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### Something to Bragg about

**Reading will be the first to host a Jail Guitar Doors Campaign gig on Saturday 16 June at the Fez Club. Linda Serck chats to the campaign's founder Billy Bragg about why raising cash to give guitars to Reading's prison inmates is a good idea.**



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[Billy Bragg talks about Jail Guitar Doors \(8:21\)](#)

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[Billy Bragg talks about Jail Guitar Doors \(8:21\)](#) >  
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#### Can you tell us a bit about what the Jail Guitar Doors Campaign aims to do?

"Well it aims to supply mainly acoustic guitars to prison where other dedicated people are doing rehabilitation for offenders through music.

"It's an idea that's been going for quite a long time, but in my experience the big problem there is getting access to instruments. Very often it relies on people who are doing the work to bring the instruments in.

"Some of the prisons they borrow the vicar's which is all well and good but obviously those guitars then leave the prisons when the people doing the work leave. So in an ideal world I'd like to see guitars remain in prisons so that inmates can have access to them, maybe take them on to their landings, perhaps in some circumstances take them back to their cells.

"I think that anyone who's ever played a guitar will know that a musical instrument gives you the opportunity to be transported away from where you are - that might be your parents upstairs front bedroom or where ever, but that clearly that also works in a prison. So the value of a musical instrument in a prison

situation is something any musician would appreciate."

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Get the full details on the Jail Guitar Doors gig in Reading here:

### [Jail Guitar Doors Campaign >](#)

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**So the idea is to give each inmate that wants to learn the guitar one of the Jail Guitar Doors guitars and hopefully that will rehabilitate them to the extent that they won't commit any more crimes once they come out?**

"There's been some work done by a group that work in prisons called Changing Tunes and they claim on their website that inmates that have gone through their musical rehabilitation are 75 per cent less likely to reoffend which is phenomenal.

"And it does suggest that a large group of people in prison who can be rehabilitated if we do something other than bang them up and throw away the key.

"I'm all in favour of people who have committed a crime being punished and going to prison but I don't believe in throwing away the key. I do believe if we want them to take part in society again we have to try in some way to help with their rehabilitation."

### **So how did you get involved?**

"Over Christmas I got a letter from a prison in Dorset where I live, from Guys Marsh, and there was a guy there called Malcolm Dudley who was doing exactly this kind of work.

"And knowing that I'd done song-writing classes at the local school and the local hospice in the last couple of years, he initially invited me to come along and help out at the prison, which I couldn't do cos I'm too busy to do that, but he did also say, supposing I was a rich rock star, 'have you got any spare guitars?', which I don't!



JGD benefit gig  
organiser James Ewers

"I've got 'some' guitars but I do use almost all of them. But I did realise that you can actually buy good quality Chinese-made guitars for 50 quid, and it made me realise that for as little as 300 quid I could help him out.

"It was very straightforward for me to organise some guitars and when I took them to the prison I realised what a difference they made.

### **"Musicians**

"I thought this might be something musicians

maybe should be trying to do more of to help people in that situation.

"So I decided to found an initiative called Jail Guitar Doors after a Clash song, because this year is the fifth anniversary since the death of Joe Strummer.

"I was looking for something proactive in Joe's name and it seemed to me that this is the sort of thing The Clash might do.

"So I had a word with a few people and ended up launching it at the NME Awards in March when I was giving out a prize. And the first person who came up to me to offer up some money was Mick Jones from The Clash, who also by chance also wrote Jail Guitar Doors, which was the B-side to Clash City Rockers.

"So with Mick's endorsement I set up a website and that was how the people in Reading got in touch."

### **And of course there's a huge Jail Guitar Doors gig taking place at the Fez Club on Sat 16 June...**

"Yeah there are loads of great bands taking part, the people in Reading have taken hold of the concept and really run with it.

"This is actually the first proper Jail Guitar Doors benefit, all the other stuff we've got has been from personal donations. So I'm really pleased Reading have set the ball rolling with this gig and I think it's going to be great.

"I'm really proud musicians are stepping up to do this. It's easy to call upon the public to do things but musicians going in and making a commitment and putting a gig on is a real mark of solidarity, not just with me but with what The Clash stood for and what punk rock stood for, which is still very important to me."

last updated: 08/06/07

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