

Home
 News
 Sport
 Business
 Politics
► Features
 Going Out
 Free Video Trial

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 Sport

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 Help & FAQs
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 The Diary
 Local news
 Local weather
 Fantasy Football
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 Today's page 1

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Billy Bragg, Usher Hall, Edinburgh

ROB ADAMS

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Twenty minutes in, Billy Bragg had a reassuring message for anyone who had brought along a new best friend with a promise that "he doesn't just sing political songs". Bragg does indeed do "other stuff too". Vulnerable in Levi Stubbs' Tears, between World Turned Upside Down's opening firebrand call and the fist-aloft Power in the Union, he was about to acclaim Shirley as his reason for rising before noon.

However, with a banner condemning the British National Party stretched across the backcloth – and the BNP's English local elections successes rendering the Hope Not Hate strapline of Bragg's current tour all the more timely – the bard of Barking wasn't about to soften his political stance. As if.

Although, at times, the Usher Hall seemed transformed into a seaside conference venue, there were moments too when Bragg shrunk it into something more intimate. As someone whose songs often have the ghosts of classic soul numbers either informing their sentiments or just shaping their chordal development, Bragg could hardly have chosen a better touring partner than former Small Face Ian McLagan.

McLagan's classy Hammond organ allowed Bragg his Steve Cropper moment – ish – on Green Onions and while even his manager doesn't think people come out to hear Bragg sing, the afterhours piano setting of Everybody Loves You Babe had a certain crooner's appeal.

Overall, Bragg sagely balanced the political and the personal, managing to be both vehement and entertaining in denouncing his foes. And when Woody Guthrie's All of You Fascists Bound to Lose arrived, as it had to really, it balanced Bragg's ire with The Faces' kind of party without sounding anything like a compromise.

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