

Springsteen Proves It All Night, Takes Saint Louis Down to the River

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“Do you have any energy left?” is a question that might appropriately be posed by the fans to this sixty-six year-old artist for whom age is clearly merely a number as he delivers a show that clocks in at approximately three hours and twenty minutes without break. Instead, he asks the audience at the conclusion of “Tenth Avenue Freeze-Out” whether they have in them the energy for one more song (“Shout”). They do.

Indeed, as he is known for doing, Springsteen delivered his all and showed St. Louis who is boss, with St. Louis revealing over the course of the night that it “ooh ooh has a crush on Bruuuuce” as he performed start-to-finish his self-described “coming of age” 1980 album *The River*.

To love Springsteen is to understand loss and yearning, heartbreak and disillusionment. But that is not enough. It is, amid all of the brokenness and uncertainty in the human condition, to have faith, and to believe ultimately in the possibility of redemption (“dreams will not be thwarted, faith will be rewarded”). To love a Springsteen concert is to commit oneself to delivering entirely as well, to go with him (and the fellow 10,600 concert-goers) on the fist-pumping journey of discovery, new and idealistic love (“I Wanna Marry You”), loss (“The River,” with the poignant line “Is a dream a lie if it don’t come true, or is it something worse?”), resiliency (coming on up for “The Rising”), and of course a hefty dose of silliness (*e.g.* “Ramrod”) for which he is well known and one needn’t look hard for concert footage to support. (And is there any other man of his age who can continue to pull off crowd-surfing?).

One of the most amusing moments of the concert was the bringing on stage of an early twenties man, Tom, who had held up a sign asking whether he could “work on the highway” with Springsteen, and Springsteen allowed him to accompany the band in performing the song. Bruce declared that Tom was good and would be even better once he overcame his shyness (Tom had an impressive confidence on stage, hamming up the guitar moves a la Springsteen as he walked across the stage to engage with Bruce and Steve). And from the moments that the (hard rocking, pants-dropping, love making, Viagra taking, history making, legendary) E-Street Band takes the stage, the next three or so hours are fair game for that redemption.

For all of his superhuman qualities, one of the things that helps him to connect with such diverse audiences across the globe, and especially America’s “working class heroes,” is the fact that even with his fame and success and his show-off tendencies on stage, he is incredibly *human* and through his music shows his vulnerabilities and fallibilities. He explained to the audience that in what he was experiencing at the time of writing *The River*, he had hoped that in writing on these challenges, he might process and work through them. And through such albums as *Tunnel of Love*, we have seen him work through the uncertainties of relationships and intimacy, romance and loneliness as he crafts the soundtrack to the lives of his fans.

Apart from the length of the show and the songs that are frequent (but no less beloved) rockers such as “Rosalita” and “Badlands” and “Out in the Street,” Springsteen fans were treated to rarities on any other tour, such as “Stolen Car” and “The Price You Pay,” neither of which had been played with any frequency in previous tours but whose performances showcased that great songs they are. The tour has also brought back “Fade Away,” which Steve has proclaimed to be among his favorite Springsteen songs. “Drive All Night” was a notable highlight of the night, long and captivating, the entire audience at Chaifetz Arena singing along to the chorus. Springsteen’s performance of

“Independence Day” brought to light the well-known friction that Springsteen had with his now late father – from the song itself (“there was just no way that this house could hold the two of us, I guess that we were just too much of the same kind”) to the heart-wrenching introduction that he gives to “The River” on the 1986 live album – with Bruce characterizing “Independence Day” as being about fathers and sons who love each other but cannot find a way to make it work or to meaningfully connect with one another.

The band, though fewer in number than in the *Wrecking Ball* tour (no backup musicians or singers, and Patti was absent), was in peak form. Notably, Gary Tallent was a greater presence on vocals, and while the losses of Danny and Clarence have hardly been forgotten and footage of them continues to be shown on screen during “Tenth Avenue Freeze-Out,” Jake Clemons has truly come into his own on stage rather than simply filling the (both literally and metaphorically) large shoes of The Big Man, Clarence Clemons. Moving around the stage and delivering flawless solos throughout the night, he is a full-fledged E-Streeter now. Nils continues to amaze with his guitar solo in “Because the Night,” his fingers flying across the guitar strings as he spins round and round like a whirling dervish. Miami Steve interestingly now gets Clarence’s former billing as “last but not least.”

Springsteen extended “Shout” into several more bars having declared, “I’m not ready to go home yet,” magic words to anyone who remembers the anthem shows for which he was known in the 1980s, and even still, few people depart until the house lights come on. While Springsteen did not tell Saint Louis – “a city of love,” he said – that he’d be seeing us as they prepared to depart at 11:20, the words onto which fans hold in hopes of a second tour leg announcement, the band delivered and then some, and left no doubt as to their ability to continue delivering their all.