ForeWord Reviews

SPORTS & RECREATION

Why I Love Baseball
Larry King
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The author has long been a media icon. His ability to entertain an audience with his easygoing, folksy style has helped maintain his popularity for decades. He is especially well liked by his "greatest generation" contemporaries, regaling them with nostalgic tales of shared experiences. As a sub-category of those stories, King wrote this paean to the national pastime.

King narrates the audio version of this collection of anecdotes, in which he tells about following the Brooklyn Dodgers as a youth, meeting some of the most famous baseball personalities of the mid-twentieth century, and in general defending, like a graduate student, his assertion that the object of his adoration has all other sports beat, hands down.

He is at his most charming when he discusses the arguments among his boyhood buddies—typical of baseball fans of any generation—over the best player or team. Listeners of a certain age will relate to the difficulties of growing up poor during the Depression, when even the paltry price of admission to a game was hard to come by.

One of the most entertaining segments deals with King's first interview with Leo Durocher, one of his heroes. One can imagine the sweat on the young newsman's brow as he submits to "the Lip's" inexplicable, explicit verbal abuse.

But this unabridged two-tape set suffers from a dearth of material (the printed book is only 160 pages). A fair portion of it isn't even original, although King always credits his sources. In one section, he quotes an entire article by sportswriter Thomas Boswell listing baseball's virtues compared with football (reminiscent of a more comedic offering from George Carlin). King similarly employs quotes from numerous athletes and celebrities on the rich history of the game.

King's delivery is soothing, like a favorite uncle reading a bedtime story. At times he becomes especially animated, as when he describes incidents from his days in Brooklyn. In other sections he is slightly mechanical, somewhat disappointing from someone who is a long-time performer and is reading his own work.

The raconteur gives his own impressions of certain events that differ slightly from long-

accepted versions. This might seem picayune, but savvy baseball fans always know when something is amiss.

All this said, *Why I Love Baseball* is a heartfelt veneration. Baseball literature is sometimes accused of being too sentimental, but when King speaks of how his young sons are developing their own interests, poring over the daily box scores and defending their own favorite ballplayers, he reinforces the oft-rhapsodized legacy of passing on the enjoyment of the game.

Ron Kaplan