

Over the last decade or two, Chuck Brodsky has written himself into the history of American folk by being an old school storyteller of the highest order. Even the sound of his voice is like a classic character actor, and his very able playing is only ever there to support the song, which is there to support the story. And this transparency is rather remarkable in the age of celebrity, where people will apparently eat vile or poisonous things or perform reckless or ridiculous acts for their fifteen minutes (or even seconds) of fame.

Chuck is rightly most famous for his songs about sports, notably songs about baseball. He's even cut a CD called *Baseball Ballads*, and has nine songs in the Sound Recording Library of the Baseball Hall of Fame, where's he's performed numerous concerts. And this new record has two truly outstanding examples of baseball songs, "The Curse of the Billy Goat" (chronicling the curious black cloud over the Chicago Cubs),

and "The Death Row All Stars," a sad enchantment. There is also a great kind of a football song, "The Great Santa Snowball Debacle of 1968." (The first song begins in 1945, the second in 1911, so Chuck's depth as a raconteur is topical at the historical level.)

But the stories go far afield of sport, as is the Brodskyan way. "Old Song Handed Down" honors an unnamed musical ancestor in a photograph. I succumbed to a tearjerker waltz called "A Toast to the Woman in the Holler." Most impressive was a ping pong toast to his old man called "The Point," classic. The two most outrageous stories are "Mary the Elephant" (you won't believe it) and "The Ballad of D.B. Cooper." And there are four or five more just as good, not a flat spot to be found.

I love the reading Chuck does of a piece by Nick Annis, "In the Beginning," and wish it were required in every church, and every school. Chuck has a strong political streak (just hit the "truths" link on his website to see 32 links of a political or pacifistic nature) and this shows up on this disc on "Liar, Liar, Pants on Fire."

The majesty of the songs is served by the magic of J.P. Cormier, the multi-instrumentalist

producer from Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. This is their second record together, and on this outing he plays a dozen instruments. (That's what I call producing.)

They don't make them like Chuck Brodsky anymore. You could count them on one hand and still hold a huge beer at the ball game. • Frank Goodman

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