

Album Review:

Bruce, E Street band perform some 'Magic'

By John Padgett
Contributor



Over the past few years, Bruce Springsteen has played a number of roles: folk singer, band leader, political activist, even New York Times op-ed contributor.

With the release of his latest album "Magic" on Oct. 2, however, he resumes the role that made him famous: rock star.

Full-throated rock star at that. The album is his first to feature the legendary E Street Band since 2002's "The Rising," hailed by critics and fans alike as a powerfully emotional artistic reckoning of the September 11 terrorist attacks.

With "Magic," Bruce and the band return to full form with rousing rockers like the first cut, "Radio Nowhere," a song about making connections in the modern world. In this and other songs, longtime fans will recognize familiar themes, riffs, and even lyrics from his sizable catalog, but with a fresh, modern sound. "Radio Nowhere" revisits themes from his 1982 acoustic album "Nebraska," but this time with rumbling guitars from Steve Van Zandt and Nils Lofgren and Max Weinberg's driving drums.

The band, in fact, has never sounded better, from Clarence Clemons' saxophone on "Living in the Future" and "Long Walk Home," Roy Bittan's piano in "I'll Work for Your Love," or even Bruce's own harmonica on "Gypsy Biker" and acoustic guitar on



the untitled final track.

But as on any Springsteen album, what stands out most are the stories he tells and the characters and places he brings to life. The coffee-shop waitress Theresa in "I'll Work for Your Love," Sal's grocery in "Long Walk Home," Frankie's diner and indeed the entire small-town setting of "Girls in Their Summer Clothes," all are concise and vividly realized characters and locales which showcase Springsteen's artistic power as a songwriter.

As was true of his acoustic album "Devils and Dust" in 2005, much of "Magic" is a protest about America's downward spiral over the past few years.

Occasionally, that protest bubbles to the surface, as in "Last to Die," which channels a "voice from long ago" when the singer asks who will be the last to die for a mistake. Springsteen backed John Kerry during his 2004 presidential bid, and this is one

of the few moments on the album when Springsteen's political beliefs are made explicitly clear.

More often, the protests are subtle, as in "Long Walk Home," about a man who returns home and no longer recognizes the place. His father

tells him the flag flying over the courthouse "Means certain things are set in stone / Who we are, what we'll do and what we won't." The singer laments how far we have come from American ideals—and so, in the refrain he sings, "It's gonna be a long walk home."

One of the few slow-tempo songs on the album is the title song, "Magic," which also demonstrates Springsteen's masterful mix of protest and artistry. Seemingly about routine magic tricks ("I got a coin in my palm / I can make it disappear"), the song takes a turn toward the macabre and self-deceit when the singer says, "I got a shiny saw blade / All I need's a volunteer / I'll cut you in half / While you're smiling ear to ear." The song's refrain eerily predicts what will happen if we allow ourselves to be deceived by such sleight of hand: "This is what will be, this is what will be."

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HOROSCOPE

Aries: You will fall out of a tree this week with no recollection of how you got there.

Lucky Color: Rash Red

Taurus: If you are going to walk on hot coals, make sure you have shoes on.

Lucky Color: Margarita Gold

Gemini: A little animal will need your help this week, so keep your eyes open for a little critter in need.

Lucky Color: Friend of the Woodland Creatures Green

Cancer: You will experience an enhanced sense of smell, which may help you find what's making your room smell so bad.

Lucky Color: Stinky Cheese Yellow

Leo: After you read this, you will experience a very ironic series of circumstances.

Lucky Color: Ultraviolet Stains

Virgo: Don't jump off the village roof: it will hurt.

Lucky Color: Lumberjack Plaid

Libra: You will experience great success working for the National Institute of Naming Kitchen Appliances.

Lucky Color: Changing Leaves

Scorpio: Don't order a club sandwich if you are in New York.

Lucky Color: Roast Beef Yellow

Sagittarius: Take someone special out on a date; this will result in a lucky evening.

Lucky Color: Magical Maroon

Capricorn: Take your Vitamin C this week; sickness is following you.

Lucky Color: Plague Rat Black

Aquarius: If you're going to make tea, let it cool down first. Otherwise everything will taste like rubber for a month.

Lucky Color: Ginger Pink

Pisces: Check your tires, they seem a little loose.

Lucky Color: Fig Newton Purple