

The Montclarion

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Oaklander's life told in songs and stories

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It didn't stop Beethoven, and it hasn't stopped Randy Rutherford. The grand Lake District resident has faced progressive hearing loss for 20 years but defies it with his one-man singing and storytelling presentation. Titled "My Brother Sang like Roy Orbison," the show began last weekend at Oakland's Temescal Art Center and runs through Nov. 18.

Rutherford was a 20-something folk singer in Alaska when doctors diagnosed progressive hearing loss. As they predicted, he slowly lost most of his hearing. "Now I wear hearing aids," said Rutherford matter-of-factly. "It affects my life in a huge way. The hearing loss isolates me. If my friends say 'lets go out to eat,' we have to go somewhere that's not good so there's no people there so I can hear."

The entertaining bug bit Rutherford as a child, when he would act and sing for his mother and her friends. She, who reminded him of Betty Grable, taught him how to ham: "She instilled singing and acting in me." As the self-described "littlest boy," Rutherford discovered his talents could help him win friends when his Shelly Berman impressions at a school assembly earned him instant popularity. "We moved around a lot," Rutherford recalled, "Humor helped me get accepted."

"Weaverville Waltz," Rutherford's first show, chronicled his childhood, including his relationships with his mother and alcoholic stepfather. "It tells how my stepfather drove me away from my mother, and how as the littlest kid at Trinity County High School I tried to win the homecoming queen away from her 230-pound boyfriend." He last performed (an hour long version of) the show two years ago at the San Francisco Fringe Festival.