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ALL SONGS

Wilderness

"Emergency"

Mar 28, 2006

Wilderness

"Emergency"

Mar 28, 2006

Billy Bragg

"New England"

Mar 27, 2006

Mono

"Remains of the Day"

Mar 24, 2006

Apollo Nove

"Inexplicata"

Mar 23, 2006

Saxon Shore

"The Revolution Will Be Streaming"

Mar 22, 2006

Eels

"Railroad Man"

Mar 21, 2006

Field Music

"You're So Pretty"

Mar 20, 2006

Spanova

"Absentminded"

Mar 17, 2006

Delta 5

"Now That You've Gone"

Mar 16, 2006

Shira Small

"Eternal Life"

Mar 15, 2006

Jennie Pearl

"Maybe in Another Year"

Mar 14, 2006

Essex Green

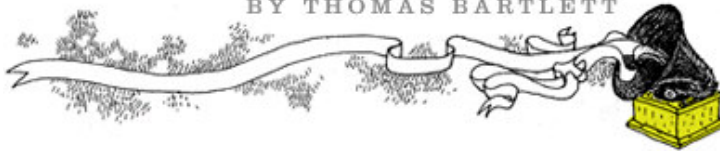
"Don't Know Why (You Stay)"

Mar 13, 2006

Kris Kristofferson

Audiofile

BY THOMAS BARTLETT



3 Questions for: Billy Bragg



On the occasion of the recent release of the seven-disc, two-DVD box set, "Billy Bragg, Volume 1" -- his first four albums repackaged with bonus discs compiling a bunch of unreleased tracks and video footage -- we asked firebrand punk-folk troubadour Billy Bragg, 48, via email about how the idea of mixing pop and politics has changed since his 1983 debut "Life's a Riot With Spy Vs. Spy."

Thinking about today's music scene -- where do you think a young Billy Bragg would fit in? Who else, right now, is out there fighting the good fight, continuing your "dirty business" of "trying to change the world by singing about it"? And who in the world of pop music can you really not stand -- either politically or musically?

There is no reason why a young Billy Bragg should not fit in well with the current crop of singer-songwriters. OK, I might not fit in with the acoustic crew too well, but I share their urge to get back to basics. Plus the Internet offers lots of opportunities for someone who wants to make a statement. One of the good things about revisiting these albums has been to discover that the songs still have edge, in delivery, in recording and in attitude. And I stand by the sentiments expressed, whether they are tenderhearted or hardcore.

The wry, tongue-in-cheek humor of the lyrics finds an echo right now in the music of bands like the Arctic Monkeys and the Kaiser Chiefs. Politically, there are acts out there trying to

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make sense of the world. Hard-Fi are a good example. It's a constant theme in popular culture -- every generation has to find a way to deal with the blues.

Who can I not stand? A long time ago, I realized that the true enemy of those of us who wished to make a better world were not the conservatives -- neo or cultural -- nor the capitalists -- corporate or alternative -- but the cynics: Those who have given up and are trying to get everybody else to follow suit so they don't feel so bad about themselves.

"Mixing pop and politics" -- in 2006, what's the use? What have you learned in the past 25 years in terms of pop's ability to make a difference?

The more I learn about politics, the more I realize that change takes time. You can't always see the end result of your actions immediately. Those kids who came along to my gigs in the 1980s are now beginning to make their presence felt in Parliament.

It's the same with pop music too. Think of the contribution pop had made to breaking down the barriers between races and nations. I sometimes play in a gig in Hamburg above the old Star Club where the Beatles cut their teeth in 1960: Four English lads playing the music of black America to a German-speaking audience. What was that all about? From such moments is our multicultural society made.

Over the years, I have come to realize that I cannot change the world by just singing songs. The responsibility for that lies with the audience. My job is to encourage them to take the first step towards change, which is to engage with the world, and I aim to do that by engaging myself.

Having said that, the artist can effect change by producing art that challenges the audience's perspective, be it on relationships or politics or whatever. I know that from my own experience of following the Clash to a Rock Against Racism gig and thus taking part in my first political act. The Clash didn't change the world, but they changed my perspective of it.

There are a number of tracks on the rereleased albums that deal with U.S. issues -- "Help Save the Youth of America," for instance -- 20-odd years on, how relevant do you think those songs are to an America which seems to have moved even further to the right than under Reagan?

Has America moved further to the right? Reagan won a much larger percentage of the vote than George W., which would suggest that there is less support for the Republicans now than back in the '80s. What is different is that, post-9/11, the Bush administration pinned the Stars and Stripes to their lapels and adopted a nationalist platform at home and abroad. "You're either with us or you're with the evil-doers" is not a policy designed to win friends around the world.

Does anyone in Peoria care about having friends in the international community? I hope so. The lesson of 9/11 is that we ignore what is going on in the rest of the world at our peril. Which is kind of the message of "Help Save the Youth of America," too.

America could do so much good in the world if it so chose. You have the logistical might and that pioneer spirit to go out and help make the world a better place for those who currently live on next to nothing. Go prove us all wrong by spending millions of dollars helping a country with no oil wells.

-- Matt Glazebrook

[16:34 EST, March 21, 2006]

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