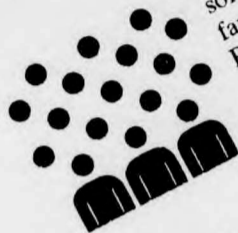


Something to Bragg about

by Ira Nayman

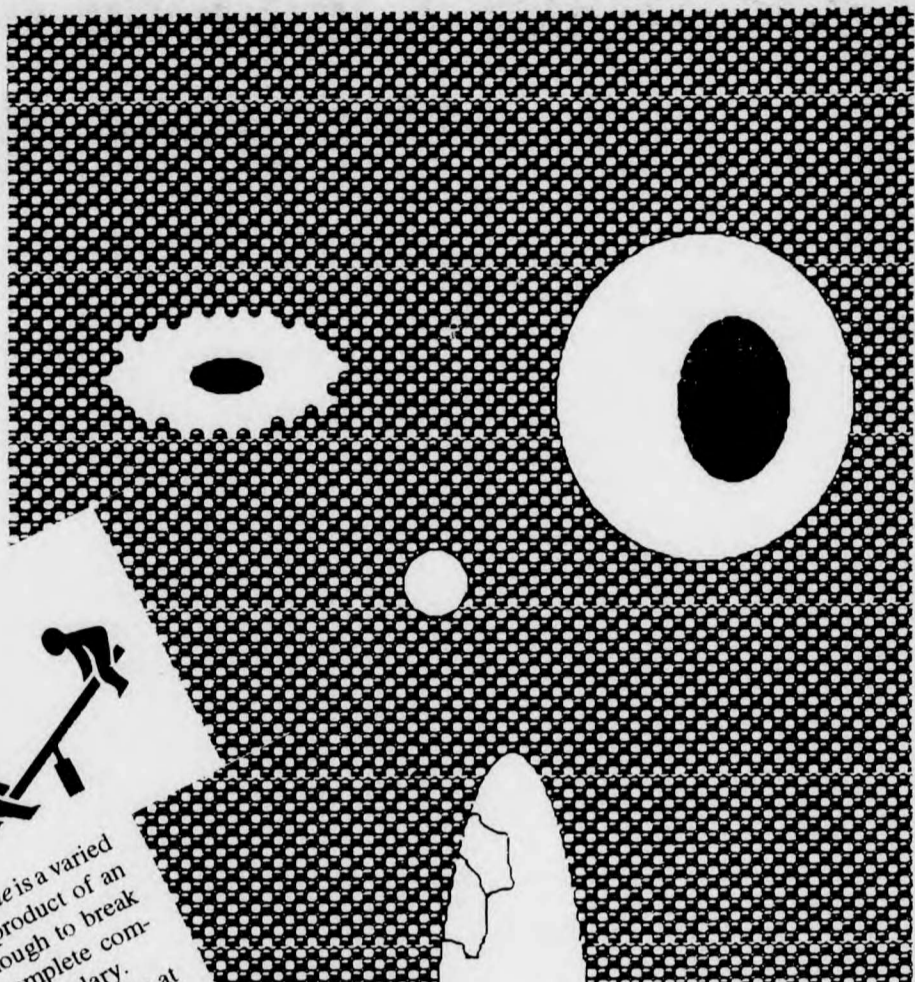
Rumours of Billy Bragg's imminent commercial sellout are greatly exaggerated. Although he does throw us some curves on *Don't Try This at Home*, it is primarily a culmination and continuation of his work to date.



"You to Happen" opens the album with the searing solo guitar many of his fans would like to limit Bragg to. At the first chorus, however, the band kicks in, to remain throughout the days of Bragg alone on stage with his guitar are over. Woke Up My Neighbourhood" or "Mother of the Bride" are love songs, shouldn't be too surprising, people who know Bragg primarily as a political songwriter, after all, his first hit, "New England," and one of his most affecting songs, "Levi Stubbs' Tears" are ballads. "Cindy of a Thousand Lives," with its swirling musical textures and ethereal harmonies, is a throwback to sixties psychedelia. The next song, "You Woke Up My Neighbourhood," with its country beat and fiddle, makes a bizarre yet fascinating contrast. Of the 16 songs on the album, only one, "Wish You Were Her" — an attempt at sixties soul that sounds more like Rick Astley — doesn't offer something of interest. Even though his music is far more complex and adventurous, Bragg hasn't lost his political edge. His raucous lyrical takeoff on The Kinks, "You're a dedicated swallower of fascism," should allay fears of Bragg's domestication. Explicitly political songs include "Everywhere," "Rumours of War" and "North Sea Bubble," which he introduced a couple of years ago at WOMAD. Moreover, political references occur in romantic songs like "Moving Goalposts," "Sexuality," and "Single." Bragg has always effectively promoted the idea that the personal is political.

music
Billy Bragg
Don't Try This at Home
Go! Discs Limited

Don't Try This at Home is a varied and mature work, the product of an artist who is brave enough to break new ground and in complete command of his musical vocabulary. Billy Bragg will be appearing at The Concert Hall on November 22 and 23.



Lucky John Lee Hooker

music

John Lee Hooker
Mr. Lucky
Virgin Records

by David Kuswanto

It's hard not to like *Mr. Lucky*, the latest from John Lee Hooker. From the driving kick of "This is Hip" to the soothing soulfulness of "I Cover the Waterfront," Hooker provides an album that deserves serious attention.

There's something infectious in Hooker's grumbling, stammering vocal style; few people can get away with singing like shit. Backed up by a killer cast that includes everyone from Robert Cray to Keith Richards and Van Morrison, "The Hook" sounds better than ever.

An important element of the record is its "live off the floor" feel. The songs have been mixed with some of the rough edges intact. Hooker is also a generous improviser, laughing and adding or repeating lines during a number of songs.

It's good to know that John Lee Hooker is still out there at 71, singing and playing. *Mr. Lucky* doesn't contain anything you haven't heard before, just things you want to hear more of: good, solid blues.



kill

YOU

TELL

Cole getting weird on us

by Kathryn Bailey

Some say Lloyd Cole has sold out. These same people would also say Morrissey has sold out, but I remain a tried and true Morrissey apostle, going back to the early days of The Smiths.

Undoubtedly Cole has progressed in the same way that Morrissey has (since The Smiths). Perhaps only the devoted fan can accept and appreciate the new direction.

Don't Get Weird on Me, Babe is Cole's counterpart to Morrissey's *Kill Uncle*. It is a mellow blend of exploratory melodies, a noticeable departure from his earlier, tough writing style. And just like Morrissey, Cole has changed from an outright cynic to a forlorn lover. Self-pity and melancholia have replaced anger as the prevailing motivation.

On this album there is a vast difference between the two sides. All of the upbeat, potential singles are on the A side, while all the low-key, experimental (and somewhat less successful) songs are on the flipside. It is as if side B was an afterthought, meant to be ignored, which some reviewers have done.

music
Lloyd Cole
Don't Get Weird on Me, Babe
Capitol Records

Side A, with its broader appeal, is meant to Cole's established works. The first cut, "Tell Your Sister," and the current single, "She's a Girl and I'm a Man," are energetic and intense. The second side includes "Margo's Waltz," which, with its full orchestra and sappy female back-up vocals, sounds strangely like a Frank Sinatra show tune. "There For Her" is apparently a big country/western hit, featuring Cole's clever lyric: "I'm a hurrin' kind of guy." "Butterfly," the only song on this side that really sounds like Cole, is the only one he composed without the partnership of Blair Cowan.

Don't Get Weird on Me is a fair album — a progression in Cole's style with a few enjoyable songs. If there were an artist's first release, however, it would be totally ignored. When Lloyd Cole asked the question, "Are You Ready to be Heartbroken?" could he have been referring to his future solo career? It seems only a devout follower can truly praise this album.

He's getting weird on us.

45 rpm

side B