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Review of The Baseball Ballads

By Jeff Lindholm

This is a grand-slam home run of an album! Brodsky has put a song or three about baseball on each of his discs. This set collects those tunes and adds three new ones, plus a 30-second "7th Inning Stretch" -- an organ playing "Take Me Out to the Ball Game." Although he's had a lifelong love for the game, Brodsky was reluctant to sing the baseball songs he was writing, thinking that others would find them hokey, but it was a tossed-off baseball song at a festival that got the folksinger a recording contract. And his baseball songs are full of the poignant details that bring all the characters in his songs to vivid life. The music tends to sound familiar from song to song, but you'll be too immersed in the true stories to notice that Brodsky intricately researches and tells. They're the real-life history of the major stars and the "little guys" alike who make the game our national pastime. "The Ballad of Eddie Klepp" tells of a white man who played in the Negro leagues in the 1940s, while Jackie Robinson was breaking the color barrier from the other direction. "Gone to Heaven" brings back to life Max Patkin, a baseball clown from the days before dancing chickens. Patkin's "uniform was baggy, he had gigantic feet," and he did slapstick routines around the bases for 50 years, making kids laugh until he was 78! In another tune, Pittsburgh Pirate Dock Ellis tries to focus on the balls as he pitches a no-hitter in 1970 while tripping on LSD. That's one of the new songs. The other new ones are "Whitey and Harry," about the late Richie "Whitey" Ashburn and his co-announcer of Philadelphia Phillies games, Harry Kalas, who is "going on without you," and "The Unnatural Shooting of Eddie Waitkus," the tragic story from 1947 that inspired the film *The Natural*. With spare instrumental backing to his guitar that includes, of course, some ballpark organ, Brodsky got good wood on this disc.