

Baseball

America

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“Ballads” a treat for baseball fans

By Bill Ballew

Baseball has always been a game that evokes a passionate response from its fans.

That same type of fervor is evident in the soulful voice of singer/songwriter Chuck Brodsky, whose latest album “The Baseball Ballads,” serves as a reminder to fans about why the game pulls on the heartstrings of anyone who has rooted for the home team.

Brodsky knows of what he sings. His most vivid inspirations come from his earliest childhood in Philadelphia in the 1960’s, as his father took him to see Phillies games at Connie Mack Stadium.

“My dad always taught me to support the home team,” Brodsky said. His diehard love for the Phillies and baseball is obvious throughout his nine songs and an organ rendition of “Take Me Out To The Ball Game.” The result is one of the most insightful and well-rounded collection of baseball songs in recent memory.

“I never set a goal to produce an album of baseball songs,” said Brodsky, who has created baseball pieces throughout his career, which has seen him become the first folk singer to perform at the Baseball Hall of Fame. “It was simply one song turned into two and two into three. It was at that point I decided to make the final push and complete the entire album.”

A skillful storyteller reminiscent of Bob Dylan, Nic Jones, and Jackson Browne, Brodsky’s songs pinpoint the everyday details that comprise a player’s life and create baseball history. Employing unique insights with an unbridled passion for the game, Brodsky tells the tale of some of baseball’s more compelling performers, beginning with the album’s first track, “The

Ballad of Eddie Klepp.”

The singer, an Asheville, N.C., resident, relates the story of a white player in the Negro Leagues. Brodsky sings:

Eddie Klepp, he should've run the bases in reverse

A white man in the Negro Leagues, that had to be a first

He could not ride the same busses, or stay in the same motels

He could not eat in the same restaurants, you couldn't have mixed clientele

Brodsky also provides insight into the life of baseball entertainer Max Patkin, whose six decades of performing in front of crowds are chronicled in “Gone To Heaven.” Another track, “Lefty,” focuses on an aging minor league pitcher who is “trying to hang on there against all that good advice.”

The singer's appreciation for the game's history is evident in such efforts as “Moe Berg: The Song,” which reveals the secretive life of the former Brooklyn catcher and OSS agent; “The Unnatural Shooting Of Eddie Waitkus,” an event in 1947 that served as the inspiration for the movie, “The Natural;” and “Bonehead Merkle,” which replays the vents of the 1908 pennant race in which Giants first baseman Fred Merkle failed to touch second base on a would-be game-winning hit.

Brodsky also relives history in one of the album's more upbeat renditions, “Dock Ellis' No-No.” The song is centered on the former Pittsburgh Pirates hurler who purportedly tossed a no-hitter while on LSD.

Sometimes he saw the catcher, sometimes he did not

Sometimes he held a beach ball, other times it was a dot

Dock was tossing comets that were leaving trails of glitter

In the seventh inning stretch he still had his no-hitter

Yet nowhere on “The Baseball Ballads” are Brodsky’s innermost feelings for the game more revealing than in his two songs about the Phillies. “Letters In The Dirt” is a tribute to the singer’s favorite player, Richie Allen, while “Whitey And Harry” provides an example of what the truest baseball fans know - the game is followed best on radio, resulting in a personal relationship with the team’s broadcasters, in this case Harry Kalas and the late Richie Ashburn.

The heart of Brodsky’s relationship with baseball is most obvious in his song about Allen. The singer goes back to his days at Connie Mack Stadium, singing:

Now I’ve since found out all these years later

Now I know alot more than I did

And if back then you knew Daddy, why all those other people booed...

Thanks for letting me have my heroes as a kid

Brodsky’s songs are not the first time that someone has written about the bond baseball creates between parents and children. But his songs are some of the better efforts at explaining those feelings. The outcome is a fascinating collection of ballads that can be considered classics worthy of the national pastime.

“The Baseball Ballads” cd can be ordered through chuckbrodsky.com or amazon.com