

# HAVE

Billy Bragg is a young singer/songwriter who's also a one-man band. With a guitar under his arm and a train ticket in his pocket, he travels light. He thinks nothing of playing three gigs

— and that's only in one night!

Karen Swayne caught up with him for a hectic dash around London.

Gary Compton snatched the snapshots.

## THE SET UP

*BELOW: Being pretty much a one-man operation has its advantages. Billy travels light, with only a couple of guitars, an amp, and a shirt to be carried from gig to gig.*

*Now if he could only figure out where that lead should go . . .*

# GUITAR,

## THE DRINK UP

*RIGHT: Surrounded by booze in the dressing room, Billy indulges in a spot of light relaxation before the gig.*

*"I don't usually drink when I'm playing," he says. "I give it away or take it to parties."*

*Sober, upright chap that he is, Billy sticks to honey and lemon.*



## THE MAN AND HIS MOUTH

*LEFT: "Doing gigs is what's important," says Billy. "I like doing supports because it means you get a different audience every night and it's a challenge to win them over."*

*His jokey chat between songs is an extension of the scathing wit in his lyrics.*

*"I hate being thought of as a comedian though," he declares.*

*"And I'm definitely not a ranter. I spend a lot of time on the lyrics and it's the songs which are important."*

## THE SCHEDULE

**6.30pm:** Leave Go! Discs record company, Shepherds Bush, London.

**7.30pm:** Arrive Middlesex Polytechnic, Tottenham site. Wrong venue.

"Sorry, but this is where I played last time," apologises Billy.

**8.00pm:** Arrive Middlesex Polytechnic, Enfield site. Correct venue.

**8.45pm:** Onstage.

**H**ello. My name's Billy Bragg. Bragg as in Melvyn. Billy as in Bunter."

This is how the new name for the New Year introduces himself as he bounds onstage armed only with a guitar and a host of great songs.

Billy Bragg is a man who travels the country, often doing two or three gigs a night. The 25-year-old from Barking has been compared with everyone from Paul Weller and Joe Strummer to Bob Dylan, but the way he strips music back down to the basics of sharp aggressive vocals and rhythm guitar is unique.

He spent three years fronting a band called Riff Raff, got fed up with not

getting anywhere in music and upped and joined the army.

That lasted 90 days.

After he'd bought himself out he went solo, and brought out a startlingly original mini-LP, 'Life's A Riot With Spy Vs Spy'.

Recorded in just three afternoons, it contains such gems as 'The Milkman Of Human Kindness' and 'A New England' and a clutch of other observations on the ways of the world.

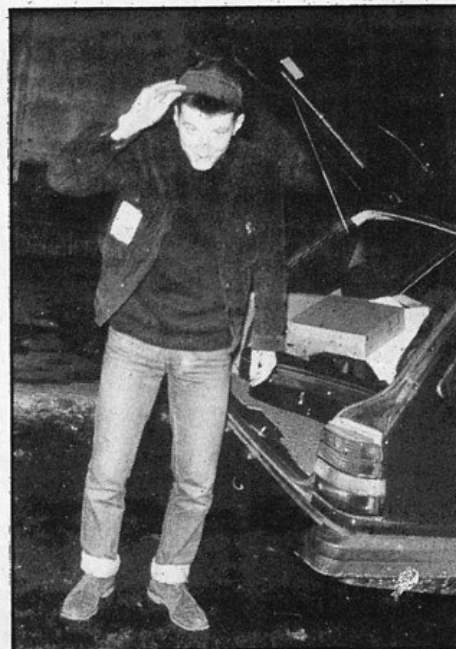
He's been hailed as a cult hero for the '80s, but says: "I'm not a spokesman for a generation. I don't wanna change people's lives, I just want to make them aware that there are things in music apart from Duran Duran and Culture Club . . ."



**THE PAY OFF**

**ABOVE:** Billy negotiates his fee in the girls' shower room.

*Who said the glamour's gone from the music biz?*



**ON THE ROAD AGAIN**

**ABOVE:** Tonight he's travelling 'n style — by car. More often than not he goes from gig to gig by train or bus.

"I do a lot of writing on trains," he says.

"I've got relatives all round the country too, so when I'm out of London I usually stay with them.

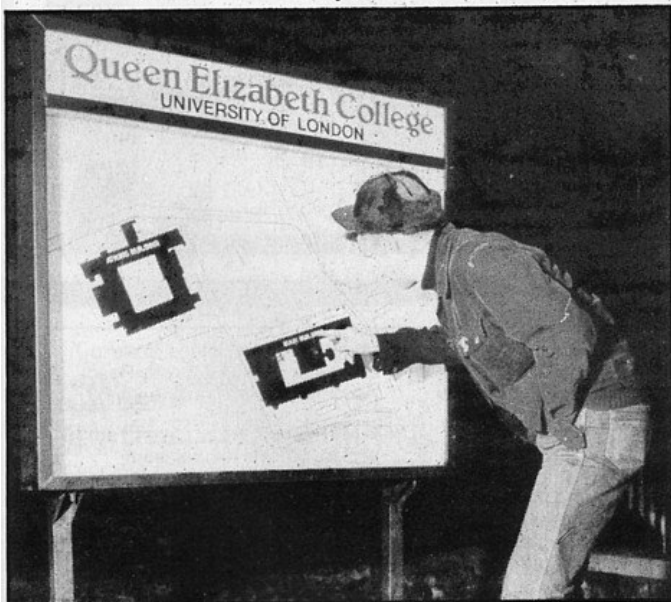
"It's not a very romantic life though, living out of a bag."

**THANK YOU AND GOODNIGHT**

**LEFT:** The end of a long evening.

By now it's about 2.45am and freezing cold and Billy loads up the car for the last time and heads home.

He's got to be up early in the morning because he's making an appearance at a Liverpool record store at midday, and he's doing a gig that night . . .



**WHERE AM I?**

**ABOVE:** After travelling halfway across London for the first gig and ending up at the wrong venue, the second gig is easier to find. But which bit is he meant to be playing in?

*When we finally locate the right hall it's like stumbling into a debutantes' ball. The gels in taffeta evening frocks and the chaps in dinner jackets and bow ties are slightly reluctant to let the Bragg entourage in at first.*

# WILL

- 10.00pm:** Pack bags and leave.
- 10.30pm:** Arrive Queen Elizabeth College, Notting Hill. Retire to dressing room.
- 11.45pm:** Onstage.
- 12.40am:** Offstage.
- 2.30am:** Time to go home...

# TRAVEL