



Chuck Brodsky "**Baseball Ballads**" self release

Some would call it foolhardy, even excessive and dumb, to release an album of songs solely about baseball [#]. Lord knows, Brodsky has stepped up to *the plate* on previous recordings and regaled us with his *passion* for America's *national pastime*. Although I'd thought of using the word *love* [instead of *passion*], what Brodsky feels for *the game* is way, way beyond that. His, is a passion for the dirt, the smell, the characters, the occasion, the history – win or lose, the whole ball of *string*. That said, there's a lot more to these songs than *mere* tales about baseball. Scratch the surface ever so slightly, and you'll discover that each and every Brodsky lyric becomes an allegory for countless *facets* [*] of *that other game* that we call *life*.

Six of Chuck's nine *ballgame* songs have appeared on his previous recordings, yet they all feel fresh, vital and new in this setting. They're all pieces of a jigsaw [puzzle] that has found fruition, and two of the aforementioned half-dozen reappear here as new interpretations. Apart from the fictional pitcher "Lefty," the first baseball composition Chuck wrote, my impression is that Brodsky deliberately chooses to feature less well-known baseball figures in his songs, so don't go expecting to hear about Mickey Mantle or Mark McGwire. That said, Chuck's lyrics capture the times in which they are set – a number of songs portray a nation that was at one time divided [openly] by religion, ethnicity and *more* on the field of sport [as well as in life]. Call it intuition, but I feel it would also be true to say that Brodsky hankers after the simpler, less money troubled days in baseball [and life]. In "Gone To Heaven" Chuck recalls how the late, baseball clown, Max Patkin "*not even one time sold an autograph*" while in "Letters In The Dirt" Brodsky comments "*This was before the days of the million dollar contracts, Before the days of artificial grass.*" In the latter cut, written for his father - "*Me & you, we never booed Richie Allen*" - Brodsky also recalls his all-time favourite ball player, Dick "Richie" Allen of the Philadelphia Phillies.

Focusing on the ethnic divide, and given the choice between and Eddie Klepp and Jackie Robinson, Chuck chose the former. Just in case you didn't know, and not many do, Klepp – as in "Ballad of Eddie Klepp" - was first white man to play in the Negro Baseball Leagues, while, travelling in the opposite direction, Robinson crossed the other *great divide*. Even though Moe Berg was signed by the Brooklyn Dodgers, "*who were trying to sign a Jew, Who might help 'em sell some tickets,*" he never became one of their major stars. What Brodsky reveals in "Moe Berg: The Song" was that in the years between the world wars, while visiting Japan and Germany to *play ball*, Berg worked for the CIA. The Robert Redford baseball movie "**The Natural**" was a work of fiction, but one of the crucial early scenes in that film is *practically* repeated in Chuck's new composition, the true-life story of "The Unnatural Shooting Of Eddie Waitkus." Another newie closes out the disc. "Whitey & Harry" were co-commentators, for 27 years, at Chuck's beloved Phillies. As well as being a song dedicated to listening to ball games on late night radio, it's a tribute to the late Richie "Whitey" Ashburn, who had also been, prior to his commentating career, a Phillies ball player.

As for the liner booklet, there's a picture toward the centre of it that is rather neat. It's a composite of a baseball scoreboard, from the *fictional* Brodsky Field, a place where *dreams* become reality. Not only does it feature Chuck's name prominently in lights, but there's also the web site addresses for the magazines Sing Out! [folk music] and Elysian Fields [baseball stories], the Kerrville Folk Festival, McAlister Guitars and more - Chuck's web site as well. All very subliminal, I'd say.

In the liner notes, Tim Wiles, Research Director at the Baseball Hall of Fame, unequivocally dubs Chuck baseball's *troubadour poet laureate*. All I can add to the latter is that the cycle of songs on this album are thought provoking, affectionate, respectful and so obviously and totally filled with one man's passion for life

founded on *much much more* than displaying skill with a stick and a ball. The contents of this disc are, if you will, a *lyrical* double whammy.

In a game of numerous famous firsts, Chuck was the first [and probably the only] folksinger to be invited to perform at the National Baseball Hall of Fame. It's a gig he has repeated. In the game of writing multi-layer song lyrics [to accompany melodies you can easily hum], Brodsky is undoubtedly one of the finest.

Hey you, *play ball*.....and while you're about it sing me a Chuck Brodsky song.

Note.

[#] – Circa 1995, Terry Cashman, of Cashman and West fame, cut an album titled “**Passin’ It On**” which was released by Sony Legacy. Rather than being multi-layered, Cashman’s original songs and covers were strictly about baseball.

[*] – A cut *diamond* has facets.

Folkwax Rating 10 out of 10

Arthur Wood
Kerrville Kronikles 01/03