



Billy Bragg does the jailhouse rock

Singer-songwriter Billy Bragg today visited Wandsworth Prison to launch a new initiative to provide guitars and instruments to inmates.

Bragg, a seasoned charity and society campaigner, played to a group of 15 inmates and explained how his Jail Guitar Doors scheme works.

He hopes musicians and the public will donate old and damaged guitars - which will be repaired and given to prisoners to keep.

Bragg came up with the idea after receiving a letter from a prison counsellor asking him for guitars and music equipment.

"He wrote to me telling me how he could do really good work using guitars, teaching other inmates and the idea snowballed from there," Bragg said.

The name, Jail Guitar Doors, is a song by Braggs' early inspiration, the Clash.

"Hearing the Clash as a 19-year-old changed my life, so I guess I was looking for a project that underscored the transformative power of music," he said.

"It is intended the project will embody their spirit, not just in its purpose but also in its style."

Addressing the audience, Bragg said music gave him "a way to escape from the boringness of my parents' house."

Bragg is looking for more backing, from musicians and prison workers in jails nationally.

He hopes guitar players in local communities will get involved and help teach prisoners over the country and that, in time, prisoners at Wandsworth will help repair guitars themselves.

"Hopefully music will let you articulate some of the things that you find difficult to say. Things that you may not be able to say to your friends and family," Bragg said after singing a cover of Bob Marley's Redemption Song.

"But the challenge is with you to do your bit too."

"It was great. I would really like to be involved," said inmate Peter Gruhn.

For more information about the scheme visit www.jailguitardoors.org.uk

8:02pm Thursday 6th September 2007

By Paul Cahalan

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