



# **Into the darkness: Bruce Springsteen's musical representations of the night**

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# The Trope of the Night in Popular Music

- The night as a time for “rebellious” activities—“The Night Time is the Right Time”, “Seven Nights to Rock”, “One Night With You”
- The night as a time of promising escape—“Captain Jack”, “The Piano Man”
- The night as a contrast to daytime; supported by musical material—“Summer in the City”
- The night as a consistent theme in Bruce Springsteen’s songs: relates to representations of authenticity and places the singer within a long artistic tradition in Western culture

# “Ramrod”

- “Ramrod”, *The River* (1980)
- The night as a celebratory setting for driving (“we’ll go ramrodding tonight...”) with mates; emphasised through the “duet” style live performances with guitarist Steve van Zandt; raucous rockabilly/rock ’n’ roll style to frame the celebration
- Similar examples: “Darlington County”, “Glory Days”, “Cadillac Ranch”

# “Night” and “Born to Run”

- Explicit comparisons between the working-class slog of the day time and the freedom of night—“Cause you work all day // to blow ‘em away in the night”...“And it feels right as you lock up the house, turn out the lights // and step out into the night”
- “Night”—the drive towards this climactic statement shaped by a rising melody line, and transition back to original tonic of F major (from subdominant, B-flat)
- “Born to Run”—“On the day sweat it out on the streets...” “At night we ride through mansions of glory...”
- Bridge section: sudden relaxing in texture and groove (prominence of glockenspiel/ strings/keys, half-time feel), rising melodic/harmonic sequence
- Shift towards the flattened submediant key and subsequent descent—a dream-like state (Forrest 2017; Ferrandino 2017)
- The night as a time of transcendence when anything desired is possible, but also, a dangerous illusion?

# “Backstreets” and “Jungleland”

- “Backstreets” and “Jungleland”, *Born to Run*, 1975
- “Backstreets” is celebratory, but with a harder edge—the characters go “hiding” and “running for lives at night” on the Backstreets”
- “Jungeland” has the same narrative setup—secret rendezvous in the shadows at night, but after a sprawling song, “the Rat” is gunned down and no one cares...
- The night as gritty and dangerous—a time when one closes the curtains and ignores the reality of outside

# Springsteen, The Night, and Authenticity

- Authenticity as a quality ascribed to songs according to three primary categories depending on who/what is being authenticated (Moore 2002)
- First-person authenticity: Springsteen is honest and genuine about the realities of the night beyond escapist fantasies
- Second-person authenticity: Springsteen celebrating the night lives of the characters about which he writes (and of his audience); he “tells like it is” for them (Moore 2002)

# Springsteen, The Night, and Authenticity

- “*Darkness on the Edge of Town, The River, Nebraska and Born in the U.S.A.* documented and gave voice to the unemployed and the working poor...” (Loss, 2016)
- “Born to Run is about, you're 21 and you've got to get away; and Darkness is about, you're 30 and you didn't..” (F McConnell, 1983)
- “He is a legitimate American mythologist, a storyteller of clear and authentic talent and, I would say, a major American poet” (M McConnell, 1990)
- “Folkloric authenticity and authenticity as transcendence of the everyday re two forms that speak most directly to Springsteen’s artistic vision” (Wolff, 2017)

# Springsteen, The Night, and Third-Person Authenticity

- Third-person authenticity: Springsteen as part of a longer cultural tradition that connects the night with *liebestod*; a time for endless love (“I want to die with you Wendy on the streets tonight // in an everlasting kiss”, “Born to Run”)
- Also, the night as a time for forbidden love and escape; following *Tristan und Isolde* and *Romeo and Juliet*; see also, “Rosalita (Come Out Tonight)” — “Hold on tight, stay up all night”
- Further underscores second-person authenticity by elevating the cultural status of these stories (Holm-Hudson 2005; Walser 1992)



# Bibliography

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