

Faces of the week

Our regular look at some of the faces which have made the news this week. Above are Billy Bragg (main picture), with [Sir Paul McCartney](#), [Kd lang](#), [Kate Hudson](#) and [Nicolas Sarkozy](#).

BILLY BRAGG

A mother fighting breast cancer is this week knocking at the door of the pop chart's top 10. Her surprise hit has been made possible by the personal support of the veteran musical maverick, Billy Bragg.

We Laughed is the result of a moving collaboration between Billy Bragg, long-time songwriter and political activist, and Maxine Edgington, a single mother from Dorset with no musical background.

The pair met at a songwriting workshop held in a Weymouth Hospice, when Ms Edgington was determined to create a poem for her teenage daughter. Bragg put her lyrics to music, and credits "goodwill and word of mouth" alone for its impressive sales.

This is a very personal endeavour for the artist described as the social conscience of the pop charts. But for more than 20 years, Billy Bragg has been proving his versatility with a unique blend of lovelorn poetry, political polemic and multicultural evangelism.

While many other artists in the 1980s were selling records with safe messages and polished production, Bragg became a wandering minstrel, a British Woody Guthrie, his uncompromising East London tones belting out all that was important to him, with only his guitar chords for company.

In fact, Guthrie's daughter holds Bragg in such respect that she recently entrusted him with putting her father's unpublished lyrics to new music. This labour of love earned Bragg a Grammy nomination.

Opinionated

Whether he was being radical or romantic, all his songs were grounded in honesty and humanity, and conveyed with a wistfulness that pervaded songs like his early-penned anthem, A New England (later made a hit by Kirsty MacColl), the workers' lament Between the Wars, and his dark, elegiac love song, Levi Stubbs' Tears.

Ever since his radio debut in 1983, which he earned by bringing John Peel a mushroom biryani when the DJ remarked on air that he was hungry, Billy Bragg has been as politically active as he has been commercially successful. He has sung at rallies and benefits more times than on Top of the Pops, and earned himself the title Bard of Barking.

During the 1980s, his interpretation of the American song, Which Side Are You On? became a poignant soundtrack to the miners' strike.

He went on to front Red Wedge, a group of Labour-supporting musicians dedicated to the ousting of the Tory Party from government.

But he has railed as consistently against the present incumbents. "At least you knew what Thatcher's politics were," he says. He remains as opinionated as ever, pro-miners, anti-petrol-protestors, ardently anti-monarchist and fascinated by the question of English identity, what he calls "England dot co dot uk", and where it fits on a capitalist globe.

Billy Bragg once described his philosophy as "socialism of the heart" and his efforts for Maxine Edgington and her daughter certainly mark a change from the political drum he normally beats.

Inspirational figure

However, the unifying theme of his music remains the quest for a better world, the chance for the ordinary person to shine. It is this consistency and integrity that has undoubtedly made him an inspirational figure to those like Maxine Edgington, in finding her own voice and celebrating all that is good around her.

The longevity of his career and the loyalty of his fan base attest to the quality of his songs and enduring relevance of his material. Now for Maxine Edgington, her daughter and all those who listen to We Laughed, Billy Bragg has once again revealed the transforming power of music.

SIR PAUL McCARTNEY

Forget Shea Stadium, the Hollywood Bowl and Live 8, because Sir Paul McCartney has been chosen as the first artist in history to broadcast live music into space. At 5.55 am, UK time, on Saturday, the former Beatle was due to provide a live wake-up call for the crew of the International Space Station, serenading Nasa astronauts Bill McArthur and Valery Tokarev with two songs, Good Day Sunshine and English Tea, direct from his concert in Anaheim, California.

KATE HUDSON

Actress Kate Hudson has launched a legal action against various publications over photographs she claims wrongly portrayed her as having an eating disorder. The 26-year-old daughter of actress Goldie Hawn has starred in films Almost Famous, Raising Helen and The Skeleton Key. Her solicitors say that the pictures caused extreme concern to her mother and family. The case is expected to be heard at the High Court in London sometime next year.

kd lang

The Grammy-winning singer kd lang has filed a lawsuit against her former business manager, accusing her of siphoning excess funds from her account. The Canadian star says that Annabel Lapp, who represented her for 15 years before her contract was terminated in September, may have stolen millions of dollars. The singer fears she may never know the exact amount because several key documents are missing. She alleges that Lapp often wrote cheques on her business accounts without consent.

NICOLAS SARKOZY

France's Interior Minister, Nicolas Sarkozy, has stood by his remarks referring to those involved in the past two weeks of street violence as "hooligans" and "scum". In an interview on French television, he said: "Those who have fired live bullets at head height at the police, those who burnt the bus where there was a 56-year-old handicapped woman? When I say they are hooligans or scum, I stand by it."

Compiled by BBC News Profiles Unit's Caroline Frost

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