

The Local

SWEDEN'S NEWS IN ENGLISH

Discuss last updated 1 min ago

Concert review - Billy Bragg

Published: 14 Apr 08 11:36 CET

Online: <http://www.thelocal.se/11092/>

Twenty five years on from the release of his debut album, Billy Bragg was in Stockholm at on Saturday night for a sell-out concert at Södra Teatern. David Bartram was there.

- **Stockholm club and concert guide: May 1 - 8** (1 May 08)
- **Gothenburg club and concert tips - May 1 - 4** (1 May 08)
- **What's on in Sweden: May 2 - 8** (1 May 08)

Quite who should be going to a Billy Bragg concert even Billy Bragg probably doesn't know. The audience at the old Södra Theatre in Stockholm seems equally confused, and for every kid dreaming of revolution there is a middle-aged couple looking for a quiet night out.

Södra Teatern is a long way from his roots – busking in a London Underground tunnel – but it is as tall as it is deep and creates the sort of cosy venue he thrives in, even if he does look a little perplexed by the surroundings as he takes to the stage alone.

When Bragg belts out opener "The World Turned Upside Down," a song about 17th century English radicals the Diggers, one suspects that the audience only relates to part of the lyric: "We are free men though we are poor."

One over exuberant youngster tries to sing along with the refrain, but is swiftly told to pipe down by a man sitting adjacent. Perhaps after 25 years on the road, the old maxim that you don't go to a Billy Bragg show to hear him sing no longer applies.

Bragg jokes that, "you don't get this in a shitty rock and roll club," after the fully seated crowd politely applauds, but as he sips a cup of tea in between songs there is little to suggest he misses much about them.

New material is interspersed throughout. "People tell me that the new album is a lot more soulful, but actually it is just because I recorded it in my bathroom," he quips before launching into a song about faith. The audience has to pinch themselves that it is Bragg and not a Christian rock act before them.

Of course the message has always been more important than the music as far as Bragg is concerned, but long diatribes between each pair of songs gets tiresome, even though he is as comfortable chatting behind the microphone as he is singing.

A ten minute ramble about Woody Guthrie, clearly a hero of Bragg's, precedes a cover of "Ingrid Bergman." The song, a patent attempt to curry favour with the Swedish audience, goes down well but the show fails to gather momentum as songs are sacrificed for chatter.


At least Bragg has maintained a sense of humour during a career of protest, and at times you could be forgiven for thinking you were watching a stand-up comic in action, especially given the surroundings.

The biggest cheer of the night comes when Bragg turns the fade out of "There is Power in a Union" into the opening chords of the White Stripes' "Seven Nation Army" – something which perhaps betrays the true


loyalties of those in attendance.

But the crowd becomes more receptive as the evening reaches a climax, and by the time of the encore - a rousing rendition of "A New England" - Bragg leaves it to the audience to sing the chorus, and at least some of them comply.


David Bartram (news@thelocal.se)

 Send to a friend

 BOOKMARK 

 Printable version

The Local © The Local Europe AB 2008
News from Sweden in English

-  Newsfeeds
- Why Register?
- Contact Us
 - Advertise
 - FAQ
- Privacy Policy
- Unsubscribe