

Old songs balance new Chapin humorous, mellow



Harry Chapin presents his greatest stories live as he weaves tales of lonely men, aspiring women and wandering taxicabs.

Last night's concert sold out Rec Hall.

Photo by Julie Cipolla

By STEVE HALVONIK
Collegian Staff Writer

As he strode onto the stage, the lanky figure was greeted by enthusiastic applause. Harry Chapin replied with a "thumbs-up" gesture and a warm smile. The mutual admiration and camaraderie lasted throughout Harry Chapin's mellow concert last night at Rec Hall.

Accompanying himself on acoustic guitar and supplying his own back-up vocals, Chapin opened with "W.O.L.D."

The band entered at various times throughout the next song, "Shooting Star."

The first portion of the show featured a nice balance of old songs and new, and of pensive ballads and breezy ditties. Joking among themselves and with the audience, Chapin and his band gave to cavernous old Rec Hall an intimate, living room atmosphere.

Chapin also let the band step into the spotlight. Each band member had a role in "Blues Boy," and brother Steve Chapin performed his own song, "Let Time Go By Lightly."

Chapin closed the first portion of the show with an exceptionally reflective version of "Cat's in the Cradle."

After a 15 minute break, Chapin began the second portion of the show with the bouncy "Six String Orchestra."

Changing moods abruptly, Chapin performed several of his more poignant songs.

Explaining the setting as Watertown, New York ("I spent a week there one afternoon), Chapin launched into "A Better Place To Be." This tale of lost love was the perfect vehicle for Chapin's weary voice.

The absence of orchestration made the ballads a little more intimate and the

vocals a little less strangled than on records. The sparse arrangements gave the songs more flexibility but didn't lack the depth of the studio originals.

The second portion of the show also displayed the light humor Chapin effectively used to pace the first segment. Drummer Howard Fields' lament of life on the road, "The Horniest Rock Drummer," garnered for him much applause and a pair of women's panties from the audience.

But perhaps the funniest event of the evening came from a fan. After Chapin had played the first three endings to "30,000 Pounds of Bananas," a man from the audience demanded, "We want an ending with appeal!" Later in the same song he

received a standing ovation for muttering "apples."

Chapin also received a standing ovation — after his closing number, "Taxi."

After a thunderous roar, Chapin and the band returned for an encore that featured "Mr. Tanner" (a song that Chapin said he realized is about him) and "Circle."

At first Chapin's humor — which the audience was supposed to believe was off-the-cuff, but which was obviously contrived — was irritating. And the audience countdown to "As Dreams Go By," an overworked play used by every singer this side of Chuck Berry to generate audience participation, seemed ridiculous. But Harry Chapin's genuine warmth and sensitivity made me forget these small annoyances.

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