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Bard Billy is all boxed up

23 February 2006


Bragg

WHEN I first caught sight of a big-nosed singer-songwriter with attitude in a smokey, pub back room with a pool table as a stage, I knew I was witnessing the start of something good.

But I never imagined that Billy Bragg would go on to become both a national treasure and local hero and, most importantly, would be responsible for some of the finest musical moments of the past 20 years.

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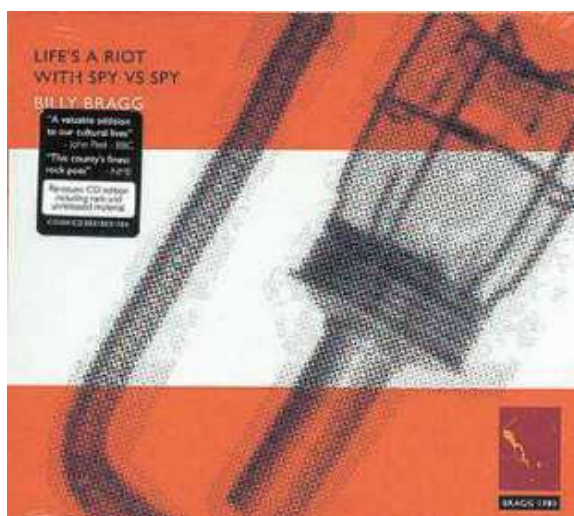
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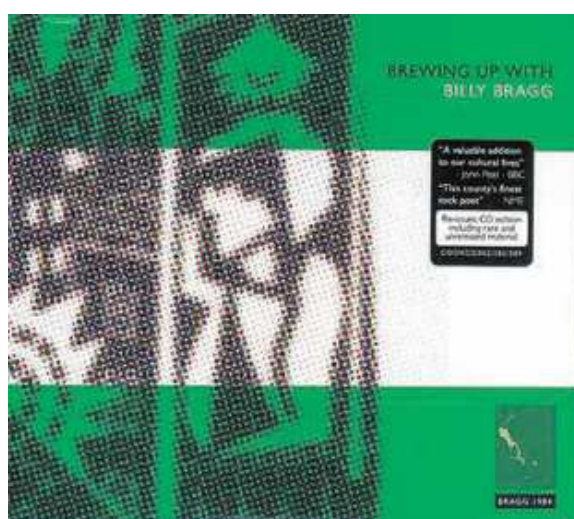
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Bragg CD

Indeed, he has been so successful that he is set to unleash his entire back catalogue, and much, much more in a series of boxed sets.

First up, and back where he (and we) started, the self-styled "Bard of Barking" releases four of his earliest and most acclaimed albums on Billy Bragg Volume 1 - seven CDs and two DVDs with a wealth of rare and previously unreleased tracks - in stores on March 6.



Bragg CD b

It chronicles Bragg's extraordinary contribution to the political and cultural ferment of the 1980s.

Born in December 1957, Billy was just 18 when, in 1976, punk made its indelible contribution to English popular culture.

He formed a band called Riff Raff but true cultural significance was to escape them and they split in 1981.

Perhaps remarkably, given Bragg's punk antecedents, he briefly joined a tank regiment of the British Army before buying his way out with what he later described as "the most wisely spent £175 of my life".

Between time working in a record store, and absorbing his newfound love of blues and politically inspired folk music, Bragg launched a solo musical career.

Armed with a guitar, amplifier and voice, he undertook a maverick tour of the concert halls and clubs of Britain, ready at a moment's notice to fill in as support for almost any act.

His songs were full of passion, anger and wit, a self-styled "one man Clash". Bragg, also managed to grab some studio time, courtesy of the Charisma label's indie subsidiary, Utility.

The result was Life's a Riot with Spy Vs. Spy (1983) which, when reissued as the first album on the new Go! Discs label, hit the UK Top 30 in early 1984.

It was an early indicator that Bragg's work would be infused with genuine insight and humour, as well as a sustained and personal commitment to political and humanitarian issues.


After seeing how the Conservative government of Margaret Thatcher was changing the fabric of British society, particularly for mining communities, Bragg's songs became more overtly political.

He became a fixture at political rallies and benefits, particularly during the 1984 Miners Strike.

The boxed set comprises Life's a Riot with Spy Vs Spy; Brewing Up with Billy Bragg - the original 1984 album and a bonus CD with 11 additional tracks; Talking with the Taxman About Poetry - the 1986 album plus 10 extra tracks; and The Internationale - a 1990 release, now combined with his Live & Dubious EP and five bonus tracks. All the albums are also available separately.

Volume 1 will be followed by a further boxed set chronicling his career through the '90s and up to now.

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