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Concert Review: Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band play NJ

[Bruce Springsteen](#) and the E Street Band returned to their homeland Tuesday night to play the first of two shows at the [Izod Center](#). Though normally this is considered a totally joyous occasion, the evening was bittersweet as this was their first time playing for their home state since they lost their beloved friend and bandmate Clarence Clemons. Affectionately known to all as "The Big Man" (for his big height, big sound and big personality), Clemons passed away last June due to complications of a stroke. It was clear that Springsteen and his musical family needed the audience as much as they needed the band when he said during the intro to "My City of Ruins", "We missed you. Oh...we need you. Oh yes."

Michael Buckner/Getty Images for SXSW

There has always been a tight bond between Springsteen and his fans, so experiencing a show without Clemons for the first time made for an emotional night for everyone in the Izod Center. During the performance of "Tenth Avenue Freezeout", Springsteen said "Here comes the important part." Just then, the music stopped to let

Springsteen sing a cappella: "When the change was made uptown and The Big Man joined the band." Raising his mic into the air while the band sat still and the horn section looked up to the sky in memoriam, Springsteen's eyes were displayed big enough on the overhead screens that you could see them begin to water as the crowd gave a loud, [standing ovation](#) in tribute to the man whose smiling face gave them so much joy over the years.

Reading the news of Clemons' passing on a website and being face to face with the palpable absence are two different things.

Springsteen eased some of the mutual sadness felt between band and audience as he recognized the missing presence of Clemons and Danny Federici (longtime E Street Band member who lost his life to Melanoma in 2008) saying: "If you're here, and we're here, they're here." Once again, the house erupted into applause and cheering.

The crowd also broke out into cheers every time Clarence's nephew Jake appeared on screen. Jake is currently taking over Clarence's musical role for the tour and every time he was shown, the crowd went crazy as if to say "Welcome to the family!" Keeping his stage presence relatively low key, Jake came forth once in awhile to sing with Bruce or play one of Clarence's remarkable solos. Otherwise, he remained with the rest of the sizeable horn section in the back.

As for the rest of the show, Bruce and the E Street Band sound as tight as ever, especially guitarist Nils Lofgren, who absolutely shredded during his solo in "Because The Night." One concertgoer

said "If I closed my eyes, I wouldn't know what year it was." The [setlist](#) was comprised of material mostly off of the latest CD "Wrecking Ball", with other fan favorites scattered throughout the set. As you might suspect, "Born To Run" received the biggest response, which isn't surprising since that is Springsteen's crown jewel and one of the best Rock songs ever written. And of course, "Thunder Road" was an absolutely magical moment with the whole arena [singing along](#). But the new songs went over quite well too, especially "Wrecking Ball" which makes direct references to the Meadowlands: "Now my home's here in these meadowlands where mosquitoes grow big as airplanes / Here where the blood is spilled, the arena's filled, and giants played their games." The crowd, of course, went ballistic at the mention of their Super Bowl Champions, which brought a big smile to Bruce and the E Street band.

Though many of the crowd members have been fans since the early days when "the arena was named after a human being" (as Bruce put it), or are at least old enough to raise a toast at the mention of their football heroes, Springsteen has also managed to garner an even younger following, noting that "We see some old faces and some new faces", adding "But the mission of the mighty E Street Band remains the same!"

One of the new faces will no doubt be riding high for days from the once-in-a-lifetime experience she had Tuesday night. During "Waitin' on A Sunny Day", Springsteen pulled up a 'tween girl from the general admission pit and let her lead the crowd in a singalong to the chorus right before he persuaded her to do one of his famous

knee-slides across the stage with him. After Bruce made it successfully across the stage, he turned around to see that she had actually nearly faceplanted during her attempt. He smiled and said "It's not as easy as it looks!", then scooped up the laughing girl into his arms and returned her to her family.

Mid-set, Bruce and the band performed Wilson Pickett's "634-5789" as part of a soul medley that also included "The Way You Do The Things You Do" by the Temptations. Describing Soul as having "a little sense of sadness that let you know that it was real", Springsteen looked anything but sad as he sang the song from a platform center-arena, chugged a fan's beer and crowd surfed his way back to the stage.

Finishing up with an encore that included "Rocky Ground" (featuring New Jersey native Michelle Moore), "Out In the Street" and "Dancing In The Dark" (which saw Moore jokingly dancing 80's style stageside), Bruce and his E Street Band took their final bow, saying "We'll be back tomorrow!"

To follow Springsteen news, check out his official [site](#) or follow him on Twitter at [@Springsteen](#). You can follow me on Twitter at [@ConcertExaminer](#).