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Review of Last of the Old Time

Chuck Brodsky

Last of the Old Time

Red House RHR-CD 141 (2000)

Life is like baseball: Sometimes you win, sometimes you loose, and sometimes you get rained out. That's probably one reason why hardball fan Chuck Brodsky has become such an astute observer of the human experience in general. Raised in Philadelphia, now living in North Carolina, he makes multilayered but instantly accessible music that combines a sharp Northeastern lyrical edge with smooth Southern country sounds and rhythms.

Brodsky sings like a cross between John Prine and the early Bob Dylan, with a voice that's wiry but warm, and flatpicks his guitar like Ramblin' Jack Elliot. His lyrics flow like mountain streams, fast and sparkling, and the people in his songs are as real as your neighbors. There's some populist politics in his songs, frequent dry humor, and a lot of understated wisdom. On most songs on the disc he's backed by a crisp band that contributes various combinations of Dobro, slide guitar, keyboards, bass, and drums.

"Take it Out Back" is a sardonic jab at the informal trash disposal habits of some rural residents, while "In the Country" is a quiet appreciation of living there. "How Beautiful She Looks" starts off like a conventional love song but takes a quick twist when you realize that the narrator is a mortician describing a woman he has just prepared for her wake. "Third Dead Cat" builds around a joke - a squashed feline being one of a series landmarks that give directions to a

house - but in the process paints an affectionate, vivid picture of a North Carolina mountain road. "Restless Kid" nostalgically sketches a rambunctious childhood through a series of quick snapshot images.

And of course there are Brodsky's trademark baseball songs. "Gone to Heaven" is a 10-verse tribute to the five-decade career of baseball clown Max Patkin, the original between-innings comedian, while "Bonehead Merkle" is a ballad that narrates the legendary base-running gaffe that ultimately lost the pennant for the 1908 New York Giants. Unlike some contemporary songwriter albums, *Last of the Old Time* doesn't offer one or two flashy home runs surrounded by strikeouts and errors. It's a well-played game from start to finish.

- Tom Nelligan (Waltham, MA)