

Bruce Springsteen – Working On A Dream (2009)

Written by bluesever

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01. *Outlaw Pete* 02. *My Lucky Day* 03. *Working On A Dream* 04. *Queen Of The Supermarket* 05. *What Love Can Do* 06. *This Life* 07. *Good Eye* 08. *Tomorrow Never Knows* 09. *Life Itself* 10. *Kingdom Of Days* 11. *Surprise, Surprise* 12. *Last Carnival* 13. *The Wrestler* 14. *Night With Jersey Devil (Bonus track)* Musicians: Bruce Springsteen – lead vocals, guitars, harmonica, keyboards, percussion, glockenspiel Roy Bittan – piano, organ, accordion Clarence Clemons – saxophone, vocals Danny Federici – organ Nils Lofgren – guitars, vocals Patti Scialfa – vocals Garry Tallent – bass Steven Van Zandt – guitars, vocals Max Weinberg – drums + Soozie Tyrell – violin, vocals Patrick Warren – organ, piano, keyboards Jason Federici – accordion Eddie Horst – string and horn arrangements

On this album's opener, *Outlaw Pete*, Bruce, it seems, is addressing nothing less than America's own past coming back to haunt it (in the guise of a bounty hunter finally catching up with the titular outlaw) and *Working On A Dream* uses the complete range of The Boss to hunt down and redefine the dream in the 21st century.

Yet the use of an harmonica sample from Sergio Leone's *Once Upon A Time In The West* on *Outlaw Pete* is misplaced, for unlike Leone's cartoon vision of the great American Western it's the late films of John Ford that seem more relevant.

These are songs filled with nostalgia, regret, shame and yet, like Ford, underneath it all a love of the American Dream. These days it seems that all the Boss can do is sound like a classic. The E-Street Band barrel manfully through tracks like *My Lucky Day* with all that Phil Spector widescreen verve, while *This Life*'s first 15 seconds could even be the Beach Boys.

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Much like Johnny Cash, Springsteen's status, at once heroic and preposterous, is now utterly assured. Whether you buy the image will probably dictate as to whether you regard Working On A Dream as being among his masterworks. Maybe we should just be grateful that somewhere there's someone still this guileless. But it's a paradox for a man who's made a career out of chronicling the working man's experience (he still sings about getting his hands dirty on the title track) that he's almost become an archetype.

Like his previous album, a great deal of this stuff is about mortality and age. Bruce's entourage is now feeling the hand of the Reaper. Magic was dedicated to right hand man Terry MacGovern and here The Last Carnival is a thinly veiled tribute to the passing of keyboard player Danny Federici. But it's far from bleak; Tomorrow Never Knows sings of time's passage with a jaunty Pete Seeger-in-Nashville swagger. Beyond the usual bombast Brendan O'Brien's production work is a little less cluttered, the songs a little more closely mic'ed, and there are some small but significant stylistic experiments. Life Itself has some vaguely trippy guitars at its heart and Queen Of The Supermarket's coda checkout beeps lifts the potentially banal analogy of the mall as palace of seduction to another level.

It's hard not to read all this as a brazen attempt to encapsulate a nation on the brink of a new era. But who else is as qualified to ring the changes? Dylan's found a new home in the primal blues of his youth, while artists like Neil Young are too personal in their attempts to sum up a nation's mood. Bruce still stands tall as both conscience and as a teller of tales. --- Chris Jones, BBC Review

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