

Review Article

Beethoven, Springsteen and the Music of Despair

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Abstract

Using Ludwig van Beethoven and Bruce Springsteen as case studies, I argue that through a process of catharsis music can simultaneously express and transform severe psychosocial disability. Both musicians experienced an existential crisis around the age of 32, when already launched on successful musical careers. As well as providing written testaments to their distress, both expressed it in their contemporary musical compositions: *La Malinconia* and *The Tempest*; *Born to Run*, *Darkness on the Edge of Town* and *Dancing in the Dark*. Both were experiencing fundamental problems of identity: Beethoven's anguish was precipitated by his encroaching deafness and its effect on his future abilities; Springsteen's by his growing sense of alienation from his cultural base. Both had strong factors predisposing them to depression, centred around longstanding difficult relationships with their fathers, rendering them angry at the world and themselves. But for both, music was a means of sublimation, of channelling their aggression and their despair, of finding purpose beyond the self. Beethoven's belief in his mission to express the full range of his art to the world gave him the strength to continue, while for Springsteen the key was a growing awareness of his mission to map the distance between the American dream and American reality. Both experienced further periods of turbulence later in life, but were able to use their musical outputs – for example *La Cavatina* and *Long Time Comin'* – as forms of maintenance therapy. For their audiences, their music continues to provide powerful antidotes to despair.

Keywords

- Beethoven
- Bruce Springsteen
- Music
- Psychosocial disability

INTRODUCTION

Music can enable people in despair find reasons to stay alive.

I have recently argued that literary reading is an intrinsically therapeutic activity for people who are uncertain how to resolve the dilemma of their existence [1]. Engaging with literature enters the confusing and chaotic heart of the suicidal experience in ways that even the most detailed clinical knowledge or the profoundest philosophical insights are unable to do. We are transported to places which are simultaneously real and not-real, where the combination of the 'otherness' and brilliance of the text allows us the space, and gives us the courage to acknowledge the deeply inconsolable, to engage with the inadmissible and to hold thoughts and experience emotions which we would otherwise fear it would almost kill us to contain.

In this paper I apply these principles to music, and show how through reflection and expression of the serious problems we face in real life it, like classical tragedy, offers us the opportunity to find relief from our consequent strong or repressed emotions: purgation or catharsis in Aristotle's terms [2]. I follow the standard definition of music as 'art concerned with combining

vocal or instrumental sounds for beauty of form or emotional expression': its power to move people its ecstatic qualities have been recognised in all cultures [3]. Considering the various forms of engagement with music - not only listening but also composition and performance - I argue for its therapeutic potential for people experiencing the deepest distress. Using Ludwig van Beethoven and Bruce Springsteen as case studies, I propose that music may be simultaneously expressive and transformative of existential despair.

This paper emerges from an expanding body of research into the impact of music on our mental health. We know that music has the ability to express and induce our emotions. It acts as a powerful tool for mood regulation, enabling us to cope with negative experiences by alleviating negative moods and feelings [4]. While musical mood self-regulation sometimes has harmful effects – for example if the listener adopts strategies similar to rumination [5] - systematic review of research evidence suggests that listening to music over a period of time can reduce depressive symptoms [6]. Music-listening interventions also overcome important practical challenges in the treatment of mental health problems: they are self-administered, low cost and - being a passive activity – encourage high rates of adherence [7].

I build on this research with a qualitative exploration of specific ways in which music has the power to express and heal our troubled minds. I have chosen to focus on Beethoven and Springsteen for three main reasons. First, because they are both personal favourites of mine, composing music which has moved and inspired me over many decades. Second, both extended and transformed the boundaries of their musical genres, the classical tradition of Haydn and Mozart on the one hand, the interventionist folk tradition of Seeger and Dylan on the other. And third, both grappled with - and for the most part overcame - intense emotional turmoil, in ways which are remarkably similar despite the differences in their historical and cultural contexts.

I begin by describing the similarities in their moments of crisis, and how they expressed them in words and music. I then consider factors from their formative years which predisposed them to these crises. I show how they both used their music as means of resolution and renewal, while continually keeping their emotional 'demons' at bay.

Readers of this paper may wish to ensure ready access to their usual music streaming service, so they can directly experience the various musical references as they arise throughout the text.

THE MUSIC OF DESPAIR

Both Beethoven's and Springsteen's existential crises occurred when they were in their early 30s, already launched on highly successful musical careers.

Ludwig van Beethoven was born in December 1770 in Bonn in the Electorate of Cologne (now Germany). By the autumn of 1802, he had established his reputation as a supreme piano virtuoso and the leading composer in Vienna, then the world epicentre of music. He had composed trios and sonatas for piano, including the *Moonlight* sonata, sonatas for cello and violin, string quartets, one quintet, a piano concerto and his first symphony.

Bruce Frederick Joseph Springsteen was born in September 1949 in New Jersey, USA. By the autumn of 1981, he had released five commercially successful albums, including *Born to Run* and *The River*, scored a US top ten singles hit with *Hungry Heart*, and was undertaking major tours across America.

But these achievements were not enough to sustain them.

A MISERABLE EXISTENCE

For several months during 1802, Beethoven takes himself away from the restless busyness of Vienna to Heiligenstadt, a rural resort on the edge of the city. He is still creative, composing his second symphony and another piano sonata. But he is also burdened with despair at his advancing deafness, which he had tried for several years to ignore.

On 6 October, he writes his last will and testament which, with a codicil dated four days later, he keeps with his papers to be discovered after his death. Addressed to his two brothers, his so-called Heiligenstadt Testament explains his apparent hostility

to them, and to mankind in general, in terms of his need to 'fight against the dreadful consequences of my poor hearing' by cutting himself off from society. Sometimes he seeks company, but the humiliation of someone hearing a flute playing, or a shepherd singing, when he can hear nothing, is too much to bear:

'I must be totally alone, except in cases of the direst emergency. I must live like an exile. [...] Such things have brought me near to despair. Only a little more and I would have ended my life. [...] I continue to eke out a miserable existence - truly miserable, my condition so sensitive that a sudden change of mood could plunge me from happiness into despair.'

I bid thee farewell - with such sorrow - to think of the hope I had when I came here, that I might be cured even just very slightly - that hope I must now realise has abandoned me completely as the leaves fall from the trees in autumn and fade away [8].

Two of Beethoven's contemporary musical compositions give lyrical expression his distress.

He gives the title *La Malinconia* (melancholy) to the final movement of his sixth string quartet (Opus 18). The movement begins with a slow passage, marked *adagio*. This is followed by a fast and simple evocation of a German country dance, which grinds to a halt as the *adagio* suddenly reasserts itself. This process repeats throughout the movement. As Jan Swafford observes:

Again and again in the piece, an elegant and conventional surface slips to reveal a darkness beneath, until the melancholy reveals itself in its full violence [9].

And then we have his D Minor Piano Sonata - later known as *The Tempest* - composed in Heiligenstadt during that fateful summer of 1802. Swafford describes this piece beautifully:

With disquieting quietness, *The Tempest* begins on a whispering arpeggio of uncertain tonality that erupts into a driving *Allegro*. Quiet descends abruptly again, then the pattern repeats with insistent but still more ambiguous harmonies. [...] The movement takes an enigmatic course that includes a constant background of driving demonic energy. [...] The recapitulation falls into moments of mournful quasi-recitative, as if the music were struggling for words that cannot be spoken [10].

The end of the movement is 'a chilling evocation of emptiness'. There follows a time-stopping slow movement, dark and fateful, whose moments of hope are fraught and inconclusive. The relentless and obsessive finale is said to have been inspired by a horse galloping recklessly past Beethoven's open window. We hear the horse and rider, relentless and obsessive, spreading fear and alarm 'with a churning intensity like some unstoppable machinery of fate' [10]. It is a statement of intense despair - and utmost clarity.

FROM NOWHERE, A DESPAIR

In the autumn of 1981, Springsteen is on a road trip with

his friend Matt Delia. He has ended a relationship and plans to spend the winter in California. 'This is the trip', he writes in his autobiography, 'where the ambivalence, trouble and toxic confusion I'd had volcanically bubbling for thirty-two years would finally reach critical mass' [11]. One evening as they cross the Mississippi River into Texas, he is suddenly filled with an overwhelming, smothering despair:

In the blue light of dusk, there is a river. By the river, there is a fair. At the fair there is music, a small stage, filled by a local band playing for their neighbours on a balmy night. I watch men and women lazily dancing in each other's arms and I scan the crown for pretty local girls. I'm anonymous and then... I'm gone. From nowhere, a despair overcomes me; I feel an envy for these men and women and their late-summer rituals, the small pleasures that bind them and this town together. [...] all I can think of is that I want to be amongst them, of them, and I know I can't. I can only watch. That's what I do. I watch... and I record. I do not engage, and if and when I do, my terms are so stringent, they suck the lifeblood and possibility out of any good thing, any real thing, I might have. It's here, in this little river town, that my life as an observer, an actor staying cautiously and safely out of the emotional fray, away from the consequences, the normal messiness of living and loving, reveals its cost to me. At thirty-two, in the middle of the USA, on this night, I've just exceeded the once-surefire soul-and-mind-numbing power of my rock 'n' roll meds [12].

His emotions are an ecological disaster, an oil spill despoiling the landscape:

My well of emotion is no longer being channelled and safely pipelined to the surface. There's been an "event," and my depression is spewing like an oil spill all over the beautiful turquoise-green gulf of my carefully planned and controlled existence. Its black sludge is threatening to smother every last living part of me [13].

This sense of alienation and despair permeates Springsteen's early work.

In his 1975 album *Born to Run*, the title track finds him and Wendy riding 'in suicide machines' on 'highways jammed with broken heroes' through a 'town that rips the bones from your back; it's a death trap, it's a suicide rap'. Reflecting later, he describes the overwhelming feeling of dread that was in the air at that time:

I was a child of Vietnam-era America, of the Kennedy, King and Malcolm X assassinations. The country no longer felt like the innocent place it was said to be in the Eisenhower fifties. Political murder, economic injustice and institutionalized racism were all powerfully and brutally present. These were issues that had previously been relegated to the margins of American life. Dread - the sense that things might not work out, that the moral high ground had been swept out from underneath us, that the dream we had of ourselves had somehow been tainted and the future would forever be uninsured.... [14].

In *Darkness on the Edge of Town*, released in 1978, we find Springsteen's character, having lost his money and his wife, waiting on that hill 'where dreams are found and lost'. He'll 'pay the cost/ For wanting those things that can only be found/In the darkness on the edge of town.' For Bruce Zirilli, this piece combines 'the metaphorical Catholic darkness of a working-class existence with the liminal, urban space of a community in which instability is the permanent starting point' [15]. And in John Massaro's words, 'even for those who try to run away from life, from their roots, from themselves, there will always be a reckoning with the pain and sorrow of life'[16]¹. For me, the most telling element of the song is Springsteen's final wail of despair, lasting for 22 seconds at the end of the song. Although he later suggests that 'the setting for personal transformation is often found at the end of your rope'[17], in his original interpretation of this song there is no certainty that any such transformation will occur.

And a few years later, in his 1984 single *Dancing in the Dark*, we have the night-shift worker who is 'just tired and bored' with himself. He gets up in the evening 'And I ain't got nothin' to say'. In the morning 'I go to bed feelin' the same way'. Despite its superficially upbeat tempo, the muffled synthesizers that underpin the music 'accentuate its dreary theme and the monotonous lifestyle of its characters'[18]. Springsteen himself sees this as 'my song about my own alienation, fatigue and desire to get out from inside the studio, my room, my record, my head and ... live' [19].

IDENTITY AND EXCLUSION

Beethoven's and Springsteen's experiences of existential despair occurred at the same age, and at the same stage in their musical careers. Both were literally on the edge of town - a resort near Vienna, a fair in Texas - with despair likely surfacing at this point because, by withdrawing from the distractions, hustle and hassle of their relentlessly busy lives, they could no longer repress their underlying emotions.

Yet the parallels do not end here. Both express an intense dread, 'driving demonic energy', of life spiralling out of control: the galloping horse in Beethoven's *Tempest*; the suicide machines in Springsteen's *Born to Run*. Both are oppressed by an overwhelming sense of alienation. Beethoven has to live like an exile. All Springsteen can do is watch other people enjoy their late-summer rituals and small pleasures. Neither can engage with their worlds in the way they wish to do, to the extent that the thought of life continuing like this becomes unbearable.

For both, this existential dilemma is inextricably linked to their identities as musicians. Building on Durkheim's observations of the impact of individual's membership of a particular group or category [20], Anna Mueller and Seth Abrutyn argue persuasively for the link between identity and emotion [21]. People whose identity is embedded in a relationship, a group, or broader social system feel higher levels of commitment to that identity; and their commitment depends on the intimate, emotional aspects and the extent of their social ties. When commitment to an identity is high, the person is emotionally attached to the bond itself.

Identity matters then, to suicide and mental health, because it is one prominent pathway through which the external social world comes to matter to perceptions of self. Our identity renders painful the possibility of exclusion, rejection, and isolation from cherished social groups, not simply because we feel lonely, but because a part of our self can be damaged or lost through these social experiences [22].

Beethoven's identity as a musician, as a performer and conductor, as the *enfant terrible* of contemporary Viennese culture, is terminally threatened by his encroaching deafness. No longer will he be able to excite audiences, and himself, with competitive virtuoso piano recitals.

Springsteen recognises issues of identity as key to his own music:

My writing was focusing itself around identity issues – who am I, who are we, what and where is home, what constitutes manhood, adulthood, what are your freedoms and your responsibilities. I was interested in what it meant to be an American, one small participant in current history at a time when the future seemed as hazy and shape-shifting as that thin line on the horizon [23].

In his case, the threat to his identity is socially-derived. His upward social mobility raises an internal problem of existential guilt. He has become painfully aware that his own musical success means he has irrevocably parted company with the white working-class culture of his youth, which he so convincingly portrays in its harsh yet sometimes hopeful reality. He may wish to portray himself as an advocate for oppressed young men under conditions of industrial decline [24]² but in his position as a superstar he struggles to convince himself that this is true.

I'll be leaving in the morning

These crises of identity, these periods of existential despair, did not arise *de novo*. As well as the specific precipitating factors of deafness and social isolation, my analysis is that Beethoven's and Springsteen's life experiences as children and young adults predisposed them to severe mental distress.

Both had difficult fathers, who adversely affected their lives for many decades.

Beethoven's father Johann was a failed musician and a severe alcoholic, who pushed his son relentlessly to succeed as a musical prodigy from a very young age, while being verbally and physically abusive towards him [25]. Johann's serial financial incompetence left Beethoven himself as the *de facto* family breadwinner before the age of 15, and the *de jure* head of the household from age 18 after Johann was arrested for public drunkenness [26].

Springsteen 'grew up around a lot of very ill people, secretive, susceptible to serious depression, and disturbing, unpredictable behaviour', principally his father Douglas. His father worked various jobs, including as a bus driver, but had mental health issues throughout his life. Alcohol figured prominently. As a

child and teenager, Springsteen's abiding memory was 'the silent, dormant volcano of the old man's nightly kitchen vigil, the stillness covering a red misting rage'[27].

Both parted from their parents in their late teens, in large part to escape their father's baleful influence. Beethoven's mother died of tuberculosis when he was 16, and he moved from Bonn to Vienna in stages over the next few years, making Vienna his permanent home in 1792. Springsteen stayed in New Jersey, along with his sister Virginia, when his parents translocated to California in 1969. In *Independence Day*, released in 1978, we find the singer severing his links with his father:

Well Papa go to bed now it's getting late [...]

I'll be leaving in the morning from Saint Mary's Gate.

There is darkness in the house and in the town that's got the better of him, and from which he needs to escape. He is leaving to protect himself from his father – 'you can't touch me now' - while also expressing awareness and empathy for the pressures his father has been under:

... they ain't going to do to me

What I watched them do to you.

As a result of these experiences, I suggest, Beethoven and Springsteen were ruthless in their search for personal success, determined to become the best in their field regardless of the consequences for those around them. And both had difficulties with forming and sustaining close personal relationships: a problem which Beethoven never fully resolved, despite the mystique surrounding his 'Immortal Beloved' [28,29]. Reflecting on his life in his late 20s, Springsteen concludes:

My experience with relationships and love to that point all told me I wasn't built for it. I grew very uncomfortable, very fast, with domestic life. Worse, it uncovered a deep-seated anger in me I was ashamed of but also embraced [30].

They were angry young men, exhibiting evidence of toxic masculinity. Beethoven's rage found frequent and overt expression, famously in his public humiliation of Daniel Stiebel during an improvisation contest early in 1800 [31]. Springsteen could be similarly volatile, as before his 1976 performance in London's Hammersmith Odeon, when he let fly at his manager Mike Appel and ripped down all the advertising posters and flyers he could find [32].

Each was heading relentlessly towards emotional breakdown. Placed historically midway between them, Sigmund Freud has highly pertinent observations to make about the relationship between their anger and depression. In his seminal paper on mourning and melancholia, he proposed that ideas of suicide occur when hostility towards another person is turned inwards on oneself; in other words, that hate has a suicide-inducing effect. Suicide can happen when the object to which one is attached and which one is unable to let go is also the target of one's hostility, anger, rage, and aggression.

So we find the key to the clinical picture: we perceive that the self-reproaches are reproaches against a loved object which have been shifted away from it on to the patient's own ego [33].

My interpretation here is that the unresolved hostility and anger that Beethoven and Springsteen each felt towards his father, was turned inwards on himself.

TRANSFORMATION AND RENEWAL

Although both Beethoven and Springsteen contemplated suicide, neither acted on the desire to end their existence. Music was a means of sublimation, of channelling their aggression and their despair, of finding purpose beyond the self. Their belief in the importance of their music as a force for good in the world – allied to a degree of egoism – was the reason why they chose to keep on living.

Only my art

Beethoven expresses this belief explicitly in his Testament, immediately after his cry of despair. He vows to live with his suffering, for the sake of his art

Only a little more and I would even have ended my life. Only my art [Beethoven's emphasis], that is all that held me back. It would have been impossible for me to leave this world until I had brought forth everything that was within me, and so I continued to eke out a miserable existence [34].

As Swafford observes, 'from this moment on, without hope and, he feared, without joy, he needed to be heroic just to live and to work [35]. And indeed he was.

We find this change most clearly expressed in his Third Symphony (opus 55), which he himself titled the *Eroica*. He composed most of this during the summer of 1803, with its first public performance in April 1805. In the opening bars of the first movement, we hear resonances of the discomfort and discordance of his *Tempest*. But then, in place of that sense of dread and uncontrollable energy, we discover a dramatic narrative, an unfolding story of adversity, of challenge accepted and overcome, and finally of peaceful resolution. Adolph Marx, reviewing the symphony some twenty years later, describes the first movement as a battle from which the hero emerges victorious; the second as a walk through a corpse-strewn battlefield; the third conveys troops massing together; and in the final movement the warriors return home in peace time [36].

The original intended hero of the *Eroica* was probably Napoleon Bonaparte, though the Frenchman's increasingly imperious actions persuaded the musician – a lover of liberty, equality and fraternity – to strike out his formal dedication from the title page. Others have suggested allusion to classical figures such as Homer or Prometheus [37]. But ultimately, Beethoven himself became his music's hero:

his defiant stance towards adversity – his struggles with deafness and resultant sense of exile from the world around him

– painted a portrait of the artist that would endure for centuries [38].

And then, for the next twenty years, Beethoven explored sublime new territory of exhilarating compositional brilliance. My personal route across this territory would include the haunting *largo* from his 1806 violin concerto, preferably the performance by Itzhak Perlman and Daniel Barenboim with the Berlin Philharmonic. I would revisit his *Missa Solemnis* which first overwhelmed me in York Minster at the age of 15, and his *Choral Symphony* which I sang one memorable evening with the Kodály choir at Oxford. Finally, I would immerse myself in the Endellion's rendering of his late string quartets, especially the magnificent pandemonium of his *Große Fuge*, with its apocalyptic struggle to overcome chaos and enable meaningful life to evolve [39].

Mapping that territory

Springsteen's transformation was more evolutionary, but no less dramatic. It began with the release of his *Darkness* album in 1978, when he first found his political voice and vision:

Darkness was my samurai record, all stripped down for fighting. My protagonists in these songs had to divest themselves of all that was unnecessary to survive. On *Born to Run* a personal battle was engaged but the collective war continued. On *Darkness*, the political implications of the lives I was writing about began to come to the fore and I searched for a music that would contain them. [...] I determined that there on the streets of my home town was the beginning of my purpose, my reason, my passion. Along with Catholicism. In my family's neighbourhood experience, I found my other "genesis" piece, the beginning of my song: home, roots, blood, community. Responsibility, stay hard, stay hungry, stay alive [40].

During his *River* album tour in 1980, he became increasingly interested in the place 'where the political and the personal came together to spill clear water in to the muddy river of history'.

I thought perhaps mapping that territory, the distance between the American dream and American reality, might be my service, one I could provide that would accompany the entertainment and the good times I brought my fans. I hoped it might give roots and mission to our band [41].

As Pilgrim observes, the river is a potent image for the complex interplay between the unpredictable nature of the material world and the uncertain outcomes of our hopes and dreams [24].

After his breakdown in Texas, Springsteen arrived in Los Angeles and consulted his friend and manager John Landau: and involved himself in an intense period of personal therapy.

The benefits to Springsteen – and to his subsequent *oeuvre* – were immense and sustained.

I felt myself steadying, righting myself. I'd danced and driven my way, all on my own (sans drugs or alcohol), to the brink of my big black sea, but I hadn't jumped in.

I began to map a previously unknown internal world. A world that, when it showed its weight and mass, its ability to hide in plain sight and its sway over my behaviour, stunned me. There was a lot of sadness, at what had happened, at what had been done and what I'd done to myself. But there was good news also: how resilient I'd been, how I'd turned so much of it into music, love and smiles [42].

Springsteen openly acknowledges the healing and relief he experienced by embracing the vulnerable, emotional aspects of his character [43]. He is able to channel his creative energy - and his righteous anger - into highly influential music that critiques not only the lack of irony in American culture, but also the wider community's failure to live up to its responsibilities.

His commitment to social justice is deep and sustained. Despite its frequent misinterpretation as a patriotic anthem, *Born in the USA* (1984) is 'a scathing condemnation of an American dream that has left some citizens behind and alone' (Stonebrook, 2012, 222). Inspired by Steinbeck's Tom Joad, he chronicles 'the effects of the increasing division of the eighties and nineties, the hard times and consequences that befell many of the people whose work and sacrifice created America' [44]. His songs foster compassion for those whose 'souls are at risk' [45], whether from AIDS on the *Streets of Philadelphia* (1994), or the police killing of an unarmed young black man (*American Skins* 1999). He celebrates the firefighters who sacrifice their lives in the aftermath of 9/11 (*The Rising* 2002), and in 2021 welcomes the inauguration of President Joe Biden with his 'secular gospel' song *Land of Hope and Dreams*.

MUSIC AS MAINTENANCE THERAPY

The existential transformations after Heiligenstadt and that 'dusty night' in Texas were not permanent panaceas. Both Beethoven and Springsteen experienced further turbulence later in life. And for both, music performed the function of maintenance therapy.

The combination of deafness and his abrasive personality channelled Beethoven into an habitually solitary life, interspersed with periods of intense but usually short-lived friendships and, for him most significantly, the increasingly fraught guardianship of his nephew Karl. The tempestuous ending of his relationship with Karl is expressed and (to a degree) sublimated in the *Cavatina*, the tragic final movement of his Opus 130 string quartet, elegantly described by Swafford as:

a song of endless heartbreak, the models for which in his life were endless. Beethoven said he had never been so moved in composing a movement; even the thought of it brought him to tears. In his youth he had laughed at the tears of his listeners when he improvised. Now the tears were his own, and he did not scorn them. Though the movement is some seven minutes it seems much longer, because it has another of the wide-arching melodies of the late slow movements. The manifestly sobbing last section, in dark C-flat major, is marked *Beklemmt*, "anguished." [46]

Music also helped Beethoven through his recurrent and increasingly severe illnesses. He composed the Heiliger Dankgesang as the third movement of his 15th string quartet (Opus 132), 'a holy song of thanksgiving of a convalescent to Deity' for his recovery after a prolonged, near-fatal intestinal disorder in 1825; interpreted by the poet T.S. Eliot as 'the fruit of reconciliation and relief after immense suffering' [47].

Springsteen's persisting anxiety about personal intimacy affected his ability to sustain any long-term relationships until his early 40s, when he married long-term musical colleague Patti Scialfa. He was still capable of carelessness and emotional cruelty, 'all straight out of the old man's playbook' [48]. Although he reports some initial resolution in composing *My Father's House* (1982), and when his father sought his forgiveness before the birth of his son Evan, it was really not until *Long Time Comin'* in 2005 that he could finally put his father in his place - 'well my daddy he was just a stranger [...] just somebody I'd see around' - while describing a profound sense of rebirth at a campfire with his partner and two sleeping children:

I'm riding hard carrying a catch of roses
A fresh map that I made
Now I'm going to get birth naked and bury my old soul
And dance on its grave and dance on its grave.

And then, shortly after his sixtieth birthday he 'slipped into a depression like I hadn't experienced since that dusty night in Texas thirty years earlier. [...] For the first time I felt I understood what drives people towards the abyss. The fact that I understood this, that I *could* feel this, emptied my heart out and left me in a cold fright. There was no life here, just an endless irritating existential angst embedded in my bones [49]. For a while the despair was too deep for his music to reach. He was unable to tour for a year or more. Antidepressant medication, psychotherapy and his wife Patti kept him going; perhaps also his Catholic roots, as expressed in his 2012 song *Rocky Road*. But then, out of the blue, Mick Jagger invites him to join the Stones in performing *Tumbling Dice* in New Jersey [50]. And he is back.

Springsteen, now in his 70s, continues to perform in ways that are hugely life enhancing for him and for his global audiences. He describes touring as his trustiest form of self-medication [51]. And those of us privileged to see him performing his recent world tour will vouch for the continuing therapeutic properties of his music. His voice may be a little rusty round the edges these days, his energy levels somewhat reduced after three hours on stage - but he remains, like Beethoven, a powerful antidote to despair.

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- (Endnotes)
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