

Review of November 17, 1998 show at Henfling's in Ben Lomand, CA

By Steve Palopoli

Chuck Brodsky was looking sharp at his Henfling's show Tuesday, with his beautiful acoustic guitar made in Watsonville by Roy McAlister. And he was putting it to good use, spinning tales from his newest CD, Radio, and his two previous albums. Brodsky is one of those few singer-songwriters who can really tell a whopper of a story --- I'm talking flesh-and-blood characters, a coherent plotline, a vivid setting, all wrapped in a lot of realistic human drama and emotion. He's so good at it, you barely notice that he's structured words a certain way to make them fit in the same line, or that he's rhyming. He pulls you into the story so completely through his lyrics that the music really does little besides set a mood. And it's no surprise when Brodsky explains the true story that a certain song is based on --- even the ones that aren't true sound like they must be when he gets through with them.

This time, though, it was especially interesting to note how much Brodsky cares about the people whose lives he's put into song. He mentioned three separate incidents where he actually went and found the person whose story he'd immortalized, and either gave them a CD or played the song there for them on the spot.

One was a guy at a roadside fruit stand who'd told Brodsky the love story that inspired "Bill and Annie"; Brodsky returned to look for his fruit stand three years in a row until the guy finally showed up again and he could play it for him. Another was a high school football coach in South Carolina who had convinced his school to sort of adopt a man with Down's Syndrome, and had changed the guy's whole life in the process. His story inspired "Radio"; Brodsky told Tuesday of how he'd called the coach to tell him about the song and the school ended up inviting him to open up their first football stadium by playing the song.

I mean, this is great stuff, and it makes you remember that though Brodsky may be best known for satirical pieces like "No More Mr. Nice Guy" or "Talk To My Lawyer," it's really these knockout tales of genuine human triumphs that bring out his strongest songwriting. And the best stories, too --- you could see how much the crowd really got into his tales of unsung heroes, with oohs and aahs and everything. It was great because it wasn't sappy, button-

pushing stuff, but real human drama --- right down to the story of former Philadelphia Phillies African American baseball player Richie Allen, whose unfair heckling at the hands of white fans inspired Brodsky's "Letters In The Dirt." And yup, he did get to meet Allen, his childhood hero and favorite baseball player ever --- to give him a copy of the CD.