



FACES OF BTR40: CO-PRODUCER MIKE APPEL

What better way to spend the big 40th anniversary than by hearing stories from Springsteen's *Born to Run*-era manager and producer? Mike Appel kindly gave us a call this morning at Backstreets HQ, and over the course of an hour and a half we delved into all things *Born to Run*, from the record to the tour, from the astonishing lead single he and Bruce produced at 914 Sound Studios, to the work on the rest of the album with Jon Landau at the Record Plant. We'll share more of this conversation as the BTR40 celebration continues (and as we keep transcribing); today let's start with the album cover, working from the outside in, as Appel recalls how the design came together and his first look at the now-iconic image.

I told Bruce and Clarence they had to go meet with Eric [Meola], and so they did. Eric was a guy we trusted. We allowed him to be in the studio and the control room with us, and he was like an omniscient observer — like a fly on the wall, never bothered anybody, would never ruffle your feathers. He and Barbara Pyle, we'd allow them to be around, they were two of our favorite photographers. They were around, and they were always great. Everybody loved them, they got along with Bruce great, and I think Bruce felt comfortable and warm in their presence. And he opened up to them — obviously — and that's why you have all those great shots. So when it came time to do the thing at CBS, to relax and do the photoshoot, it wasn't any problem. "Oh, this is Eric. Oh, yeah, sure."

So Bruce and Clarence go over there. Then, a few days later, [Columbia art director] John Berg calls me up, and Bruce is in my office. He says "Mike, you gotta come over here — I got the cover, you gotta come over here and see this!" I tell Bruce, "I gotta go see John Berg, I'll be right back."

So I go over, and John says "Mike, look at this." Right as I walk in, I'm still standing. I look, and I see the cover; I see Bruce Springsteen. Then he unfolds it, and I see that Bruce is leaning on Clarence. And I say [awed], "Ohhhh... is that gonna be, like, an open-up..." And he says, "That's right, that's *exactly* what it's gonna be." That was the first time I saw that shot, that was my first dose, and it was just such a great idea. And I say, "Oh, *maaan!* Oh!" I told him, "You're a freakin' genius! This is the greatest thing! Wait til I tell Bruce!"

When I saw the cover that first time it just, boom, punched me right in the nose. What could be greater than that black and white picture, Bruce in that rock 'n' roll leather jacket — of mine, from when I was a kid — that jacket says, "I'm coming from somewhere. I pay attention to the roots of rock 'n' roll, I'm coming from somewhere, I didn't just drop out of the sky." And here he is wearing it with a pin of Elvis, who we all loved and adored, and he's leaning on Clarence, his big giant onstage personality... it's just perfect.

I ask John for a copy and he gets me a copy; I run back to my office and show it to Bruce, and Bruce says, "Oh, man — that's *it!*"

But then he says, "What are we going to call it?" And I say, "What do you mean, what are we gonna call it? *Born to Run!*" He says, "Well, we could call it *Jungleland*," and then he starts... that's what happens when one artist talks to another artist, they start to drift. *Jungleland* could be the title. *Thunder Road* could be the title. I said "Yes, they all could be the title. For sure. However, 'Born to Run' is what all of this in motion. And it *is* born to run. And you, baby, are born to run. That's what it is: it's talking about you, too. You're not *Jungleland*. You're not *Thunder Road*. You're born to *run*, Bruce. Out of this neighborhood, to bigger and better things. The American Dream." And that was it.