

## What reviewers have said about My Brother Sang Like Roy Orbison:

"Rutherford can lay claim to a sweet little ditty of a one-man play. Stellar storytelling, (he) interweaves characters, locations and back-and-forth leaps in time seamlessly, a touching portrait." -- San Francisco Examiner

"A heartfelt triumph, Rutherford shines bright throughout this moving '60s coming-of-age memoir rich in nuance and heart." ★★★★★1/2 -- Edmonton Journal

"Wonderful, beautifully written, hilariously entertaining... startlingly fresh, touching and surprising." ★★★★★1/2 -- Victoria Times Colonist

"A vivid storyteller. A man, a guitar and an arm full of stories honestly told. Rutherford is the real thing." -- Seattle Times

"(Rutherford's) deft story-telling talents make for a seemingly effortless performance. Finely observed, funny and quite heart-wrenching." ★★★★★ -- Vue Weekly (Edmonton)

"TerrificÉwith homespun humor and vivid details, Rutherford paints a touching picture. This play deserves to be sold out every night." ★★★★★1/2 -- Edmonton Sun

"Funny and poignant, Rutherford delivers with the precision and detail of a born storyteller. Highly recommended." -- Seattle Weekly.

"A tender and loving show, watching Rutherford tell his life story is a joy."  
--Sunday Magazine (Victoria)

### Full Reviews:

San Francisco Bay Guardian  
April 17-23,2002  
Theater Review by Robert Avila

With six-string in hand, Randy Rutherford begins his one-man show by teasing out the first few chords to a Beatles song as we imagine him walking along a sunlit beach in Hawaii. The halting, half-muted strumming salutes the amateur guitarist in all of us, but Rutherford (we see later on) is actually quite capable on the instrument. Just so, Rutherford, an adept performer, subtly conveys youth's doubts, hesitations, and improvisations in a soulful and engrossing account of his early manhood in the 1960s.

Unable to raise him herself, Randy's mother sends him to live with Denny, an older boy who once had the same stepdad as Randy. The charismatic young man with a crooner's throat and a cherry red Corvette becomes both big brother and idol to the shy, undersized 16-year-old. There's humor, nostalgia, and suspense in the details of their life together, conveyed with unflinching love against the backdrop of Vietnam, a war that transforms the nation and their relationship. Directed with quiet assurance by Freddie Long, Rutherford's story inevitably blends his coming-of-age with the country's coming apart in an affecting tale of lost innocence. (Critics Pick - Recommended)

**Review in the Edmonton Journal Aug. 2000 by Alan Kellogg**

TAKE A TOUR THROUGH THE '60s WITH A TRULY OUTSTANDING GUIDE

Bay area monologist Randy Rutherford a bravura performer

My Brother Sang Like Roy Orbison

★★★★1/2

Stage 10 (Yardbird Suite)

Just when you think you'll self-destruct at the thought of another mawkish exercise in boomer nostalgia, a performer comes along to remind us that art doesn't carry a best-before date. It just is.

Bay Area monologist Randy Rutherford shines bright throughout this moving '60s coming-of-age memoir rich in nuance and heart. Over a 90 minute bravura performance, we follow our narrator on the bus from Ohio to live with his (sort-of) stepbrother Denny in Medford, Oregon. Along the way, we cruise down literal and figurative main street in Denny's candy apple red Corvette, through trailer courts and burger joints, eventually to military service and Waikiki, Vietnam War estrangement and an eventual latter-day reunion. "You feel too much, Randy, you've got too much heart," say Denny before they're off to war.

Rutherford's attention to detail is dazzling: tuna casserole on TV trays, as the television coverage of the Kent State massacre flickers blue light on the medals pinned on Denny's Marine Corps uniform.

Adding new life to the First-Time-I-Ever-Got-Stoned bit is a tough assignment, but Rutherford pulled it off.

Punctuated by snatches of '60s hits, a few too many, perhaps, we're constantly on the side of our somewhat vulnerable guide, engaged on his walk throughout.

The piece occasionally borders on preciousness, but never quite slips over. It's a heartflet triumph in a tricky performance form experienced all too rarely, and you should see it.

**Seattle Weekly**

March 16, 2000

Review by James Busch

**"My Brother Sang Like Roy Orbison**

@ Odd Duck Theater

Randy Rutherford delivers and performs this autobiographical tale of two brothers during the 1960s with the precision (and telling detail) of a born storyteller. There's no way of knowing (short of asking him) whether this is the real story of Rutherford's teenage years or merely a clever piece of writing, but you leave the theater with a real fondness for both the narrator and his brother. A funny, poignant memoir of days past. Highly recommended.

**Review in the Edmonton Sun Aug. 2000 by Mike Ross**

SINGING PRAISE — Family ties in the '60s make a touching tale  
Randy Rutherford delivers My Brother Sang Like Roy Orbison with sincerity and emotion.  
My Brother Sang Like Roy Orbison - Stage 10

Sometimes a late curtain time, an out-of-the-way venue and the prospect of a one-man show lasting 90 minutes conspire to give a worthy play the short end of the stick at the Fringe.

On Monday night, there were only about a half dozen paying customers on hand to hear Randy Rutherford's compelling life story in My Brother Sang Like Roy Orbison. It's a shame because it's a terrific piece.

With homespun humor, vivid details and a dash of Roy Orbison, the playwright/director/actor paints a touching picture of two brothers growing up during the Vietnam War era. A fable of family bonds and '60s culture, it's billed as autobiographical - easy to believe given the sincerity and emotion with which Rutherford delivers his words. Even at 90 minutes, it doesn't seem overly long. That in itself is a credit to his storytelling abilities. You might imagine listening with rapt attention over a few beers on the back porch. You may even want to know more.

Randy and Denny aren't actually brothers. They had different moms and different dads, but shared the same stepdad, through at different times. The story opens when the teenaged Randy is sent to live with his older stepbrother in Oregon. Denny, who's fond of drag racing and singing along to the radio, behaves more like the father Randy never really had. He teaches the kid about women. Sample advice: "If you're worried you're going too slow, go slower." He teaches Randy to shoot, in a scene that plays like The Rabbit Hunter. He even lets the kid drive his Corvette. In short, Denny proves to be an extremely cool big brother. The first half of the monologue is filled with warm memories, rich in detail and feeling. Parts of this play like The Wonder Years meets American Graffiti.

You can see what's coming, or at least you think you can. As the Vietnam War arrives, America is still divided and so are the brothers. Denny enlist in the Marines, while Randy opts for the much safer job as "administrative specialist" with the air force. The relationship is strained to the breaking point when Randy falls in with some hippie chicks. Denny, meanwhile, is becoming more of a Sgt. Hawks type of character.

It may sound like a cliché, but there are nuances and twists in this story that give it a remarkable realism. The way Rutherford tells it, you can almost see the evening sun sparkling on Denny's red Corvette.

This play deserves to be sold out every night -even if Rutherford can't sing as high as Roy Orbison.

★★★★1/2

**“MY BROTHER SANG LIKE ROY ORBISON”**

(Review from the *Victoria Times-Colonist* by Adrian Chamberlain August 28,1999)

Oakland, California-actor Randy Rutherford is a born storyteller who has created a beautifully written monologue about coming of age in the 1960s.

Certainly, this must be the most revisited decade in pop culture. Yet Rutherford makes it startlingly fresh in an autobiographical tale that chronicles cruising in a Corvette in Medford, Oregon, serving in the American air force (in Alaska!) and catching a love ‘n peace vibe in Hawaii.

Bearded and sporting a Hawaiian shirt, the former folk singer croons his own sound track (Walk like a Man, Pretty Woman) and tells of his relationship with a beloved older stepbrother. The politics of the times drew them apart—Rutherford was a dope-smoking liberal; his brother was a flag-folding conservative. Their final reunion is touching and surprising. Rutherford’s Spalding Gray-like delivery is relaxed and intimate. What makes this a superior piece is (1) a determination to peel back layers to reveal emotional truths and (2) a writer’s eye for telling detail. ★★★★★1/2

*(The following is from an Article Mr. Chamberlain wrote about the fringe after it was over.)*

The show My Brother Sang Like Roy Orbison was a beautifully written and conceived piece about coming-of-age in small-town America during the ‘60s.

When I approached the performer he seemed initially bewildered. Then he told me what the problem was. He was practically deaf. He’d lost much of his hearing years ago, though you couldn’t tell from his performance. His skill and courage seemed to me amazing — almost as important as his terrific monologue.

**VUE WEEKLY**

AUG 24-30, 2000

Review by M.F.

**MY BROTHER SANG LIKE ROY ORBISON**

@ Yardbird

This one-man performance presents an autobiographical narrative about two brothers. It’s also about a particular historical moment, just prior to the Vietnam war. The deft-storytelling talents of writer and performer Randy Rutherford make for one of those seemingly effortless performances that dissolve the wall into the space of the story, creating a sense of time and place that’s wholly convincing in its intimacy and immediacy of detail. Finely observed, funny and, at the end, quite heart-wrenching. Not a moment seems lost in this 90 minute performance; no small achievement for one man and a guitar.

★★★★

## **The Montclarion**

Tuesday, November 7, 2000

### **Oaklander's life told in songs and stories**

By Alina Larson

STAFF WRITER

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 the show two years ago at the San Francisco Fringe Festival.