

# Dave Marsh on creating the Loud Noise

By Michael Giltz

*When rock and roll criticism began — when people first began to admit, in public and in print, that they took this stuff seriously — one of its central precepts was that somehow the audience responded to the best stuff. But as time passed and some of what listeners sought out most avidly proved to be crap and some of what critics most favored was widely ignored, some critics came to revile the mass audience.*

*But since, in the end, so much of rock's meaning derives from its use, that was a shaky position to occupy. In the end you were either a critic or fan of rock and roll, and to disdain the Loud Noise and its luxurious temptations meant surrendering the possibility that what you did would matter much.*

So writes rock critic Dave Marsh in *Glory Days* (Pantheon, \$18.95), his second book on Bruce Springsteen. And few have made the Loud Noise he talks about more boisterously than that artist. From his simultaneous appearance on the covers of *Time* and *Newsweek* in 1975 to the blockbuster *Born In The U.S.A.* (the second best-selling album of all time), Springsteen has been promoted — and distorted — by the media.

Every superstar since Elvis has faced the double-edged sword of reaching a truly mass audience only to find themselves isolated by the very myth-making that got them there. But Marsh thinks it is an important step for an artist to take; even if it does result in a circus.

"Given an opportunity to reach more people, you're certainly better off reaching more than less," Marsh said.

"And I don't think it would be worth much if it didn't get out of control. I think if it's going to be something that you yourself control, you might as well be (masturbat-

ing) in front of a mirror."

Marsh was speaking in a telephone interview from New York City, where he was in the midst of a 21-city publicity tour for *Glory Days*. An outspoken and articulate music critic, he has written for *Rolling Stone*, among many other publications.

Marsh became a fan of Springsteen's after attending one of his legendary four-hour concerts in 1974. Over the years, Marsh has become his friend and, ultimately, biographer. In 1979 Marsh published *Born To Run: The Bruce Springsteen Story*, a book he now readily admits was "an act of hero worship."

With *Glory Days*, Marsh takes Springsteen into the 80s. With interviews and extensive descriptions of Springsteen in concert, he traces the development of the artist from a cult figure to a superstar; from a young man wary of speaking publicly on political issues to an adult who linked up with and promoted local food banks and unions during his *Born In The U.S.A.* World Tour.

While Marsh makes Springsteen's (and his own) political views quite clear, he shrugs off the idea that he might be limiting an understanding of Springsteen to a political agenda.

"I don't think that I do that," Marsh said. "The book is very clear in showing a political level to his work ... a personal and psychological level, a musical and creative level. I think that those three levels are very well represented.

"At several points where it is possible to put a political construction on his activities," he continues, "I state quite clearly — because I believe it — that I believe his motivation was more psychological.

Marsh may be referring to Springsteen's involvement with local unions in the cities

the E Street Band travels to. Rather than interpreting this as a political gesture, Marsh saw it as an outgrowth of his need to feel a part of a community, to personalize the places he visits.

Rock 'n' roll historically has been used as a form of rebellion, a way of thumbing your nose at authority. But *Glory Days* makes the argument that Springsteen is different. He took up the guitar because he wanted to be accepted. Rather than being a rejection of society, rock 'n' roll is Springsteen's way of reaching out to it.

Marsh said, "The book is about the ways in which isolation is broken down and the ways in which collaboration — amongst the

media and amongst people — are the things that really raise consciousness."

When asked whether he thought Springsteen's political views (e.g. support of unions, liberalism) would be unimportant 100 years from now, Marsh said, "Oh, I disagree. If you listen to the *1812 Overture* and it begins with a cannon, you want to know why.

"I think it's ludicrous to presume that art exists outside of the social and political context of its time and that that does not have a sustaining importance," Marsh said. "It certainly does. Whether you talk about Plato in ancient Greece or U2 today, art does not exist for its own sake."

## on the shelf

### Glory Days

By Dave Marsh



After reading the imposing 450 pages of this book, one point is perfectly clear: Dave Marsh is Bruce Springsteen's biggest fan. A lesser soul might have scrawled "Springsteen is God" on a wall somewhere and be done with it. Marsh has written two books.

The skeptical and the uninitiated will probably be turned off by his unabashed admiration and that's a shame, because

*Glory Days* has much to offer.

It is a portrait of the artist as a young marketing product: Marsh analyzes his decision to make the Loud Noise and his subsequent attempts to maintain a personal identity while making sure his ideas and beliefs remain undistorted by the inevitable media barrage.

The book is too long and its descriptions of Springsteen in concert soon turn into a blur of new cities, new songs and new speeches. And *Glory Days* is not a biography, for it rarely delves into Springsteen's personal life. But as an intense examination of the public life of a very private person, *Glory Days* is intelligent and perceptive, something most books on rock 'n' roll never even pretend to be.