you or given to you, it's something that you *fight* for. You can forget that, especially if you've had some success: Getting an audience is *hard*. Sustaining an audience is *hard*. It demands a consistency of thought, of purpose, and of action over a long period of time.... You have to be willing to roll the dice, you have to be willing to risk, to step up and enter your particular arena and stake your claim to a piece of it. That's part of what *The Rising* meant to me.

EW You recently toured Europe and are going back there again soon. How do you think America is perceived now?

SPRINGSTEEN For the best part of a decade, we've had a bigger audience overseas than in the States. Two thirds of my audience has been there; they were very connected to the *Tom Joad* record, very connected to music that was explicitly American, [so] there must be a tremendous commonality felt about the values of those songs. People continue to be very taken with America, with its bigness and its history and its drama, its myths and its values.

There's a lot of dissent about America [now], about this administration's policies. But I think those things are specific, I don't think they're



GLORY DAYS
The Boss and his
loyal E Street Band

“If I had to measure it all up, I don’t think I’ve ever been as satisfied as I am right now.... The band being present and everybody alive and accounted for—only a few bands can say that.”

something as general as a blanket anti-Americanism. Bob Herbert said in a column in *The [New York] Times* a few weeks ago that [Europeans] respond to a country that uses its power wisely abroad and dispenses its benefits fairly at home. Those are the things that are very debatable right now—the direction we’re going in.

EW Do you think we’ll go to war with Iraq?

SPRINGSTEEN I think we [already] are; I think the administration is just *set* on it. A month ago I wasn’t so sure, but now I am. Those drums are being beaten really hard. I think the administration took September 11 and used it as a blank check. And like most Americans, I’m not sure the case has been made to put our sons and our daughters and innocent citizens at risk at this particular moment. But I don’t think that’s gonna matter, unfortunately.... The actual war against terrorism is extremely complicated. You try not to be cynical, but without the distraction of Iraq, [people would notice] that the economy is doing poorly, and the old-fashioned Republican tax cuts for the folks that are doin’ well will seriously curtail services for people who are struggling out there. I don’t think that’s the kind of country that Americans really want. All the cutbacks in the environmental restrictions—it’s just a game of shadows and mirrors at the moment.

EW Shifting gears a little: Bobbie Ann Mason, a writer I know you admire, just published a biography of someone else you admire, Elvis Presley. In the book, she theorizes that Presley, brought up poor and ill-educated, had a lifelong urge to please people, whether it was his father or Colonel Parker, and he ultimately just gave up.

He said, “Okay, I’ll go do this next crap movie and Vegas show.”

SPRINGSTEEN The key to survival in the line of work he... *invented* is the replenishment of ideas. You can’t really remain physically or mentally healthy without a leap of consciousness and a continuing, deeper investigation into who you are and what you’re doing. Those are the things that will make sense of the many silly and weird things [*he laughs*] that *will* happen to you [when you’re a star]! [But] what keeps you from maintaining that replenishment of ideas is an insecurity about who you let in close to you. To have new ideas you usually need to have new people around, people willing to challenge your ideas in some fashion, or to simply assist you in broadening them. Which means you have to be open to the fact that *your* thinking isn’t everything, y’know?

The performers who suffer through their success have a difficult time making those connections, because they come from a different environment. The culture of ideas is usually over here [*gestures to his left*] and you’ve grown up over here [*gestures to his right*]. In between is this tremendous void that, when Elvis started, was rarely bridged. Bridging that void is your ace in the hole, but to do it you’ve gotta be aware of the limitations of where you come from and be willing to say, “Well, I’ve gotta go out and seek new things.”

EW You seem to identify with Elvis in this way.

SPRINGSTEEN For me, I was somebody who was a smart young guy who didn’t do very well in school. The basic system of education, I didn’t fit in; my intelligence was elsewhere. I found I could apply my intelligence when I started to play [music], but once you get to

that point.... There was a moment during the [recording of] *The Wild & the Innocent* when the band was having a kind of breakdown—we couldn't make the record, the sessions weren't going well. I happened to bump into Jon Landau [then a rock critic for Boston's *Real Paper*, and Springsteen's manager since 1977] outside a club I was playing in Boston. I was reading his review, which was pasted up outside the club in a feeble attempt to lure some paying customers inside [*laughs*], and he said, "Whattya think?" I said, "It's pretty good," not realizing he had written it, and we just struck up a conversation about our love of music. I thought, This is an interesting guy and I don't know any guys like this. That was my take on him: "I don't know any guys like this."

So he came in, he had ideas about how the band should sound, about how the band should be arranged. We listened to records together and we said we like this drum sound, that guitar sound. And it became clear to me that what he was doing was *assisting me in doing what I wanted to do*. So the security for a young guy like me was suddenly there. I was like, "Hey, I'm steerin' the boat, I got some help here." And I felt comfortable. My own tolerance for outside help was limited for all the same reasons [as Presley's]—I went to just a year of college and you're *self-conscious* about those things, believe me. But my artistic *survival* at that moment depended on some fresh ideas.

EW So how did you spark some of those fresh ideas?

SPRINGSTEEN I began to look at movies differently and I began to read more intensely. It led me on my own journey through the world of ideas, which I feel has sustained the vitality of what we've done for 30 years: It is at the *essential core* of everything that happened next. I was lucky to come along when I'd seen the mistakes that my predecessors had made and I instinctively understood some of those mistakes before I was able to articulate them. [As a popular entertainer] you can culturally feel very, very isolated. No matter how revolutionary an artist Elvis Presley was, the flip side of that is that you are singular, you are alone, and so you seek the comforts of home and of personalities that you utterly dominate. You effectively isolate yourself from the world that keeps you alive.



"If I was just coming up, I wouldn't want to be playing by the rules of the music business right now."

ness. It's a self-protective mechanism that protects your gifts. Otherwise, you'll get totally spent and trashed. It's a job you can only do by yourself, assisted by—if you are *very* lucky—a trustworthy companion and some close friends. I've been very lucky that way. I drift, but not too far—so far. [*He laughs.*] There's always tomorrow!

EW This was how you felt even at the height of your popularity?

SPRINGSTEEN Yeah, sure. We were doing good, makin' a lotta dough, but when you're in the spotlight, it makes you hyperaware of what you're doing, and that can make you more self-conscious than you need be. I wrestled through all those things, and I found my own way of alleviating those pressures, partly by making an [experimental] record like *Nebraska*—that helped me feel very balanced....

At the heights of success you're a little extra cautious because the level of exposure becomes wearisome. I truly don't know how some big stars do it. I could make a commitment to it for a certain amount of time, but after that I just had to get my feet back into what felt like real life. I always come back to the same thing: It's about work—the work, working, *working*. Write that next song and put that next record out; speak to my audience and continue to have that conversation that's been going on for so long. After a while you build up a large body of work that serves as a foundation. It's not like when you get your first record out and you

As you get older, the price you pay for not sorting through your [emotional] baggage increases. At 22, you can get away with a lotta slippin' and slidin', and you can get away with a good deal of that at 32, but by your early 40s, you're skiddin' *all* over the place. The pressure on you increases and I think that leads you to release this pressure, whether it's with drugs, or whatever it may be for you. Because you can't figure it out, you anesthetize yourself against it to go on livin'. And some people get dug in so deep that if the person [who could help him] was standing right in front of him it wouldn't matter. I've seen that plenty of times. It's a real tragedy because [an artist] who gave so much couldn't get it in return: the things that really matter, the things that would have brought him fulfillment and meaning and understanding of the beautiful and vital role that he played in so many people's lives.... You need to make that leap of conscious-

wonder, Am I gonna get a chance to put another record out? Are people gonna care six months from now?

I have a lotta sympathy for some young musicians who are trying to crack it. We've gone back to the pre-FM [hit-driven days of] Top 40. It's a very different environment for young, thoughtful musicians. If I was just coming up, I wouldn't want to be stuck playing by the particular rules of the music business right now.

EW So you're unimpressed by the opportunities to be found for young talent on *American Idol*?

SPRINGSTEEN Ah, the great, terrible Darwinian spectacle! I haven't seen it, but it's the theater of cruelty that has everybody fascinated at the moment.

EW Speaking of embarrassment, do you ever hear one of your old songs and wonder, Where the hell did that come from?

SPRINGSTEEN Yeah, and it's a feeling of, I wouldn't write that now but I'm glad I wrote it then! [Laughs] Those first two records [1973's *Greetings From Asbury Park, N.J.* and *The Wild, the Innocent & the E Street Shuffle*] were very freeing because I didn't have an audience and I wasn't reacting to something I'd done

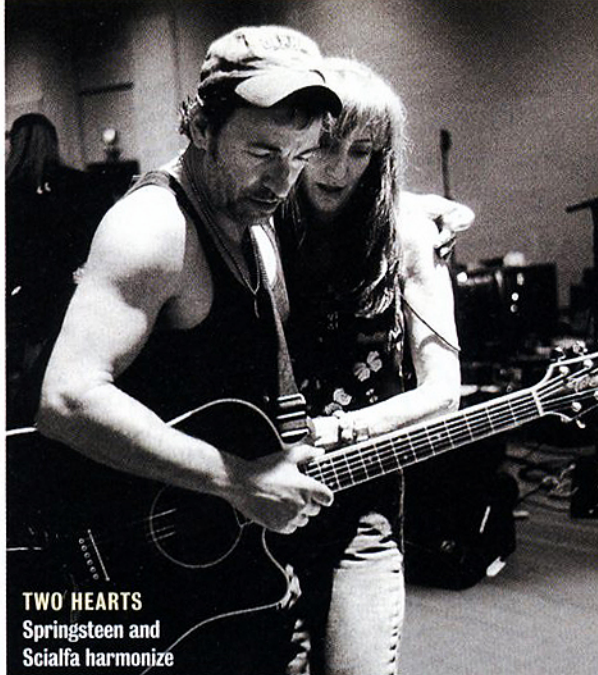
previously. I just had this explosion of youthful creativity and exuberance. Those records were filled with exuberance and enormous energy.... I had heroes I was emulating, but I also had my own little world that I was trying to give life to. Those records always bring me back to the street life of my early 20s and the boardwalk.

EW Then came *Born to Run*.

SPRINGSTEEN Yeah, with that one I was shootin' for the moon. I said, "I don't wanna make a good record, I wanna make The Greatest Record Somebody's Ever Heard." I was filled with arrogance and thought, I can do that, y'know? It was fun, it was a great time, but if I had to measure it all up I don't think I've ever been as satisfied as I am right now. The combination of this particular record coming at this particular time, and the band being present and everybody being alive and accounted for—only a few bands can say that. We go to Europe and the front of the stage is filled with 15-, 16-, 17-year-olds—they see [the E Street Band], who stood there 30 years ago. And not only are my guys still *there*, they still *mean it*.

EW *Born in the U.S.A.* was by far your most commercially successful record. I have a friend who, remembering the album's cover, wanted to know what it was like to have had, for a time, the most famous ass in America.

SPRINGSTEEN [Laughs heartily and turns red] That's funny because



TWO HEARTS
Springsteen and
Scialfa harmonize

About 'American Idol,' Bruce says, "Ah, the great, terrible Darwinian spectacle!... The theater of cruelty that has everybody fascinated at the moment."

something it has to be connected to an element of energy and creative thought—that's the thing that's gonna have some impact.... So that's my approach: Try to be wise about the way the world works. But at the same time, you need to find some way to turn those insights about what's real and what's true into some creative process, creative action. That's what we try to pass on to our audience so [they] don't feel powerless.... Tommy Morello, the guitarist from Rage Against the Machine, said in an interview that history is made in people's kitchens, in living rooms, at night; it's made by people talking and thinking things through. That, I think, is true: You should throw your two cents in as best you can.

EW So much information comes from the top down. What do you say to people who feel like they don't have much say in what goes on in the world?

SPRINGSTEEN I'm always fighting against that feeling of helplessness. I can be overwhelmed by ambivalence, by the despair of the day. [But] that's what people use music and film and art for; that's its purpose. Its purpose is to pull you up out of that despair; to shine a light on new possibilities. And I think if you look at it pretty hard-eyed, it helps. That's where the living is, that's where life is. Regardless of what's going on externally, those are the powers that you find within yourself to keep going and change things. To try to make some place for yourself in the world. ■

Annie Leibovitz would tell you she shot hundreds of pictures. [But] I kept looking at that one picture and said, "Well, I dunno, there's something about *this*." It had a certain laconic iconography that I liked. And I remember Annie yelling, "Oh no! It's out of focus!" It was just a kind of instinctive thing, what can I say?

EW Got a current cultural hero, someone whose work continues to evolve in a way you'd like yours to?

SPRINGSTEEN I tell ya, those three [recent] books by Philip Roth—*American Pastoral*, *I Married a Communist*, *The Human Stain*—just knocked me on my ass. To be [in his 60s] making work that strong and so full of revelations about love and emotional pain—man, that's the way to live your artistic life: Sustain, sustain, *sustain*.

EW You once said that part of entertainment is to provide food for thought. For you, that seems to be very much about resisting complacency; the battle to not become cynical.

SPRINGSTEEN A certain amount of skepticism is necessary to survive in today's environment. You don't want to be taking everything at face value. But for that [questioning] to be worth