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The Carpetbagger: Hoot Owls

By [David Carr](#)



Boots Reilly, Ike Reilly, Billy Bragg and Tom Morello (Photo:

David Carr/The New York Times)

ST. PAUL — Tom Morello and Ike Reilly sat in the alley behind the Parkway Theater, tuning their guitars and talking about the day’s events. They were getting ready to join a hootenanny inside organized by Jim Walsh, the Minneapolis writer and musician. Billy Bragg led a bill that also included Eliza Blue and Jennifer Markey.



The gig followed a mock-morning show put on by Lizz Winstead, one of the creators of “The Daily Show,” and was conceived as a bit of counter-programming to the Republican convention. Mr. Morello and Mr. Reilly were running a bit late and about to join the musical fray. Chums since boyhood, Mr. Reilly is a singer/songwriter from Chicago of some repute and Mr. Morello is the guitarist/provocateur of [Rage Against the Machine](#), a band that has been in the thick of things at both conventions.

Yesterday was no exception. Mr. Reilly and Mr. Morello said that after five bands played sets in an authorized protest concert at the Capitol, the members of Rage, which was not on the bill, pulled up and tried to make their way to the stage at around 6 p.m. Mr. Morello was confronted by police and was asked if he were a member of Rage Against the Machine. He was noncommittal in response and the authorities stated that no members of Rage would be allowed to play. Blocked from the stage, but not their audience, the four members of the band made their way out into the crowd. Mr. Morello and Zack de la Rocha each made a speech and then used a megaphone to perform two a capella songs, including “Bulls on Parade.” A crowd of about 5,000 people sang right along. Some undetermined number of the protesters then marched downtown and there was a confrontation with police.

The politics at the Parkway four hours later were much the same, but the scene was far mellower, with Mr. Walsh cracking wise and introducing his songs and those of his state mates. There were many requested calls for Jameson whiskey from the stage and Mr. Reilly sang a very affecting, “Parakeet Blues,” a song about soldiers shipping off to war.

Apropos of the day’s activities, Mr. Bragg led the group in a version of “Street Fighting Man” that may have been the first time the song included a violin solo, this one from Ms. Blue. Near the end of the loosey-goosey gig, Mr. Bragg, a guy who knows his way around a protest song, kicked into a particular stirring version of his song, “Waiting for the Great Leap Forward.” Boots Reilly (no relation), the M.C. of The Coup, which had played earlier at the Capitol, materialized out of the crowd with Mr. Morello playing conductor and middle man, the song segued into a backbeat for “Heaven Tonight.”

The evening was a mix of pratfalls, laughs, protest, and yes, abundant Jameson. The Bagger stuck with the diet Coke and did not jam his fist in the air, but he knows a good jam when he hears one.

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