

Pitching big hits

Brodsky's Grey Eagle show honors new CD 'The Baseball Ballads'

by Amy Jones

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Asheville singer-songwriter Chuck Brodsky could have written an entire album about any number of familiar topics and we still would have learned many things we never knew before. Brodsky combines keen observation, natural intuition and legitimate research in his compelling storytelling. This time he's focusing on America's greatest game - baseball. Brodsky unveils his sporty selections Saturday night at the Grey Eagle in honor of his new disc "The Baseball Ballads." "I figured there are about 200 million more baseball fans than there are folk fans," said Brodsky. "And really, one song turned into two and two into three. Once the idea struck, I made the final push and there was a whole album."

Brodsky's been trickling his baseball ballads into his repertoire for years. The new disc features three new tunes and one remake in addition to Brodsky's previously released ballpark classics. There's the tale of Eddie Klepp, the only white player who ever crossed into the Negro league; Dock Ellis who pitched an entire game on LSD; and Fred "Bonehead" Merkle, who was called out at home plate for skipping a base on his run home. These are tales of baseball's quirky, dedicated, and sometimes unloved participants.

Perhaps the real charm of these song stories is that they're not written about heroes like Babe or DiMaggio. These are characters in the periphery, people who carved a unique niche in the game, on and off the field, whether we remember them or not. And maybe more importantly they are about us, conjuring up personal memories of hot dogs and sunshine. "These stories are about people," said Brodsky. "This isn't a record for jocks."

Inspired by the relationships going on in the bleachers, Brodsky was mostly drawn in by the connection between parent and child. "It actually happened at Wrigley Field in Chicago. I went to a game by myself and I ended up completely captivated by all of the fathers with their sons

or daughters, sort of passing the love of the game on. I could honestly sit and watch this interaction for hours and have no idea what's happening on the field." A father himself, Brodsky values the common ground between adult and child, but he thinks the baseball connection goes beyond parenting. "It's something special. Baseball is a shared experience for all of us," he said.

But it is Brodsky who has put that connection into song and it's not only his fans who have taken notice. He is the first folksinger to ever play the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, N.Y. And he's even heard from the relatives of baseball clown Max Patkin who, before his death, apparently listened repeatedly to the song Brodsky wrote for him.

"Chuck combines his gift for lyrics and melody with his love for baseball history and culture, and in the process, creates a new chapter in the folklore of our national pastime," writes Tim Wiles, director of research for the National Baseball Hall of Fame in the "Ballads" liner notes.

Brodsky hits these tracks out of the park, and they go on for miles.