

# Papa's got a brand new Bragg

Billy Bragg brews up. Andy Strike finds him just his cup of tea

**B**ILLY BRAGG'S going up in the world. Two new guitars and a new LP 'Brewing Up With Billy Bragg' on the streets. It's a big step forward since the three afternoons he spent making his debut 'Life's A Riot', last year. I think the new album's great, but you're an honest sort of chap Bill, what do you think of it?

"Well, you go through periods of not being able to listen to things and that's how I'm getting with 'Brewing Up' now. I took a tape of it with me to America, maybe it's just being finnickety, but you always think, 'oh, I could have done this and I could have done that a bit differently'.

"Having said that, it's a step on from 'Life's A Riot'. There's some other instruments on it because I didn't want it to be the same as the first LP."

Billy, of course, is renowned for the amount of gigs he does and his being an electro/solo performer. Can he ever see the day when he'll get a band together?

"I don't see why not," he says thoughtfully. "If I thought the songs were suffering through not being done with bass and drums, then I'd put a band together, maybe just for recording. I'd hate to be held back by the audience's or my own preconception that it's got to be solo.

"When I go out and play I still think I'm a band anyway. I try to make as much noise as a band and I try to cover all the gaps. The reasons for being solo is the mobility, the ease and the economics of the thing."

**I**T WOULD be hard to imagine a more English performer than Billy Bragg, but this doesn't stop him taking his one man show to all corners of the world, given the chance. How did he go down on his support slot with Echo And The Bunnymen in the States recently?

"We were playing on this riverboat in New Orleans," Billy tells me. "It was all rather seedy because the boat leaked and there was water everywhere, it's never how you imagine it to be.

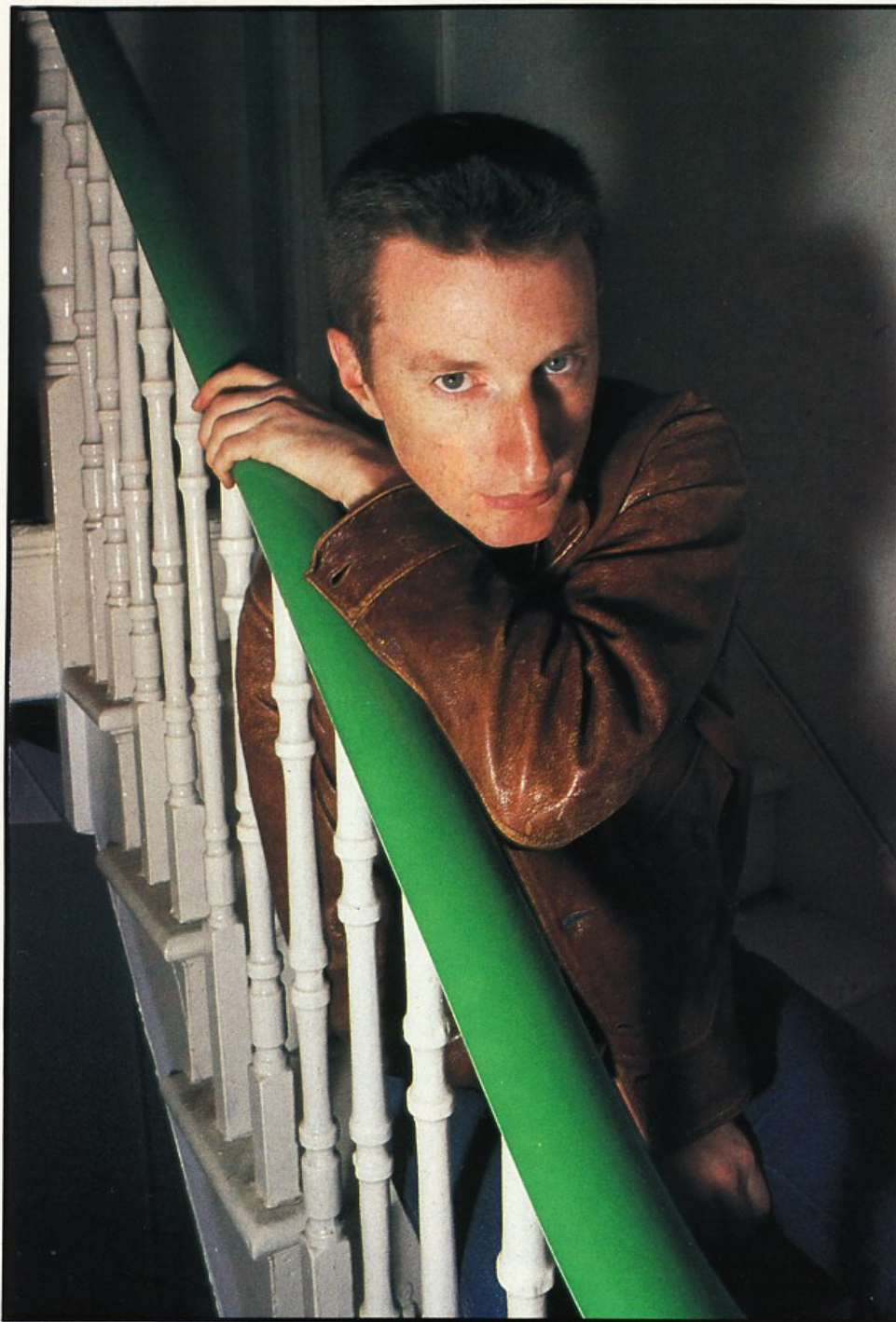
"There was these two geezers sat up on deck with their feet up on the rails and as I walked towards them, I noticed to my horror that one of them was wearing an Arsenal shirt and as I walked past they said 'Allo Bill' and the first thing they wanted to know was the football results back home.

"We stopped off at Elvis Presley's home — Graceland in Memphis. That was well tacky, I mean he's there in the ground, poor sod, and they're still making money out of him. As if they didn't make enough while he was alive."

**B**ILLY'S BEEN tagged a 'Political Performer' due to his support of many worthy causes and being a supporter of the Labour Party. How important is the political side of Billy Bragg and the benefits you do?

"They're very important because I believe there's more to music than just making records, becoming famous and getting on 'Top Of The Pops'," says Billy.

"I'm waiting for someone to accuse me of



BILLY BRAGG practises climbing the ladder of success

just being trendy but that's not the case at all, it's something I believe in. Benefits are good because they get you playing places you wouldn't normally do.

"Like I've just played Corby and I know that place because I used to live in Peterborough and it's an absolute wasteland. They used to have a steelworks there, but they closed it down and now they're going to build the biggest Disneyland in Europe. All these steelmen are going to go round dressed as Mickey Mouse.

"I don't believe you can change the world with music, I wouldn't offer you revolution on a record, so there's only so much you can do. One thing I can do is benefits, so I do them. I see no difference between playing gigs for the GLC, CND, the miners, the TGWU — because it's all part of the fight against Thatcherism which I feel very strongly more people should become involved with. If Labour don't win the next election, there will be no Welfare State."

I'll go along with all that. Buy Billy Bragg and vote Labour, it's common sense!