

Tramps Like Us: Music and Meaning among Springsteen Fans

Daniel Cavicchi


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MUSIC AND MEANING
AMONG SPRINGSTEEN FANS

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Daniel Cavicchi : Tramps Like Us: Music and Meaning among Springsteen Fans before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Tramps Like Us: Music and Meaning among Springsteen Fans:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Amazing Read for Fan-Minded PeopleBy Amanda R,If you ever felt like you were alone or perhaps abnormal for being a fanatic, this book and the studies Daniel has conducted, and continues to expand on at RISD being a professor, will make you feel absolutely normal. Fans use their hobbies to

connect to others, find themselves and get through the day. It's wonderful when someone can put into words what fan culture/anthropology is. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Well researched, well thought out By Jess S. Used this book as part of a research paper. Love the stories of fans and the massive amount of research put into this book. Music industry peeps and Springsteen fans alike should read this book, you'll definitely get something out of it. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By Maureen great read

As rock critics have noted in the past, Bruce Springsteen's songs exist in a world of their own--they have their own settings, characters, words, and images. It is a world that even those who know only a handful of Springsteen's lyrics can instantly recognize, a world of highways and factories, loners and underdogs, hot rods and patrol cars. And it is a world that stretches far beyond the New Jersey state line. Indeed, Springsteen's attention to the ideals and struggles of ordinary Americans has significantly influenced American popular culture and public debate. As a rock-and-roll troubadour, "the Boss" speaks not only for his many fans but to them, and often with a directness or sincerity that no other performer can match. But what can be said of the fans themselves? Why and how do they relate to Springsteen's words and music? Based on three years of ethnographic research amid Springsteen's fans, and informed by the author's own experiences and impressions as a fan, Daniel Cavicchi's *Tramps Like Us* is an interdisciplinary study of the ways in which ordinary people form special, sustained attachments to a particular singer/songwriter and his songs, and of how these attachments function in people's lives. An "insider's narrative" about Springsteen fans--who they are, what they do, and why they do it--this book also investigates the phenomenon of fandom in general. The text oscillates between fans' stories and ideas and Cavicchi's own anecdotes, commentary, and analysis. It challenges the stereotypes of fans as obsessive, delusional, and even mentally ill, and explores fandom as a normal socio-cultural activity. Ultimately, this book argues that music fandom is a useful and meaningful behavior that enables us to shape identities, create communities, and make sense of the world--both Bruce's and our own.

"A worthy addition to popular music scholarship...Cavicchi's dialogic and reflexive style of presentation is right at the heart of current cultural studies and ethnomusicological thinking....He is able to take complex theory and make it readily accessible for a nonacademic reader."--Rob Bowman, York University "Cavicchi manages to convey enthusiasm [about] his subject without losing his critical stance...and he writes in an accessible, clear, and engaging style. It is a pleasurable and fascinating study that will make a significant contribution to the study of popular music."--Sara Cohen, Institute of Popular Music, University of Liverpool "This is an original area in music studies [which] grows out of the author's pioneering work in popular music as people use it in daily life. Cavicchi takes a scholarly approach to understanding fandom as community, and his research among Springsteen fans has been quite thorough....The book's readability is a very impressive and appealing feature."--Jeff Titon, Brown University

From the Author

From the Preface - This book began as my Ph.D. dissertation in American Civilization at Brown University; I conducted the bulk of my fieldwork with Bruce Springsteen fans from spring of 1993 to spring of 1995, while I was a graduate student. There are few dissertations on music in the field of American civilization (or American studies, as it is known elsewhere) if only because people who are interested in studying music usually do so in music departments. But I learned early on that my interest in popular music and my reluctance to learn a symphonic instrument made me unwelcome at most American university music departments; instead, I drifted into American studies which, in encouraging a broad interdisciplinary study of the culture and history of a geographical area, allowed me the flexibility to study musical life as I pleased. This is not to say that I abandoned any notion of working in the field of music; I spent much of my time at Brown in the Music Department, taking courses on ethnomusicology, attending recitals and lectures, reading musicology journals in the music library, and teaching courses about American music. But at the same time, I was doing a lot of thinking about ideas from my other classes in anthropology, history, and literary studies. This book is clearly a product of my eclectic studies at Brown. I also see this book as a continuation of the work I did as an interviewer and editor in the Music in Daily Life Project at the State University of New York at Buffalo, while a masters student in the late eighties. The project was a six year-long investigation of the ways music worked in the day-to-day existence of ordinary people. Along with thirty or so other interviewers, I asked relatives, friends, and others the simple questions, "What is music about for you?" and listened carefully. The project was the first one of its kind--no one had explored the ways in which ordinary people used and understood music in the United States before--and it opened my eyes to new ways of studying music based not on aesthetics and history but rather on ethnography and culture. In this book, I like to think that I have continued the exploration of music in daily life; instead of talking to people in general about their musical experiences, I have focused on a particular group of people who have made participating in the world of popular music a central part of their lives. Overall, I hope this book will find a place among the growing number of works about music audiences. I am still shocked when I go into major bookstores and find plenty of books about musical performers but none about music listeners. One can always find a biography of Beethoven but rarely an engaging account of what it was like to attend the performance of one of his symphonies. One can always find all sorts of analyses about the Beatles' lives and recordings but very little about all the people who used the music to get through the day, week after week, year after year. Indeed, the academic field of

music seems to be one of the last of the arts disciplines in the humanities to experience a revolution akin to the rise of reader-response criticism in literary studies, where the prevailing paradigms about the importance of authorship and the structures of a work have been challenged by new concerns with how people use and understand those works. In music, it is still the creation of music which reigns supreme; everyone is expected to be a musician or composer and be concerned with musicianship and composition. In both the Music in Daily Life Project and my research with fans, the people to whom I spoke were often taken aback when I approached them; several were astounded that I would even be interested in their musical activities. Yet when they decided to tell me about music in their lives, they spoke with enthusiasm and clarity, recounting experiences which were rich in emotion, memory, and complexity, sharing with me whole realms of meaning about which no one in the modern university seems to care. On the whole, I hope this work will further the idea that studying music must include not only the exploration of musical performances and performers but also those who are performed to. I hope it will show that we need more studies of audience in order to achieve a more complete understanding of the ways in which cultural production is useful and important, not only in abstract aesthetic terms like "truth" or "beauty" but also in everyday life, as a means of education, communication, pleasure, memory, identity, and community. In the end, I hope that this work will show that seriously engaging the cultural experiences and activities of a majority of people in modern society has value and can move scholarship into a better position for the purpose of aiding and intervening in the problems and concerns of those people.

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