

# SPRINGSTEEN AT CARROLL

## ***The Night University Heights Saw The Future of Rock and Roll***

**By Mike Cook**

### **An oral history of Bruce Springsteen's famous 1975 concert at John Carroll University**

*In May of 1974, Boston Rock critic Jon Landau proclaimed, "I have seen the future of rock and roll, and its name is Bruce Springsteen."*

*Nine months later on February 18, 1975, fans packed the gym at John Carroll University to see the future. In a few short weeks, Springsteen was on the cover of both Time and Newsweek. Landau's prophecy came true.*

*Before Springsteen returns to Northeast Ohio on April 5 for a show at Rocket Mortgage FieldHouse, let's take a look back at his University Heights concert.*

*In exclusive interviews with member of The University Club as well as former WMMS staffers, Mosaic presents the new oral history of this legendary night in University Heights.*

*Here's how Springsteen ended up at John Carroll.*

Bill Gagliano, University Club: Our fraternity, The University Club, was founded in 1958 to provide ushers and administrative assistance with all concerts at John Carroll.

In 1975, one of our members – Joe Samuelson – reached out to Tim Russert for his thoughts on attracting talent.

Joe Samuelson, University Club: Here's how it all went down. Tim asked me, "Do you remember Bruce Springsteen?" I told him, "You bet I do!"

I ushered the '73 shows at the Allen Theater. Belkin Productions paid us twenty bucks a show to usher, take people to their seats, and then listen to a show. The Belkins were very good to us. Springsteen opened once for the Marshall Tucker Band. Bruce blew him off the stage. I mean, Tucker was great, but he was no Springsteen. Next time Springsteen played the Allen Theater, he was the headliner.

So, when Tim asked about booking Springsteen at Carroll, I told him that would be cool.

Joel Fresdorf, WMMS Promotions Director: Tim must have called us. I obviously had no idea who Tim Russert was.

Bill Gagliano: Tim graduated from John Carroll in 1972 and was finishing up law school at Cleveland State. So, he was still in town. In addition to being the Student Union president in his senior year at JCU (71-72), Tim was the president of The University Club in calendar year 1971. Tim is the one who was able to procure Springsteen for the show and he explained that in one of his books.

John Gorman, WMMS Program Director: Kent State wanted to book Springsteen. But there was a scheduling conflict with a sporting event at their gym, which made the original date – and later

the rescheduled date – available. When we got the call from Russert, he told me he got the February 27 date because Kent State was slower to respond.

Joe Samuelson: The concert was set for February 27. Back then, there were no internet sales. You actually had to go down to the box office.

Bill Gagliano: Tickets sold fast for what was then a 2,000 seat gymnasium. Springsteen only had two albums out at the time of the show. He was still recording the Born to Run album which would come out in the summer of 1975.

Pat Ward, University Club: U-Club designed posters, painted big promotional signs, and marketing materials and made sure they were distributed across the campus and at prime locations around town. We provided every function imaginable from ticket-taking, ushering and security.

Bill Gagliano: The February 1975 Springsteen -- while probably one of the more notable shows the U-Club put on -- was among many top name acts that The University Club (in conjunction with the Student Union) brought to John Carroll. Others just during my four years at JCU included Aerosmith (opening for Mott the Hoople), Jackson Browne and Linda Ronstadt, the Kinks, Heart, Nils Lofgren and BB King.

Bill Jamieson, The Carroll News: Anyone who has yet to get some (tickets) had better hurry, or they might miss the next superstar. Quite a few people are predicting this, anyhow. Superstar is such a much abused, ill-defined word nowadays, but it does serve a purpose, and Springsteen is certainly in contention for the title.

Bob Kenny, University Club: Keep in mind, at this time he was not “Bruce Springsteen” yet. He was up and coming, but he wasn’t a huge star just yet.

Pat Ward: This was one of the first stops on his “Born to Run” Tour that really put him on the map. We featured a lot of major acts – Linda Ronstadt, Sly and the Family Stone, Gordon Lightfoot – which, looking back is a pretty big deal that speaks to the respect Belkin Productions had for the members of our small fraternity.

The Carroll News: After the release of his first album, “Greetings from Asbury Park,” he was heralded as the “new Dylan.” Though Springsteen is a better singer, and does not imitate Dylan’s odd phrasing, his lyrics do have much the same quality.

John Gorman, WMMS Program Director, thinks the 'new Dylan' label 'is the kiss of death. “He deserves the attention he is getting, and what he needs is good management to promote him as Springsteen, not as another Dylan.”

John Gorman: I was right. It’s never wise to compare one artist to another. There’s only one Beatles, Stones, Dylan, Springsteen. Every talent has his or her own expiration date. Initially, Dylan wanted to be a rock star – but on his own terms and he was less in synch with his audience as time went on.

As an artist Dylan took a turn toward being an occasional, unpredictable artist to a never-ending touring artist.

Bruce Springsteen, on the other hand, was never a voice of reason. He did not want to be labeled as a “voice of his generation.” Instead, Bruce told stories in his songs. Many of them. Dylan became more of a cult artist, selling a few thousand copies of albums he’d put out

in a haphazard schedule. Springsteen was far more of a detailed person, looking for hit records, a platinum sale, and a better contract.

Joe Samuelson: The concert sold out in two days. All of a sudden, I get a call. A&R guy at Columbia Records calls, says they're pulling the show. It was competing with a Brian Ferry Roxy Music concert in Cleveland. I said, "You can't pull it. It sold out in two days." The Columbia guy says, "Oh. Can we reschedule?" That's how we ended up on February 18.

Bill Gagliano: The tickets read "February 27," but we manually changed all the posters to read "February 18."

John Gorman: At the time, WMMS was betting the farm, so to speak, on Bruce Springsteen. We were developing a radio station with a national reputation of making Greater Cleveland a breakout market. We felt we had to bring back the former glory of the city's reputation as a musical trend setter.

Joel Fresdorf: I do remember that our spot rate at that time was anywhere from \$25-\$32 and drive time spots alone might've been \$50. If I remember correctly, Timmy had very little money and we wanted to call letters on the concert. I believe he had 500 or 750 for advertising and we took it under our wing made it a "WMMS presents Bruce Springsteen" at John Carroll university and I believe it sold out.

Pat Ward, University Club: The University Club was responsible for doing all the heavy lifting for concerts. Tarping the gym floor, setting up the stage... working with the roadies. We also took care of all the hospitality that went on in the back of the house to make sure the artists were well taken care of.

John Gorman: We had was when the posters and tickets for the event were printed, they did not include our logo or call letters as we had negotiated earlier. It was corrected in print advertising for the show and when the posters had to be changed, I sent the person assigned that duty some WMMS bumper stickers to put on the poster. It may not have seemed important – but as I explained to Russert, it was important to me – and WMMS. We did not want rival radio station M-105 trying to "claim jump" the concert by claiming co-sponsorship.

Bill Gagliano: Along with my 30 or so University Club brothers, I sold advance sale tickets on campus, helped erect the stage and move the band's equipment onto the stage, helped set up the floor seating and ushered. As the vice-president of the U-Club in 1975, I along with three other officers and the Director of Special Events had the responsibility to roam the floor to be wherever needed during the show. Others were assigned to specific ushering locations or in the ticket booth.

Bob Kenny: I was a sophomore. The help, really. I still might have been just pledging with University Club. We sold tickets, ushered the show. We built the stage, for what it was – it was probably just plywood on top of saw horses.

Stan Mambort: Putting together the stage was lots of hard work. It was about 4 ½ feet off the ground. Nothing fancy.

John Gorman: I do remember there was a bit of tension in the band at the time. The E Street Band was still somewhat of a loose collective of musicians that were still jelling in their current incarnation. That's why Springsteen was experimenting with Suki. The band was on a salary – and it wasn't much, considering the cost of touring.

Bubbling under was Springsteen's discontent with his manager, Mike Appell. At least that was word coming out of Columbia Records and other people that knew Springsteen personally. If I'm not mistaken, he had not formally filed suit against Appell – but the buzz close to his camp indicated that something was about to give.

Bruce was wondering why he wasn't being booked in better venues like some of his Columbia Records labelmates – and still doing the college tour circuit (since 1971) – and began blaming Appell for not having more juice with the label and concert promoters. Also, Jon Landau, who was a freelance writer in Boston who penned their phrase "I've seen the future of rock and roll" in a review of an earlier Springsteen appearance in Cambridge, Massachusetts was toying with the getting into the management business.

The Carroll News: Executives from Columbia and the William Morris Agency (Springsteen's public relations firm) are supposed to be here for the concert. I assume that they will be here to gauge the audience's response, and somehow use the information to further groom Springsteen for stardom.

John Gorman: We were told that some Columbia decision makers were planning to come to Cleveland to the John Carroll show to gauge the response in a market that was still somewhat "new" to Springsteen (compared to New York, the Jersey shore, and Philadelphia).

Cleveland was beginning to get that reputation as a barometer and break out market for rock and roll – which was fine with us. The rumor of the Columbia brass coming to Cleveland proved to be nothing more than a rumor.

What the Columbia people were really concerned about was the possible litigation between Springsteen and his manager Mike Appell and how that would affect future album releases. And it did.

*On the day of the concert, the sound check did not go off without several incidents.*

Joe Samuelson: The sound check was in the afternoon. Bruce wasn't happy with the acoustics in the gym, probably rightfully so.

Bob Kenny, University Club: The gym was a crummy place to have a concert. At that time, Springsteen didn't want to play large gyms. Joe Samuelson: He wanted a curtain in the back of the gym to absorb some of the echo, so, he sends Gagliano off to find a curtain.

Bill Gagliano: It was, after all, just an empty room at the time. We were instructed to erect a curtain in the little time we had before show time.

Joe Samuelson: Since it took some time to find a curtain, some of the band members got bored and wandered off. Finally, we get the curtain. We're running late, but we're ready for sound check. But guess what? No Clarence Clemons. He was gone.

Some of the U Club guys were dispatched to go find Clarence. We eventually find him at the old Corky and Lenny's at Cedar Center. It's four in the afternoon. Clarence is there, holding court, entertaining a table of 70-year old Jewish ladies with his stories about being a sax player in a rock and roll band. C'mon Big Man, it's time to go. You've got a show to do.

Stan Mambort: I do remember being in the balcony, and in walk Bruce and Clarence. Clarence had on this head toe leather jacket, and a cocktail in his hand.

Bob Kenny: I remember watching him in rehearsal. I was probably just five feet away.

*The show got off to an unexpected start.*

The Carroll News concert review: The concert began at 8:30 p.m. with WMMS jock Kid Leo's introduction.

Bill Gagliano: Kid Leo of WMMS made the onstage introduction. The first song was "Incident on 57th Street. The lights were kept very low for the start of the song, and the audience was asked to avoid flash photography.

Stan Mambort, University Club: They wouldn't start the show until there was complete silence. You could hear a pin drop. A violin solo started the song, and that's different than what's on the album version.

Joe Samuelson: First song was a ballad. It was slow. I was hoping we didn't get an entire show of slow songs. We didn't.

The Carroll News concert review: Springsteen's first song, "Incident on 57<sup>th</sup> Street," brought out the musical talents of the band. His lead guitar work in all the songs displayed a frenzied, unique style.

John Gorman: This concert was historic for the addition of the band's first woman, Suki Lahav. She was only a few months out of the Israeli army and was trying to break into the music business. She played violin on this brief tour. She was a standout on stage in a flowering white dress.

I remember being told Springsteen added her when he learned Bob Dylan was going to add a female violinist to his band for the Rolling Thunder Review. Dylan added Scarlet Rivera. In a mode of competition, Bruce took Suki on the road with him to be the first on tour with a woman violinist.

*A "Coming of Age" performance.*

Stan Mambort: What other songs did he play? Nobody knew all the songs. It was like watching some high school band play. I was just enjoying the music.

Bill Gagliano: I do know "Grownin' Up" was played. Bruce played what were then working versions of several songs that would appear on the Born to Run album.

Stan Mambort: One of the last songs was "Rosalita." You know that part at the end? Hey, hey, hey, hey! The crowd as in absolute frenzy. It was loud.

Joe Samuelson: You can listen to Rosalita on the album and be like, yeah, that's a great song. But to hear it live? Amazing.

Bob Kenny: He sang Born to Run. It wasn't a national hit yet, but Murray Saul used to play Born to Run on WMMS as part of his Get Down show every Friday. When the song would come on each week, the entire cafeteria would go crazy. I mean, just whacky.

Joel Fresdorf: We were playing the hell out of it from the moment we got it.

Stan Mambort: The night of the concert, I initially took the tickets at the door. Once that portion was over, I wound up right in front of the stage. I was a bouncer. Thankfully, nobody rushed the stage.

The Carroll News concert review: A round of applause should go to the University Club for efficiently maintaining control of the crowd. For all the energy being created on stage, the concert was exceptionally peaceful.

Pat Ward: I just remember the place being electric. He knocked it out of the park.

Joe Samuelson: The show was incredible. They weren't promoting a new album yet. They were just promoting Bruce.

Bill Gagliano: After the set concluded, the band returned back stage where Russert had beer waiting for them. Russert opened the dressing room door so the band could hear the chants from the crowd. They went out and performed three or four more songs.

Bob Kenny: I remember the encore. Remember, at this time he didn't have a whole bunch of original songs. He ended with some 50s covers.

The Carroll News concert review: There were standing ovations five or six times, as people clamored for even more when it was finally over.

Kid Leo, WMMS: It was truly a "coming of age" performance.

Bill Gagliano: Upon returning to the dressing room for the final time, Bruce said, "This was a fantastic audience tonight."

Joe Samuelson: People were slack-jawed. They had never seen anything like it before. There wasn't anyone at the show who thought, "Oh, we'll see him back at Carroll for the next tour."

We knew that was it. He was never coming back. He was going to be big.

Bob Kenny: I had one of his albums. I probably should have had him sign it.

Joe Samuelson: Nowadays, nobody would let 21-year-old college kids (with no supervision) sign concert contracts and promote major musical acts. What we were able to do then could never be done today.

Pat Ward: Those were the days indeed! It was an absolute blast!

The Carroll News concert review: Everyone should experience, at least once, his hard, driving music. This was definitely one of Carroll's best concerts, and it will be remembered that way for a long time.

*Mike Cook is the Communications and Civic Engagement Director for the City of University Heights.*