

Billy Bragg brings a new spell to the Concert Hall

by Ira Nayman

You always knew that Billy Bragg, the progressive, socialist folk singer who has billed himself "the cuddly communist" and writes political songs like "Waiting For the Great Leap Forward" and "Help Save the Youth of America," really wanted to be a dance musician. By closing his recent shows at The Concert Hall with a 15-minute version of Dee-Lite's "Groove Is In the Heart," he proved the point.

This unpredictability, along with a wicked sense of humour, makes Bragg's concerts irresistible (he's one of only two acts I will see any time at any price).

Last weekend, Bragg added bass and drums to his band, a continuation of the expanded sound he experimented with on his latest album, *Don't Try This at Home*. These compositions were among the weakest moments of the evening (although the teenage girls who crowded the stage, their outstretched arms a grotesque parody of the flood scene from Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, ate them up).

The band was at its best when it committed itself to Bragg's playful atmosphere, on "Groove," a hilarious soca version of "She's Got a New Spell" and a thrash version of The Beatles' "Revolution."

However, Bragg was the main focus of the evening, with various members of the band drifting on and off the stage as required. Spare versions of a number of songs, including "Dolphins" and "Tank Park Salute" were reminders of Bragg's strength as a poet.

concert

Billy Bragg
 The Concert Hall
 November 22 and 23

As you might expect, there were a lot of songs from the latest album. The second night, Bragg augmented them with songs from his best album to date, *Talking Poetry With the Taxman* (which must have pleased the middle-aged guys in brown sweaters reading *Propaganda* and *The Activist*—it was a very mixed crowd).

Bragg also tackled accusations that he's sold out with typical good humour. "Billy, people have been saying you've sold out," he parroted. "Why? Because I've added a bass and drums?"

"No. Because you sing in tune."

After the concert, Bragg played "stump the folksinger" with a couple dozen reporters (half of whom were so awestruck they were barely able to get autographs). He started by defending his appearance on *Late Night with David Letterman* a couple of nights earlier:

"I don't want to be someone who just passes by. When you have the opportunity to reach 20 million



Brendan McCoy

Billy Bragg alone in a sea of arms, puts on an inspired show with his irreverent approach.

people," you have to take it, he explained.

Bragg doesn't want his fame to take away from the issues he espouses. "My job is to try and focus people's anger," he commented.

He told a story about the time his high school class was asked to make lists of the 10 things they wanted most out of life; half the girls in the class, who were only 15 years old, responded "A boyfriend who doesn't hit me." "I just want to add my voice to the outrage," Bragg explained.

Not exactly fluff, comfortably pop

by Jim Munroe

The first thing I thought when I put on The Grapes of Wrath new album, *These Days*, was, "What is this poppy shit?" Seconds later, I decided it

wasn't poppy shit — it was shitty pop.

But, I am biased. The fact the Grapes used more than one guitar chord, sang nicely and write songs with choruses are all black marks to me. Keeping in mind that most *Excalibur* readers probably like these things, however, I decided to give the album another chance.

Overall, it's not totally intolerable. The songs are catchy in a hum-quietly kind of way. Although they definitely feel like pop, the music is a bit more inventive; at times, a country twang slips in, which is nice for variety.

I'm not sure about the lyrics. They don't come with the cassette, a most annoying exclusion. Song titles like "I am Here" and "Thru to You" indicate that the subject is pretty typical luv stuff. To their credit, though, I noticed the Grapes use quite a few three syllable words.

The band's name, taken from the Steinbeck novel, is misleading. They don't come close to the depth or honesty of the book, which makes me wonder if the name was chosen as a college radio hook. I know the name was what first interested me.

These Days isn't fluff, exactly, but it could fit comfortably into the "pop" category. Depending on your taste in music, that is high praise or dire condemnation.

music

The Grapes of Wrath
These Days
 EMI Records

Jammin' with the beerboys

by Christine F. de Leon

Beerboys were all around me. I was swamped by white faces waiting not-so-patiently for the gig to start. Anything between now and the time Billy Bragg graced the stage at the Concert Hall was unimportant. Or so we all thought.

The Disposable Heroes of Hiphoprisy turned out to be important, especially for someone who wasn't white. Their set was an empowering experience. The Heroes rapped about urban racial problems, challenging homophobia and the evils of television. They have a potent political message about the struggle of people of colour that must be brought to the attention of whites.

You wouldn't expect a folk music crowd to appreciate rap artists; for Billy Bragg to put his audience in a situation where they had no choice was ingenious.

Apparently, the Heroes were held up at the Canadian border and couldn't get their dj equipment through. As a result, they played an acoustic set consisting of jazz guitar and percussion; still, they presented themselves as fine musicians.

Lyrics like "TV is the drug of the nation, breeding ignorance and feeding radiation" became the basis of heated debate. An audience member gave the Heroes the finger saying "just turn it off."

The Heroes' reply: "You can't just turn it off, you can't eliminate technology".

The Disposable Heroes of Hiphoprisy were magnificent. Hopefully they reached a few people that night even if the music wasn't their preferred genre.



Alok Sharma

The Heroes' provide an empowering experience

Top 20

1. Public Enemy.....	<i>Apocalypse 91</i>	Def Jam, Sony
2. Digital Poodle.....	<i>Soul Crush</i>	DOV (C)
3. Soundgarden.....	<i>Badmotorfinger</i>	A&M
4. Hole.....	<i>Pretty on the Inside</i>	Caroline
5. Dinosaur Jr.....	<i>Whatever's Cool With Me</i>	Warner
6. Various Artists.....	<i>Grindcrusher</i>	Combat
7. Weird Paul.....	<i>Low Fidelity High Anxiety</i>	Homestead
8. Slayer.....	<i>Decade of Aggression</i>	Def American
9. Flaming Lips.....	<i>Wastin Pigs</i>	Warner
10. A Tribe Called Quest.....	<i>The Low End Theory</i>	Jive
11. Consolidated.....	<i>This Is Fascism</i>	Neyywerk
12. SWA.....	<i>Volume</i>	SST
13. Pegboy.....	<i>Strong Reaction</i>	1/4 Stick
14. Grotus.....	<i>Oldest Known Dingo</i>	G
15. Ministry.....	<i>Jesus Built My Hotrod</i>	Wax Trax
16. Frank Zappa.....	<i>You Can't Do That on Stage</i>	Rykodisk
17. Disposable Heroes of Hiphoprisy.....	<i>TV</i>	Island
18. Die Kreuzen.....	<i>Cement</i>	Touch & Go
19. Die Warzau.....	<i>Big Electric Metal Bass Face</i>	Atlantic, Warner
20. Jim Carroll.....	<i>Praying Mantis</i>	Warner

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