

TEN MINUTES IN THE MIND OF billy bragg



Billy Bragg's seventh album, "Don't Try This At Home", is out this month on Go-Discs

Q+A

What was your worst experience in the army?

Realising the guys I was with were racists. That was one morning two or three weeks after I was in. I was on my hands and knees polishing a corridor, and they said on the radio that Bob Marley had died. And no one had any respect at all. That was the time, I think, that I felt most alone. The rest of it was just bullshit – getting up in the morning, jumping to attention

Why didn't you call yourself Steve Bragg?

In 1977, the first band I was in had three Steves, so we decided to change our names. I was reading Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five*: one character in it gets a job selling insurance, and he's encouraged to call himself Billy instead of William because it sounds friendlier, and William is my middle name. Now nearly everyone calls me Bill, even people who knew me before. But my family always calls me Steven

What's the last club you went to?

Chaos, an indie rock club in Edgware Rd, on the DJ's birthday – he's a friend of mine. My manager's kids go there. I'd just finished the album, so I got totally drunk, stayed far too late and embarrassed everybody

Do you dance?

Terribly

Have you ever been to a house club?

I've been to some warehouse parties – does that count? I missed out on most of the acid stuff

Have you tried Ecstasy?

No. There's plenty of mind-expanding

natural drugs like magic mushrooms. But when I was 19, I lived for a year in a town where we couldn't have a good time unless we got absolutely plastered drunk, and I'd hate to be that dependent on anything again. My only addiction is coffee

What's the most you've ever spent on clothing?

I bought a jumper for £70 last year. I was Christmas shopping for someone else, and I decided that was far too expensive for them, so I had it for myself. Isn't that terrible? It was practical, though. It wasn't some piece of luxury clothing

Why do you need to justify it?

Because I don't buy clothes for stylish reasons. I get sick of wearing black Levi's sometimes and go out and buy... white Levi's

What's the most extravagant thing you've ever done?

Making this album
Work doesn't count A painting I saw in Amsterdam. It was about £500, so I put down a deposit, went away, then decided I really did want it. So I flew to Amsterdam, went to meet the artist, bought the painting, and flew back to London the same day. So all in all, it cost more than the jumper, but not as much as the album. Is that extravagant enough? I'm glad I've thought of something because I'd have felt a terrible failure

Are you happy? Content is a better word. "Happy" is like "success" – it's too abstract. But yes, I'm content

What's the nastiest thing you've ever done? I've done some nasty things. When I get that itchy feeling to move on, I almost always respond to it, leaving people behind. I run away

Where do you see yourself in ten years time?

Providing I don't become a parody or hugely successful, I think I can keep on at this level – enjoying myself, making interesting music. The problem is when you stop and rely on your back catalogue. Van Morrison is the same age as Cliff Richard, but he hasn't descended into a parody of himself. He's still making good, challenging records, and still exploring what he can do

You sang about it on your "Sexuality" single, but do you practise safer sex?

Yes
What was your most erotic experience? Er... the silence isn't because I can't think, it's because I have so many to choose from (*laughs*). I find making love in the open air quite erotic. One time it just started to snow, and it was incredible

Have you ever slept with a man?

During the miners' strike when it was either the floor, or in bed with this burly great Northern comedian. But that doesn't really count. OK, seriously – I've not had penetrative sex with a man

Have you ever been celibate – voluntarily?

It's a bit like eating the right things, or doing exercise. You really want to do it, it would be really good, but... no ●

Billy Bragg was talking to Sheryl Garratt