

## Love, Politics From Bragg and Shocked

Billy Bragg is a socialist of evangelistic proportions with a sense of humor—no small rarity. During a chatty headlining set Saturday at the Wiltern—his raspy voice usually accompanied only by his own ragged electric guitar—Bragg's quick wit was directed not just at capitalism but also the preconceptions of his own leftist audience, as when he wryly related how his more revolutionary fans complain that love songs (which made up about half his set) aren't "politically correct." As for the equally subjective standards of musical correctness, even an admirer might wish Bragg would give in and hire a band; political comedy aside, the set's best moments came when he was briefly joined by a pianist.

Bragg's T-shirts and LP jackets maintain that "capitalism is killing music," but given the way the U.S. system *does* occasionally reward quality aesthetics, it wouldn't be surprising if opener Michelle Shocked headlines next time 'round. A nearly flawless singer and (acoustic) guitarist, she's the perfect mix of homespun Texas roots and confrontational political branches. Her moving rendition of Steve Goodman's Vietnam-themed "Penny Evans" had her sounding like a young Baez, if not better.

—CHRIS WILLMAN