

HARRY CHAPIN SINGS GORGEOUS BALLADS

Harry Chapin, who usually composes for his brothers' rock group, The Chapins, now is playing and singing his own songs.

Rather well, at that. Mr. Chapin, who is very ebullient and with his new beard has the look of a skinny satyr, is appearing through Aug. 8, except Monday, at the Village Gate, 160 Bleecker Street. He plays acoustic guitar and is backed by Tim Scott, cello; John Wallace, bass, and Ron Palmer, lead guitar.

His songs ping-pong between the lovely and the weird, a simple polished folk with the added body of the cello. His ballads, notably "And the Baby Never Cries" and "Put Your Light On," are gorgeous. When he steps afield, as in "Dogtown," about a seaport where departing sailors left their women with big dogs for protection, then never returned, he can be a bit awesome.

This is smooth folk, certainly, not pop in any way but polished nicely. It is necessary to mention that only because the recent spate of nasal country singers has predisposed much of the folk audience against hearing traditionally "good" voices. Harry Chapin has one, and writes well.

MIKE JAHN