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HFX DAILY

Thursday, September 21, 2006

A concert to Bragg about

British folk star treats Halifax to a vintage show

By Dean Lisk The Daily News

CONCERT REVIEW - Billy Bragg talked nearly as much as he sang last night at the Rebecca Cohn Auditorium - but nobody seemed to mind.

"Trying to fit into that window between Sidney (Crosby) and the Rolling Stones has been hard," the British folk singer told the audience of more than 800 people.

"Heaven forbid I should get in the way of the Pittsburgh Penguins."

Halifax marked Bragg's first stop on a small tour of North America to promote the first volume of box sets of his songs, and the reissue of four of his earlier albums.

Walking onstage in a few giant steps, and with his finger pointed in the air, the 48-year-old singer picked up his silver electric guitar and began playing songs from his two-decade long career.

"Welcome, welcome, welcome," he said after his first song, Upfield. "Here we are at last. I am nervous as hell," he added about being on tour.

Heart and head



Folk singer: Billy Bragg accompanies himself at last night's show. (Photo: Mike Dembeck)

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The songs he chose to sing last night came from his head and his heart - stories about love as well as political anthems.

They ranged from arguments for business and political accountability, to social issues - like homosexuality.

He reacted to the audience like he was standing in a working man's club back in his native Essex - with familiarity and friendliness.

Bragg wasted no time charming the audience between songs blending folk, punk-rock and protest music.

Politically motivated

The politically outspoken singer ruminated about current events, including the World Trade Organization, terrorism, the war in Iraq - and observations about things as simple as tea.

"From my hotel window I can see the Union Jack flying. I was wondering where I was. Certainly not Quebec, it's only Wednesday."

He also plugged his book, *The Progressive Patriot: A Search for Belonging*. Hitting stores next month, it was on sale in the lobby.

Part biographical, part autobiographical, the book examines questions of identity and belonging in a country recoiling from bombs planted by its own citizens on July 7, 2005, and in which the far-right BNP gained seats in Bragg's home town of Barking this year.

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Bragg, who is perhaps best known for his 1980s' hit, *A New England*, said he was going to wear his author's jacket on stage, but his opening act - Nathan Wylie - already performed wearing his own.

"Don't get me started, I am here to play music," he warned the audience about allowing him to ramble on.

KEY FACTS

- More than 800 people attended Billy Bragg's show at the Rebecca Cohn last night.
- In the lobby, Bragg was selling copies of his new box set for \$70, his new book for \$40, CDs for \$20 and buttons for \$5.
- Bragg's worked with the band Wilco a few years ago to release two albums of work featuring never before released songs by Woody Guthrie.

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A concert to Bragg about [9/21/2006]

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