

There's power in them illicit, late-night unions, ain't there Bill?

LAST OF THE HOT RED LOVERS

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EMPIRE

RACISM BLAH blah, fascism, communism blah blah ism ism ism. SHUT UP! Shut up, SHUT UP! We know Billy – we know and appreciate and understand your political commentary. Preaching to the converted is a senseless exercise – why not play a National Front benefit gig or something?

Everything Billy Bragg says is RIGHT and incredibly important and should

not be dismissed, but when you've got a room full of raving activists and ranting politics students, his discourse becomes a glorified attempt at becoming Nelson Mandela hosting an anti-apartheid rally, for a night. But we love him all the same because this is Billy Bragg, and despite his obligatory indignation, he's always gripped the issues close to his checked shirt.

He created his own little niche, striking a balance between rallying cries and relevance, and squats comfortably within it. Tonight he's actually very funny – his humour far outweighs the sermons and the integral part of Billy's act takes second billing to a grin. The bard of Barking, with his new found 'Sexuality', is practically a one-man conscientious cabaret act.

In all the years that Bragg has toured the college benefit circuit, his leanings toward unconventional pop has always found a seat amongst friends. The awkward man of pop will never forget his roots, he just digs them up and carries them around with him. Tonight he takes us on a subconscious journey through his success from One Man And His Milk Crate, through all his dubious

collaborations, to present day Billy And His Big Band Of Musos. The man who crosses Carter USM with The Clash and sounds like a tractor turfing David Essex walls early favourites 'Richard', 'Little Time Bomb', 'The Few' and (Billy certainly knows how to write a tortured love song) 'Man In An Iron Mask'.

Kirsty MacColl appears and does a, frankly unnecessary, half-hour set and worse, Billy The Generous has given her 'New England' but this isn't Kirsty's review so we'll ignore the fact that she was pretty good and welcome Bragg back, dragging his band behind him. 'The Warmest Room' gets a thrashing, as does 'Revolution' and 'Help Save The Youth Of America' exhibiting his ability to front a group despite his gawkiness.

A double duet with Kirsty, 'Cindy Of A Thousand Lives' and – whoops – 'Sexuality' with a Morrissey vocal bit at the end. A bonus fun bit to finish Billy's Big Night Out, Ian Dury's 'Billericay Dicky' and The Specials' 'Message To You Rudi'. If you can't laugh at politics what can you do? Over to you Billy.

Gina Morris