



## Mr. Love meets Mr. Justice Two halves make one Billy Bragg

by : Brendan Fitzgerald

For all of his luck managing artists like **The Clash** and signing musicians to the **Charisma Records** label, **Peter Jenner** couldn't tune a TV to save his life. Tucked away in his office on a day in 1982, Jenner and a few other Charisma employees tinkered with the telly, eager to tune in and videotape a performance of **Peter Gabriel**, while **Billy Bragg** stood in the lobby, ready to try anything to get his demo tape into Jenner's hands.

"I wasn't having much luck getting past reception to see him. And someone came out and said, 'Are you the guy that's coming in to tune the TV?'" says Bragg, whose tour behind his excellent new record, **Mr. Love and Justice**, brings him to **The Paramount Theater** on Wednesday, October 29. He recalls the story without hesitation, as if he were still very much the man downstairs, hungry to move up. "Fortunately, I'd been working with a buddy of mine who had an audio-visual company, so I did technically know how to tune in a TV to video."

So, punk songwriter frothing at the mouth, or TV repairman? Bragg's image and reputation—a blue-collared **Labor Party** advocate, a musician with little patience for ornamentation and plenty of room for occupation—makes him seem like a likely candidate for either job, really. He's a clean split, two halves, the man behind the record **England, Half-English** and as hyphenated as the phrase "Anglo-Saxon," a point he makes when he brings up his longstanding frustrations with the British National Party and its legacy of intolerance towards immigrants.

"If you know your history, you know because of [England's] position on a continental land mass that we've always been a place of diversity," Bragg says. "We alone, among all the races of the world, have a hyphen in our racial name."



**Braggers can't be choosers: The "Bard of Bark" himself, Billy Bragg, performs at The Paramount Theater on Wednesday, October 29.**

Split between the celebrity that the music industry encourages and the engaged citizen that politics demands, Billy Bragg is also at another mid-point. The songwriter celebrated his 50th birthday last December and his wife, bless her, "organized a lovely party."

"It wasn't so much being 50 that I wanted to celebrate," says Bragg. "But it was also 25 years since quitting my last proper job. So, having not had to work for anyone else for 25 years—I thought that was worth throwing a party for."

Fittingly, Mr. Love and Justice ties together the two Billys into a solid Bragg album: A two-disc "Deluxe Edition" offers Bragg's 12 new tunes recorded with his band, **The Blokes**, as well as a second version of the same songs delivered in that ultra-potent pairing of Bragg and his electric guitar, the same pairing planned for Bragg's Paramount gig.

Songs like "I Almost Killed You" and "I Keep Faith" get the proper Blokes treatment with dancehall percussion and whistling organs, and "The Beach is Free" seems to carry the leftover feedback from Bragg's work with Wilco on the

**Mermaid Avenue** records. But Bragg's MySpace page still bills him as a "one man Clash," and it's still nice to remove the packing materials around him and feel the sharp edges of the solo tunes. As Bragg himself puts it, "Some people prefer me playing with the band, some people prefer me playing solo. I don't mind either."

So long as he gets to play, that is. With half of his life spent performing, recording, and performing again, Bragg is also one more musician confronting an "industry changing in disturbing ways."

"But those of us who can cut it live and have something to say other than the usual, run-of-the-mill songwriter, I think we'll always be able to find an audience," says Bragg. "It might be a minority audience but, after 25 years, people still want you to come to Charlottesville."

## Sí, señor

Sounds like **Is**, the upstairs music hall of **Sí Tapas** (and the remains of the old **Starr Hill Music Hall**), is making use of the local music resources. Last week, Curtain Calls heard from booking agent about town **Jeyon Falsini** that he's been drafted as the venue manager for the performance space.

Falsini has made a few popular moves as a local promoter, nabbing acts like North Carolina's hip-hop crew **Endless Mic** and Fredericksburg rock acts like Tereu Tereu and **The Points**, so **Is** may hit its stride earlier than expected. In fact, scope the place out for yourself on Friday, October 24, with a gig by **Q\*Black and the Illville Crew, DJ Young Rye and Carmine**. Tickets are \$5-10, and doors open at 10pm.