

Live at the Carousel

In December 2010, Bruce Springsteen gathered E Streeters in Asbury Park to perform and film songs from his new release 'The Promise' — plus an irresistible "Blue Christmas" for the season — where the merry-go-round used to be. Thom Zimny's 'Songs From The Promise' streamed online as a 2010 holiday treat, but only briefly. Now, to close the decade, the songs are back. Our coverage from writers Caryn Rose and Glenn Radecki took readers inside, for a look at all 11 songs and a unique performance in Springsteen history.



FROM

2010 Ends on a Carousel Ride

BACKSTREETS MAGAZINE
WINTER 2011

ALL INTERIOR PHOTOS
BY DANNY CLINCH

EXTERIOR PHOTOGRAPH
BY MARK KRAJNAK



DECEMBER 7, 2010
SONGS FROM THE
PROMISE
CAROUSEL HOUSE
ASBURY PARK, NJ

With the *Darkness*-era E Street Band, plus Charlie Giordano, David Lindley, and horns

The first and only performance by the E Street Band in 2010 improbably materialized on a bone-chilling and blustery Tuesday afternoon in Asbury Park, at an equally improbable location: the former carousel house adjacent to the old Casino on the boardwalk. Almost a year after Bruce assembled the 1978-era E Street Band members and Charlie Giordano for the *Darkness* live recording at the Paramount Theater on the other end of the boardwalk, he brought the same group together to record the first live performances of material from *The Promise*.

Unlike the Paramount performance, this time the band would perform in front of an audience, albeit an extremely small one,

given the fact that the entire E Street Band (plus David Lindley and a five-man horn section, but minus Nils and Patti) as well as band crew and a large camera crew were all assembled in a space that used to house a merry-go-round. The audience was comprised of guests and family members (including Adele Springsteen, prominently placed in front of Steve Van Zandt), together with the lucky winners of a *Backstreets*-run contest.

The configuration inside the carousel house was reminiscent of early *Unplugged* stage configurations, with the audience literally feet away from, and at the same level as, Bruce and the E Street Band. Instead of being seated—or standing—in front of a stage, the audience was positioned practically *around* the band, both behind and in front of them. This created an atmosphere where you could clearly read the charts Max had written up for “Racing in the Street”; where the wrong choice of T-shirt would prompt a personal visit from director Thom Zimny

or Jon Landau, telling you to turn it inside out or put on a loaned (black) shirt instead; where accidentally stepping in the wrong place or thrusting your arms in the air a little too hard might accidentally cut off vital electronic connections. No joke: the drum tech lost connectivity with Max because of a kicked-out cord, and Eddie Manion’s sax mic got pulled out during an enthusiastic fist-pump by an adjacent fan.

Starting in the late morning on December 7, the band had been rehearsing behind closed doors (but audible to the fans standing outside in the cold along Asbury Avenue) for several hours. Shortly before 3:00 that afternoon, the contest winners were escorted inside to a staging area adjacent to the carousel house (the former arcade that was part of the Casino), where the rehearsal was clearly audible. The band wasn’t ready for an audience yet, so tour manager George Travis arranged for a small video monitor to be brought out so that the waiting fans could see as well as hear. Among other things, fans

watching the video monitor were able to see Bruce and Steve enact a classic James Brown routine, with Bruce on his knees and Steve exhorting him to get up at the end of “Talk to Me.”

Around 4:00, the waiting crowd was led into the carousel house in small groups and positioned in various locations around the stage. Or the area serving as the stage—except for risers for Max, Roy, and the horns, the band was on the black-canvas-covered floor in the center of the space, on the same level as the audience. Once the crowd was positioned to the satisfaction of the crew, the film shoot began with the ‘78 version of “Racing in the Street.” Over the course of the next four hours, the band would perform ten songs from *The Promise*, each of which was performed in its entirety at least twice. In addition, Bruce frequently directed the band to reprise sections of songs in order to get endings, solos, transitions, and even lighting to the satisfaction of himself, Zimny, Landau, or a combination of the



DANNY CLINCH PHOTOS



three. This was, after all, a working film shoot first and a performance second.

For the guests lucky enough to be admitted to the taping, it often felt like standing just off-camera in Barry Rebo's footage from the *Darkness* box set: the band worked out cues, chords and arrangements on the fly and in the open, whether it was Bruce clarifying Max's drum part at the beginning of "Save My Love" or Steve coaching and conducting the horns at the end of "The Brokenhearted." It was clear, watching the performance, what a perfectionist Bruce can be, and how the smallest details—the volume on a particular note, the speed of a transition in and out of a guitar or saxophone solo, the pace that lights were brought down for dramatic effect—were considered and corrected as appropriate.

The show included seven live performance debuts from *The Promise*, with renditions of each song mostly faithful to the versions released on the box set. David Lindley made a guest appearance to reprise his contributions by joining in on violin for

"Racing in the Street ('78)" and "Come On (Let's Go Tonight)," as well as adding texture to "The Promise" and a solo on the show's finale, "Blue Christmas." Bruce also brought a five-piece horn section to the show, with Curt Ramm and Barry Danielian on trumpet, Clark Gayton on trombone, Manion and Stan Harrison on saxophone; the horns joined in on "Gotta Get That Feeling," "The Brokenhearted," "Talk to Me" and "Blue Christmas."

The performances of "The Brokenhearted" were easily among one of the most memorable moments of the evening. Two takes were completed, and then Bruce redid the ending three more times. He kept coming over and speaking with the horn section, discussing how best to achieve the effect he was hoping to get—he wanted them to fade out more obviously than they were able to in a live setting. Steve came over to offer his advice, and in each of the three retakes of the ending, he turned to direct them in the darkness while Springsteen sang the ending at center stage, lit in a spotlight.

Here, one of the reasons the ending was taped multiple times was because Bruce gave very specific direction that he wanted the lighting behind him to fade out while still keeping him in a spotlight, and the lighting crew was having difficulty with it (after one take, admitting over the PA that they just forgot).

The process of filming this song (which regrettably, in the end, did not make the cut for the webcast) was the most intense example of having the opportunity to observe Springsteen at work, as opposed to Springsteen on stage in front of 20,000 people. As a fan, you've heard stories about his dedication, his perfectionism, and his need to get even the smallest details to his satisfaction; it's another thing entirely to watch it unfold right in front of you.

As the event progressed, Bruce began to directly interact with the members of the audience between songs, chatting and shaking hands during filming breaks, as well as cracking the occasional joke. He asked where people were from, he asked if people were doing okay and hav-

ing a good time, he talked about his mother and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame exhibit, and he explicitly told one fan (who suggested that Bruce to take an entire horn section on tour with him) that "there ain't gonna be a tour."

As Springsteen's comfort level with the fans increased, he began experimenting with incorporating the fans directly into the performance. Everyone present was on their best behavior—there was no shouting, screaming or *Broooocing* at inappropriate moments—and as a result, Bruce increased the level of direct audience interaction as the shoot went on. He began by asking the fans to come onto the stage and surround him as he stood on Max's drum riser on his cue at the end of "Save My Love."

After a short break, during which the audience was repositioned (fans at the back came to the front, and vice versa) and the band socialized and chatted amongst themselves, the shoot began again with "Ain't Good Enough For You." Bruce started to walk along the edge of the "stage," but there were no fans to



12-7-10

Live from the Carousel

- Racing in the Street '78 (x2)
- Gotta Get that Feeling (x2)
- Outside Looking In (x2)
- One Way Street (x2)
- Come On (Let's Go Tonight) (x2)
- Save My Love (x3)
- The Brokenhearted (x2)
- Ain't Good Enough For You (x2)
- The Promise (x2)
- Talk To Me (x2)
- Blue Christmas (x2)

Video released on *Songs From 'The Promise'* webcast and DVD

Audio available on 2011 Record Store Day 10-inch, *Live From the Carousel*



interact with, as there was a track for the main camera between the fans and the band. His solution was to hop over the track and walk along the audience, but that was out of camera range, and he didn't have a lot of room.

At the end of this first take, Bruce announced that this song required singers, but that there weren't any singers in the band any more. He noted that they used to have microphones, but they were taken away. Clarence protested audibly, and Bruce relented to say that Clarence is actually okay. He then proceeded to inventory the vocal abilities of the rest of the band: Garry could sing "if pressed into service," and both Max and Roy had to take a singing test before they joined the band (Roy laughed at this mention, while Max shook his head).

After this interlude, Bruce solved the problem by determining that the fans would sing—he invited fans positioned in front of the stage to hop the track, to come between the cameras and the band. Steve suggested that Bruce sing the entire song from Roy's piano, and Bruce replied

that it seemed a very long time to be "situated up there." In the end, the song ended up being a little bit of both: Bruce worked the crowd up front for the beginning of the song, and moved to the piano for the last verse, inviting fans to follow, where he seemed visibly pleased that the crowd nailed the "just like Jimmy Iovine" line, loudly and with gusto.

The full band debut of "The Promise" was a welcome break after the hard work of running around a stage and singing with Bruce Springsteen, as the fans went back to their assigned locations—which everyone did, every single time, without having to be asked. That was definitely the advantage to playing in front of only 59 people; Bruce repeatedly joked throughout the night that they'd like to do more shows with only 59 people, that all future shows would have 59 people in the audience, and that the ticket price for those shows would be, per Mr. Landau, several million dollars each.

Following the brooding intensity of "The Promise," the teleprompter (positioned at the back

wall of the carousel house, rather than at Bruce's feet) switched to "Talk to Me" and the horns returned to the riser. Bruce returned the crowd to the same positions he had placed them in for "Ain't Good Enough For You," except instead of ending the song on top of the piano, he retreated to Max's drum riser and again gestured for the crowd to follow.

It's unfortunate that this incendiary performance of a diehard fan favorite didn't make the final broadcast, as the horns were fantastic and band energized. This was another one of the many moments during which the band appeared surprised at the fans' familiarity with the material and at the energy the crowd brought to "Talk To Me," which was as familiar to everyone there as any long-time Springsteen concert warhorse.

Crew members began distributing Santa hats (Bruce checked to see if the audience members were allowed to keep them; the answer was yes) as the Christmas lights around the room began to flash on and off. The band performed a funky version of "Blue

Christmas," slightly different and not quite as faithful to the original version as had been practiced several hours earlier.

By this point, Bruce was comfortable enough with the crowd to wave caution to the wind and invite everyone to come onstage and surround him on all sides, as he climbed onto the monitor and addressed the camera directly, wishing everyone a happy holiday and a happy new year.

With the taping finished, management initially asked the audience to please gather their things and get out as quickly as they could, because the crew wouldn't be able to leave until they had cleared everything out. In a final showing of the incredible hospitality provided to the fans that evening, however, security rushed no one out of the building; Bruce had taken to mingling with the crowd, shaking hands and giving hugs to anyone who came up and said hello, thanking fans for being there as they thanked him for letting them be there, another Asbury Park Springsteen memory in the books. ➡

—Glenn Radecki and Caryn Rose