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**ADVISER**

**Songs With Something to Say**

**Rocker Billy Bragg on His Favorite 'Message Music'**

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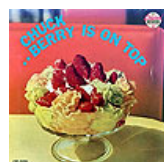
**HIT LIST | Music**

With an acoustic guitar and gruff voice, Billy Bragg became an unlikely music star in 1980s Britain by merging Woody Guthrie activism with a punk-rock aesthetic. Although he's best known for music that champions workers' rights and other social causes, Mr. Bragg is also a prolific balladeer. The songs on his latest album, "Mr. Love and Justice," range from romantic meditations to strident protest songs, such as "O Freedom." "Life isn't all about politics, just as it isn't all about bling," Mr. Bragg says. "Somewhere between those two extremes is almost all of human experience." As Mr. Bragg prepared to launch a short U.S. tour with a June 6 concert in Seattle, we spoke to him about his favorite songs infused with a social message.



Billy Bragg

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**Chuck Berry**

'Roll Over Beethoven,' from 'Chuck Berry Is on Top' (1959)

(listen to a clip<sup>1</sup>)

The pioneering rocker called for a musical rebellion with this song, but it also carried broader social implications, says Mr. Bragg, who calls it "the first naked expression of the coming supremacy of pop culture."



**Sam Cooke**

'A Change Is Gonna Come,' from 'Ain't That Good News' (1964)

(listen to a clip<sup>2</sup>)

"You don't get much more sugary pop than Sam Cooke," says Mr. Bragg. But just before he was shot to death in 1964, the soul singer wrote this anthem, which was embraced by the civil-rights movement.



**Bob Dylan**

'I Shall Be Released,' from 'Bob Dylan's Greatest Hits, Vol. 2' (1971)

(listen to a clip<sup>3</sup>)

This song, first released by Mr. Dylan's close collaborators in the Band, works as a protest song because it's deeply metaphorical, says Mr. Bragg. "It becomes timeless," he says. "It could be about Guantánamo Bay."



**The Clash**

'I'm So Bored With the USA,' from 'The Clash' (1977)

(listen to a clip<sup>4</sup>)

This song from the punk band's debut railed against U.S. hegemony, but front man Joe Strummer was a student of American music. "The great thing about the Clash is they were such a contradiction," says Mr. Bragg.



**Otis Gibbs**

'The People's Day,' from 'One Day Our Whisper' (2004)

(listen to a clip<sup>5</sup>)

Singing about unions and working-class life in a country-music style, this Indiana performer covers themes Mr. Bragg explored in the 1980s. "He's carrying on the tradition," Mr. Bragg says.

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