Springsteen Expresses New Orleans' Pain
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NEW ORLEANS (AP) - New Jersey's favorite son was adopted by New Orleans on Sunday, as Bruce Springsteen -- through speeches and song -- vocalized the anger, frustration, pain and resilience of this hurricane-battered city at the annual Jazz & Heritage Festival.

Decrying what he called "criminal ineptitude" in Hurricane Katrina's wake, Springsteen jabbed at the political powers he deemed responsible for New Orleans' slow recovery.

Perhaps the most pointed moment came as he prepared to sing an old song that he had rewritten lyrics to for New Orleans. Noting that he visited the city's ninth ward, perhaps the most devastated area in the city, Springsteen said: "I saw sights I never thought I'd see in an American city," and added: "The criminal ineptitude makes you furious."

With that, he launched into a song titled "How Can A Poor Man Stand Such Times and Live?" and dedicated the song to "President Bystander." Its lyrics included the lines: "There's bodies floatin' on Canal and the levees gone to hell ... them who's got out of town, and them who ain't got left to drown, tell me, how can a poor man stand such times and live?"

It was Springsteen's first appearance at the event, the biggest musical happening since Katrina struck last summer. The rock legend, along with Bob Dylan and the Dave Matthews Band, were among the high-profile names who joined the city's homegrown music stars for the two weekend-long festival, which kicked off Friday and will end next Sunday.

Other performers on Sunday included New Orleans music luminaries The Meters and jazzman Allen Toussaint, who performed with Elvis Costello. Toussaint's set was more buoyant than melancholy, as he celebrated with mostly upbeat songs. During his final song, he led the audience in a chant: "Home, home, everybody come home."

But it was Springsteen who may have provided the most poignant moments. Springsteen eschewed the big hits he's most identified with and instead performed classic folk and gospel songs epitomized by Pete Seeger that are featured on Springsteen's new album, "We Shall Overcome: The Seeger Sessions." Though they were decades old, many of the songs seemed particularly relevant to New Orleans struggles -- "Mary Don't You Weep," "Jacob's Ladder," and particularly "My Oklahoma Home," which depicts a man's loss of his home and family after the devastating dust storms there in the 1930s.

But perhaps no song was as bittersweet as "We Shall Overcome." As Springsteen somberly performed the tune, some people embraced each other, others dabbed their eyes. Another emotional moment came as he dedicated one of his old tunes to New
Orleans: "My City of Ruins." Though he wrote it for his favorite town of Asbury Park, N.J., its lyrics resonated with the crowd: "Young men on the corner, like scattered leaves, the boarded up windows, the hustlers and thieves, while my brother's down on his knees. My city of ruins."

By the time he sang the chorus, "Come on rise up!" the audience spontaneously rose their hands in their air, symbolizing the pain and the hope of the city.

Not all of Springsteen's two-hour long set was downbeat; his huge band at times sounded like a boisterous New Orleans brass band, with its booming horn system, while he later injected some boogie and swing with another jazzy tune. But he ended his performance on a tender note, sweetly singing, "When The Saints Go Marching In."

The festival picks up next weekend with Paul Simon, Irma Thomas, Keith Urban, Jimmy Buffett, Buckwheat Zydeco and Fats Domino, who hasn't performed in public since being evacuated from his damaged Ninth Ward home after Katrina.