

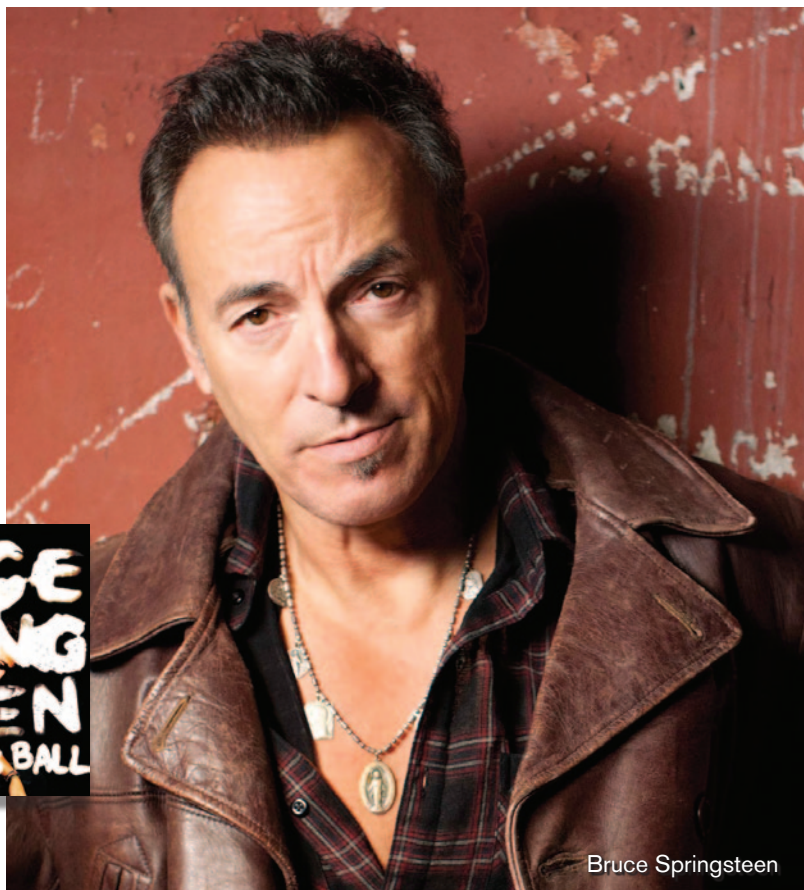
REVIEWS

BRUCE
SPRINGSTEEN*Wrecking Ball*

[Columbia]

Although Bruce Springsteen's latest unmistakably features a couple of blistering sax solos from the late E Street Band mainstay Clarence Clemons—a sound now charged with emotion for fans missing the Big Man—*Wrecking Ball* is mostly a Springsteen solo album. Working with producer Ron Aniello (Lifehouse, Guster) the Boss employs more outsiders than E Streeters on songs triangulating the sparse, dusty feel of 1982's *Nebraska* and the rambunctious folk of 2006's *We Shall Overcome: The Seeger Sessions*. Springsteen's first set of new material since 2009's *Working on a Dream* is a protest album in the classic folk style—albeit updated for modern times with some of his most scathing and defiant songs.

Starting with the opener “We Take Care of Our Own,” a song pointedly questioning why Americans don’t do just that, Springsteen’s lyrics are bracingly direct as he sets references to robber barons, greedy bankers and fat cats alongside a working man’s pleas for a fair shake on songs like “Shackled and



Bruce Springsteen

Drawn” and “Jack of All Trades.” The album is a mix of up-tempo folk stompers like the Celtic-flavored “Death to My Hometown,” quieter songs of resignation and, as the album veers in a spiritual direction, powerful revival-meeting songs like the redemptive “Land of Hope and Dreams” (a live staple for more than a decade now). Not everything works—a rap interlude by Michelle Moore on “Rocky Ground” feels forced—but *Wrecking Ball* is, at its core, a bracing call to action that finds Springsteen as fired up as he’s ever been. —Eric R. Danton

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