

A true folk artist has to live on his wits and an acoustic guitar. That explains why there aren't many true folk performers out there. Prepare to meet one, and , on top of that, one who is likely to be one for a good long time to come.

Chuck Brodsky has the true songwriting talent, voice, and style to be able to be that oddity, a successful folk performer. The songs on A Fingerpainter's Murals are all folk songs, stories spun with simple melodies that become familiar through repetition, rolling easily along and taking just brief, lovely turns at the chorus sections. Yet, when folk music has always worked best (from Woody Guthrie to Tom Paxton to Dylan), it's the beauty of that simplicity that makes it so appealing. to return to square one for a minute, few artists are strong enough to be that simple, but Chuck Brodsky is.

His songs mix the concise word choice of someone like John Prine with the story-telling ability of someone like Robert Earl Keen. To that, Brodsky adds his own unique way of finding the point of the story and making that clear without making it obvious. Vocally, he again gives hints of Prine, but with much warmer tone and less-stylized approach. He presents a fragile edge to what at first seems to be a sturdy, earthy voice, and perhaps it's that fragile edge that makes his voice so personable. His voice is a key to his success, though, and for whatever analytical reasons it works, it does get deep inside a listener quickly and stays there. As for his guitar work, he plays a smart folk style, and normal chord patterns with just enough fills, runs, and hammer-on's, to make the melody line hold its own against the rhythm of the chords.

That's the basic rundown on what makes Chuck Brodsky a talented folk artist. Yet the real tribute to his skills comes by just sitting and listening to A Fingerpainter's Murals from beginning to end. Something happens in the process, and that's that you find yourself just floating along with his voice , guitar , and songs, and nothing else seems to intrude. Brodsky even has a verse for that feeling...

"So let the sourpuss be sour

I don't give a damn

And shoefly, he don't bother me

Cause I'm happy as a clam

I march behind the majorette with the baton that twirls

It's halftime

In my happy little world."

It is a "Happy Little World," as he says, but it's not the unreal world. of Disney World. It is real life, just seen through an optimist's eyes. When the time comes to choose best friends, the optimist usually makes the better choice. If you're looking for a friend, let me suggest one who's "just plain folk."