

Three decades of baseball songs

After a 1979 debut, Newman rallies with a new album

By Doug Miller / MLB.com

It's never too late for a sequel.

Take it from Howie Newman, the Boston-based singer, songwriter and baseball nut who recently released an album of clever, funny and heartfelt baseball songs, *Baseball's Greatest Hits, Volume 2*, a follow-up to the first volume-- which was released in 1979.

"It only took me 29 years to do the second one," says Newman. "In another 29 years, I'm sure I'll have another five or six songs ready."

The songs are current but destined to become as classic in the folk-baseball-humor genre as the tunes on the first volume, which earned Newman acceptance into the National Baseball Hall of Fame Archive.

There's "Doug Mientkiewicz," a tribute to the former Red Sox -- and current Pittsburgh Pirates -- first baseman that Newman penned, "just because I like saying his name."

There's "Why Did You Go, Johnny Damon?" a paean for the departed outfielder, who took his long hair, unkempt beard and game to the Yankees.

There's "Weekend Warrior," a theme song for the hard-trying beer-league softball player.

There's "Mendoza Line," a first-person tale of a player flirting with a .200 batting average.

And there's "It's the End of the Curse And We Know It," a spoof of R.E.M.'s "It's the End of the World As We Know It (And I Feel Fine)," with lyrics about the Red Sox and their 86-years-in-the-making 2004 world championship.

The album serves as the perfect follow-up to the original, which featured the Tug McGraw-inspired "Traded," the stadium party saga "Blasted in the Bleachers," the anti-artificial-surface anthem "AstroTurf," the lovable loser's lament "Wait Until Next Year," and the self-explanatory "Utility Infielder Blues."

"When I first started writing good songs, some of them were baseball songs," says Newman, who plays acoustic guitar and plays gigs around the Boston area. "I always had this bent that I was going to write things that were a little different. My songs are about getting up in morning and TV commercials and collecting garbage in outer space.

"So baseball seems like a natural topic for me."

Newman's baseball songs got him enough attention that from 1983 to 2001, he dropped out of the music game altogether and became a legitimate sportswriter, filing stories for the Patriot Ledger, Lowell Sun, Boston Globe, Associated Press and Lynn Item.

After journalism, he moved into corporate communications for a non-profit organization, but out of nowhere, his baseball music muse called once again.

"The songs just sort of come out," Newman says. "I don't really have control over it. It pops into my head when I sit down and it sort of happens that way."

It wouldn't be surprising if this new batch of Newman baseball songs gets him into some good company. It's happened before.



Howie Newman is a staple of the Boston folk music scene. (Courtesy Howie Newman)

Newman met the famous late folk -- and sometimes baseball -- singer Steve Goodman ("City of New Orleans," "A Dying Cub Fan's Last Request") at a gig in Boston and mailed Goodman a cassette of his music. The next time he saw Goodman, the singer insisted on paying Newman a dollar, the price of a 45.

Newman's stripped-down, intimate story-telling style of live performance has gotten him on bills with Brewer and Shipley and the Pure Prairie League.

He says Tug McGraw loved the song "Traded," played it in the Phillies clubhouse, and sent Newman back an autographed lyric sheet with a personal message.

Newman sent a copy of the song "Doug Mientkiewicz" to the player named Doug Mientkiewicz, but he hasn't heard back from the man most famous for catching the last out of the '04 World Series - and keeping the ball.

"As we know, Mientkiewicz's not good at returning things," Newman says. "He likes to hang on to stuff."

Newman also made some headlines for a non-musical baseball pursuit, his mid-1980s national "Dump the DH" campaign that started off as a lark and ended up attracting attention from television, Sports Illustrated, the New York Times and 30 major metropolitan radio interviews.

"It really took off, and it was a blast," Newman says. "People got into it. Every day the mail would bring something fairly outrageous. I got mail from Australia and Saudi Arabia, but I guess it was all for naught."

Yes, the designated hitter remains in the American League, and Newman witnesses it every time he attends a game at Fenway Park. But he still writes songs about the game, which means we'll be set for *Baseball's Greatest Hits: Volume 3* somewhere around the year 2037.

"Baseball is just dramatic, and that's what makes it great for songs," Newman says. "The batter steps in, there's drama. It creates dramatic situations that you understand and you can write about. The drama builds.

"You're always wondering what could happen and what's about to happen and what's happened in the past. You understand the emotions involved in playing the game, and those emotions are perfect for music."

Doug Miller is a Senior Writer for MLB.com/Entertainment. This story was not subject to the approval of Major League Baseball or its clubs.