

Despite my reservations above, *The Praeger Singer – Songwriter Collection* looks to be an exciting prospect, and it will be interesting to observe how it develops. Having previously written numerous texts for the Greenwood publishing group, including biographies on Elvis Costello and Carole King, Perone is well qualified to document the inaugural edition, and act as series editor.

To conclude, this volume serves as a useful introduction to the music of Stevie Wonder, and alludes to some interesting perceptual points. The publication is consequently a welcome, albeit frustrating addition.

Paul Carr

University of Glamorgan, UK

***The Words and Music of Bruce Springsteen.* By Rob Kirkpatrick. Westport, CT, London: Praeger, 2007. 211 pp. ISBN 0-275-98938-0 (hb)**  
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There is by now an extensive library of book-length studies of Bruce Springsteen, including biographies, cultural studies and analyses of the more than two hundred songs he has released. The aim of this book, which is part of the Praeger Singer-Songwriter Collection, is to provide a chronological account of the songs written and (for the most part) performed by Springsteen either on his own or with the E Street Band. Rob Kirkpatrick is well aware of the numerous books that have preceded his and makes use of a number of them. At the same time he wishes to differentiate his work from others; while making frequent use of Jimmy Guterman's *Runaway American Dream*, for example, Kirkpatrick suggests his own project provides more of a focus on 'examining Springsteen's creative processes' than does Guterman's, which is an exploration of listening (and hence interpreting) (p. xi). Similarly, he wishes to differ from writers who have attempted to place Springsteen into a lineage of American literary figures, emphasising instead the artist's 'place in the American singer-songwriter tradition' (p. x).

Each of Springsteen's fourteen studio albums from 1973's *Greetings from Asbury Park, NJ.* to 2006's *We Shall Overcome: The Seeger Sessions* is covered, as are four officially released live albums. Numerous songs which did not make it onto these albums but were either released on soundtrack albums and hits collections or covered by other performers are also discussed, as well as some performances only available on bootleg recordings. The result is a solid account with some revealing insights; Kirkpatrick is particularly strong on the continuities and discontinuities between songs from different parts of his subject's career and on the literary and filmic inspirations for many of Springsteen's lyrics. That he devotes equal space, for the most part, to each song on a given album rather than focus on the more celebrated numbers, is very welcome, allowing for renewed appreciation of some of the Boss's obscurer gems.

That said, the book rarely gets to the heart of the interaction of words and music that its title might suggest; too often these elements are treated separately, leaving us unsure what effect each has on the other. The test of any Springsteenologist may be in his or her ability to 'explain' 'Born in the U.S.A.', a song that continues to provide a classic template for the possibility of words and music to say quite different things.

Springsteen himself is very aware of this and, while claiming the song as one of his 'five or six best songs' (p. 108), has deliberately altered the musical accompaniment and the structure of the narrative in more recent years in order, seemingly, to get to the song's 'original' message. Kirkpatrick faithfully deals with the various inspirations for the song as well as the words, instrumentation and recording process before moving on to note the varied reception of the song and its accompanying album in the Reagan/Rambo-era USA. But he doesn't offer an interpretation of his own for the title track or venture an explanation as to why it might be that the chosen music sent the wrong (i.e. 'Right') messages so successfully.

We need not look too far for the lacuna in Kirkpatrick's approach. At one point he makes clear his concern about 'the risk of invoking literary deconstruction, which has no place in rock 'n' roll' (p. 57). Even though he doesn't provide a reason for this concern, it connects to a more general avoidance of interpretations that might earn him accusations of ungrounded speculation. This is a shame, especially when it leads to overly-literal accounts of songs rendered in a rather mundane reported speech. An example from the author's account of 'The River': 'The narrator comes from "down in the valley" where [ . . . ] you are raised to do "like your daddy done"' (pp. 68–9). At other times he lets others' interpretations stand in for his own, quoting what writers such as Guterman, Geoffrey Himes (who has written a book on *Born in the U.S.A.*) and Bryan Garman have written. Even while relying on these writers to provide a bit of subjective excitement to his accounts, Kirkpatrick seems uneasy; after quoting a well-observed interpretation by Garman about the gender roles depicted in 'Spare Parts', Kirkpatrick offers a throwaway line ('As Chuck Berry once said, Hail, hail, rock 'n' roll . . .') which makes a mockery of Garman's observations (p. 114). Kirkpatrick knows very well that Springsteen, more than most rock songwriters, has inspired others to subjectify his lyrics or use them as springboards for other work, from T. Coraghessan Boyle's story 'Greasy Lake', through collections of stories based on the song 'Meeting Across the River' and the *Nebraska* album, to the countless affirmations by fans on to be found in magazines and Internet forums. It would have been better had he allowed his own voice to untether itself from 'objective' reporting a little more. While it can be dangerous to criticise work for not doing what you or someone else would have done, to read Kirkpatrick's account of 'The River' alongside Dai Griffith's interpretation of the song (*Popular Music*, 7/1) is to see what a failed opportunity the former is.

Other quibbles relate mainly to slackness and irrelevance. Julie Burchill, who Kirkpatrick misquotes, apparently misunderstands Springsteen because she is British (p. 77). There is a completely unnecessary attack on Madonna at the start of chapter 9, which I couldn't help connecting to a distrust of the 'feminine' consumption of pop music that had already made itself apparent with the 'pastel-wearing girls singing Springsteen in school hallways' during the account of *Born in the U.S.A.* (p. 108). The last chapter and Afterword feel rushed and could have used a more thorough copyeditor. As well as a number of sentences that need reworking, there are some factual errors, such as the rather embarrassing assertion that Bob Dylan and The Hawks were booed off the stage at the Albert Hall a year after Springsteen made his European debut at the same venue in November 1975. (Kirkpatrick seems to be using the famous 'Judas' recording as his Dylan reference, meaning that he gets the venue as well as the decade wrong – the concert in question took place in May 1966 at Manchester's Free Trade Hall, as numerous recent publications have emphasised.) All the music-related books listed in the bibliography are about Springsteen, making one

wonder if Kirkpatrick could have looked a bit further afield. Those that are listed, along with a number of magazine and online articles, provide a useful Boss bibliography. How much of this material will come as 'news' to the seasoned Springsteenologist, however, remains questionable, something that might be said for the book as a whole.

Richard Elliott

Newcastle University, UK

***Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge.* By Keith Kahn-Harris. Oxford and New York: Berg, 2007. ix + 194 pp. ISBN 1-84520-399-2 (pb)**  
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*Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge* offers a comprehensive and long overdue documentation of the extreme metal scene and its bizarre and terrifying facets. Relying upon details derived from ethnographic research including fan interviews and participant experience, the opening chapters chase a history through extreme metal describing (if never fully defining) the generic distinctions that this scene holds for its fans. The reader is introduced to the complex fusion of death metal, thrash metal, black metal and more besides, with a nod to the preceding sound of heavy metal and an assured cementing of the influential role that the variants of extreme metal have had upon 1990s nu metal. Offering a variety of attention-grabbing case studies spanning the global metal scene (UK, US, Israel, Sweden and to a lesser extent South America and South-East Asia), stories of murder, (sexual) violence, death, war, religion, the state, the occult, Satanism, neo-fascism, racism and sexism are regaled yet not with an air of spectacularism. In fact, quite the opposite. Keith Kahn-Harris is at pains throughout to stress that, although visually and audibly shocking (he admits the music is at times 'formless noise' that 'may not appear to be music at all', p. 5), extreme metal is an intricate process and display of both the transgressive *and* the mundane.

The themes of transgression and mundanity are brought to bear within discussions of the extremes of musical practice, fandom and the body as compared to the everyday experience of community. How radical individualism and a drive for uniqueness are muted and indeed (paradoxically) shaped by 'an almost altruistic commitment to the collective' is but one query embroiled in the transgression and mundanity debate (p. 124). Drawing upon Bourdieu (and Thornton), Tonnies, and Giddens, Kahn-Harris sets about the task of developing post-subcultural thinking beyond the grapples of the Birmingham School's subcultural approach by way of theorising the struggle between communal experience and music as resistance within late (post/reflexive) modernity. The lack of a break from the 'us versus them' construction of (sub)cultural engagement does hinder this effort to push popular music studies beyond CCCS paradigms, something that Kahn-Harris is clearly aiming for. That said, the concepts of transgressive and mundane subcultural capital, and 'reflexive anti-reflexivity' (Chapter 7) – while admittedly at times rhetorically more sound than they could ever be in practice – do provide an additional pathway to contemporary theorisations of the factors involved in popular music participation.