

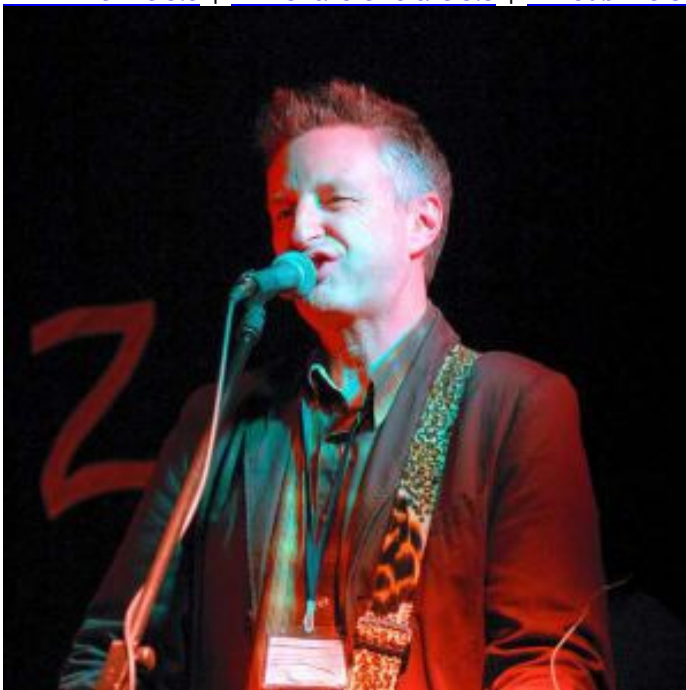
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BRAGG: A hit with the inmates



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## Billy's jailhouse rock

**Exclusive Nicola Dowling**

15/12/2007

ROCKER Billy Bragg took to the stage for a gig with a difference - at Styal women's prison.

Singer-songwriter Billy had been due to pay only a flying visit to the jail, near Wilmslow, to deliver nearly £2,000 worth of guitars and musical instruments for the inmates.

But when he heard they were putting on a concert of their own - led by the Mearcatz, a band headed by mental health nurses at the jail - he asked if he could perform a song or two. About 200 inmates clapped cheered and sang along when he took to the stage in the prison gym.

Billy said he brought the instruments for the women to learn to play and use to help express themselves as part of their rehabilitation.

And after a rousing rendition of I Keep Faith, accompanied by seven inmates who had won an X Factor-style competition at the prison, he stopped to speak to the staff and sign autographs for the women.

Afterwards he spoke about the Jail Guitar Doors Project, which he set up in a bid to bring music into prisons.

He said: "While I believe people who have committed crimes should be punished, I feel that when they are in custody we want them to be rehabilitated, not criminalised more. My experience is that there are people like the nurses here who are willing to do the work to bring music into jails but there is a lack of equipment and instruments.

"Anyone who plays a guitar will know that it can help transcend your surroundings and take you to another place. Music helps to make inroads into dealing with the issues and frustrations that are so often a part of incarceration, being caught, sent to prison and having failed your loved ones."

The gig proved a big hit with inmates.

Adele, 23, from Liverpool, one of the X Factor-style competition winners, said: "I really enjoyed the atmosphere and the feeling you get when you sing. You get a buzz. It helps you get all your feelings out. This was just a great experience - I'll never forget it."

Elisha, 21, from Coventry, said: "I love music. It is something for everyone."

The Jail Guitar Doors Project is named after a song by punk rock legends The Clash.

For more information log on to [jailguitardoors.org.uk](http://jailguitardoors.org.uk)

**Billy Bragg supports The Pogues at Manchester Central (formerly G-Mex) on Saturday 15th December.**

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