

# Folkwax

## Folkwax Rating: 10 Baseball Ballads by Brodsky, Chuck

**A Perfect Game, (02/20/03)**

**10 out of 10**

Some would call it foolhardy, even excessive and dumb, to release an album of songs solely about baseball [See Note #1]. Lord knows, Chuck 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 [See Note #2] 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 lesser 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 Eddie Klepp and Jackie Robinson, Chuck chose the former. Just in case you didn't know, and many do not, Klepp - as in "Ballad of Eddie Klepp" - was the 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.

Notes:

#1-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.

#2 - A cut diamond has facets.

Arthur Wood is a contributing editor at FolkWax.

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