

Preserving Springsteen oldies, goodies.

## Experts restore a river of the Boss' ephemera

By Natalie Pompilio  
FOR THE INQUIRER

In the studio where Ben Franklin's *Poor Richard's Almanack* was conserved, where Frederick Douglass' diaries found new life, and where a copy of the U.S. Constitution received gentle care, the unforgettable work and words of another American are being preserved for posterity:

Bruce Springsteen's.

Inside the Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts in Center City, dozens of the Boss' notebooks containing lyrics, phone numbers, personal notes, doodles, set lists, and tour information are getting the same types of careful treatment.

See **SPRINGSTEEN** on A16



MICHAEL S. WIRTZ / Staff

**Bruce's Beatle look:** Springsteen (front left) with the mop-topped Castles.

# Not fade away: Preserving the Springsteen archives

SPRINGSTEEN from A1

Jim Hinz, who heads the nonprofit organization's book section, said conservators are akin to book doctors, taking a "Hippocratic Oath of Paper."

"We handle everything the same," Hinz said. "We have to be just as careful with someone's daughter's drawing as we have to be with a Rembrandt etching."

Some of the cleaned pieces are already on display at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum in Cleveland. The show "From Asbury Park to the Promised Land: The Life and Music of Bruce Springsteen" runs through next spring.

It is the most extensive exhibition on a rocker the hall has ever done, occupying two floors of the seven-story museum. It includes the 1960 Chevy Corvette Springsteen purchased after his success in 1975 and a round table where, he says, he's written a majority of his songs.

Among the treated paper products on display is a typed petition, signed primarily by girls from Springsteen's high school, arguing that his band at the time, the Castles, deserved more attention and respect.

"He's obviously a major figure of 20th- and 21st-century American life," said Jim Henke, the hall's curator and vice president of exhibitions. Because of that, taking steps to preserve Springsteen's writings make sense, he said.

"It's important to keep them for generations to come," he said.

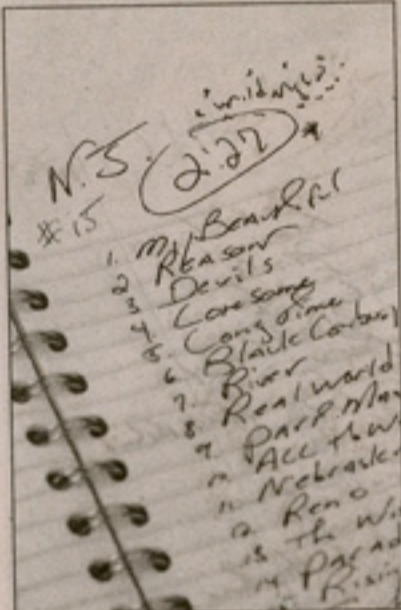
A Springsteen associate brought the more than 40 spiral notebooks, binders, folders, and scrapbooks to the conservation center's attention last year. The materials date from 1966 to 2005. Springsteen was archiving his collections, and the materials he sent to the center have personal notes, letters from fans both famous and not, and even a few vinyl recordings tucked between pages.

"He's very forward-thinking to consider preserving his legacy for future generations," said Ingrid Bogel, the center's executive director. "The type of musical things we've worked on in the past are Bach manuscripts."

For a Springsteen fan, the documents are a trove that gives insight into not only Springsteen the artist, but also Springsteen the man.

These everyday items include a "to do" list that has "extra garage door openers," a note to bring a camera and "vests — blue, purple, gray, black" on the tour supporting *The Rising*, and a typed series of phone messages for "Bruce and Patti," with a reminder to attend a parent-teacher conference.

There's a notebook from a University of Pennsylvania shop, another



"Wild night," Bruce Springsteen noted at the top of a set list from a N.J. concert, along with the 2-hour, 27-minute concert time, above. Above right, the sleeve of a Castles 45-rpm demo burns some rubber at the Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts. A notebook doodle, right, caricatures the Boss with sax player Clarence Clemons.



bearing a map of New Jersey, at least two with Snoopy on the cover. One orange composition book has lines on the cover for the user to fill in a name, address, and subject. Someone filled those spaces in to read: "Bossinheimer Jones / Cool Street / Your Mama."

"It's like looking into the past of a common human being who had common methods and common materials, and in a way it's kind of appropriate for who he is and what he does with his music," Hinz said.

On a recent day, conservation technician Val Kremser was working on one of Springsteen's tour notebooks, which contained set lists and notes on how to play certain songs. Springsteen often went back to the lists, putting down exactly how long a given concert had lasted. And he prepared for his overseas tours: One notebook has English-to-Italian translations of common stage phrases such as "Be right back." (*Torno subito*, although Springsteen spelled it differently.)

He sometimes included a few words about the weather or the crowd: "Wild night" reads a notation next to a New Jersey show, the words circled by what seem to be stars. (Two Philadelphia shows from the same period might not have gone as well: "Humid" was the notation next to one show; "new stadium," read the other.)

Kremser's job is to repair and clean, not alter. The tools of the conservator's trade are wheat

starch paste, Japanese paper, and vulcanized rubber. Folded pages are unfolded. Dirty pages are cleaned. Then each page is scanned and a digital photo taken. Each finished notebook is placed in a custom-made cloth box.

Kremser delicately reattached a perforated notebook cover. She showed an imperfection she was planning to fix, a minuscule blemish that probably would go unnoticed by most observers.

"That little tear, someone grabs a page too roughly and it's torn," she said.

While she's a little young to be part of Springsteen Nation, Kremser said, she likes working on documents belonging to a living person, someone she saw on TV just the other night. "It's nice to see he's a real person who makes lists about things. I make lists, too," she said.

Among the Springsteenabilia were two scrapbooks, covering 1965 to 1968, put together by the wife of the man who managed the Castles, one of Springsteen's early groups. The woman considered the five band members part of her family, labeling pictures "my sons" and including birthday-party photos and locks from each teenager's hair.

The paper conservators' worst enemy — or best friend, since it keeps them in business — is pressure-sensitive adhesive, what the rest of us call tape.

Senior conservation assistants Jillian Wilcox and Anna Krain took on



MICHAEL S. WIRTZ / Staff Photographer

On their way to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum in Cleveland, the Springsteen notebooks get a preservationist's touch from Val Kremser at the Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts in Center City.

the scrapbooks. Some pages had as many as eight layers of tape, which stained pages and marred images.

"There were a lot of challenges, and that was the fun part," said Krain, who met Springsteen after a Philadelphia concert and kissed his cheek, which she recalled as "sweaty."

Each scrapbook was unbound so its pages could be addressed individually. After a surface cleaning with the vulcanized rubber, the tedious tape removal began, manually or with a heated spatula.

"Adhesive tends to yellow and brittle and disfigure the object by staining it," Hinz said. "If you don't remove it, it could release on its own, and the item that it attached could fall off and be quite possibly lost forever."

Each scrapbook required at least 80 man-hours. After the pages were cleaned and repaired, the items — photos, newspaper clippings, ads such as one for a Castles show at a VFW for 50 cents — were reattached with black photo corners or tiny hinges in their original positions.

Conservators often don't have time to analyze what they're preserving, Hinz said. "We can't luxuriate in the reading of artifacts," he said.

But he did notice, for instance,

that the words *Well, they*, which kick off "Atlantic City," were used in multiple songs. And Springsteen has hundreds of songs scrawled in his notebooks, many unrecorded or unreleased.

The Hall of Fame's Henke said the papers gave glimpses into Springsteen's songwriting style. Henke has seen songwriters who cross out and revise a song on paper. Springsteen is more likely to write out an entire song, move on to something else, and then rewrite the earlier song in full with changes. A song can appear three times in a notebook, with slight revisions each time.

Henke also noted a difference as Springsteen matured. "Going back to the earlier years, he'd write and rewrite and rewrite, and there's far less of that by *The Rising*," Henke said. "He sort of gets it out much quicker now."

As she surface-cleaned a black-and-white composition book that still contained Springsteen's high school schedule — steno was first period, and he had two English classes — Krain noted that the artist's simplest personal writings had a certain timing and rhythm.

"Even the notes he wrote had the potential to be songs," she said. "They had the quality of lyrics."