

# Saga of a Brooklyn Heights Rock Group

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The Chapins of Brooklyn Heights, a folk and rock group. From left: Steve and Tom Chapin, Doug Walker, Phil Forbes.

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The Chapins of Brooklyn Heights, a folk and rock group whose members occupy part of the building at 136 Hicks Street, have completely taken over the Village Gate in Greenwich Village.

At the Hicks Street address, Tom Chapin, who is 26 years old, has an apartment, Steve Chapin, 25, and his wife have an apartment, and another is occupied by their mother and two teen-aged stepbrothers.

At the Village Gate, the nightclub at Thompson and Bleecker Streets, Tom and Steve sing and play with two Brooklyn Heights compatriots, Doug Walker and Phil Forbes. The group shares the bill with Harry Chapin, Tom and Steve's older brother, who is 28 and who has a quartet of his own that performs in a contemporary folk-pop vein.

The Chapin brothers have rented the nightclub as a showcase for their two groups. They tried it out on weekends in April and May and, encouraged when they found they could bring in enough money to pay the rent, extended their occupancy to six days a week. They will continue at the Gate through Aug. 8, appearing every night except Monday.

Their purpose was partly to back up the release of the Chapins' first single disk, "Working My Life" on the Epic label. In broader terms they hope to build a following and make their name known.

### A Discount Card

To develop the kind of repeat business that contributes to this, they are giving every customer a guest card that invites the bearer "to beat some of the admission price" by making a second visit for \$1.75 or \$3.50 a couple instead of the regular admission of \$2.50 a person.

This aggressive musical and business approach has been developing for more than a dozen years. It had its origins in the Boys Choir of Grace Episcopal Church in Brooklyn Heights. The Chapin brothers, aged 11, 9 and 7, moved to the neighborhood from Greenwich Village in 1954 and soon joined the choir because, as Harry points out, "it was a way we could meet girls."

The boys grew up in a musical household. Their father, Jim Chapin, was a drummer who had played with the Casa Loma Orchestra, Tommy Dorsey and Tony Pastor. Their grandmother insisted that they all take music lessons even though, as Harry says, "she was unhappy about Dad being a musician."

The music lessons had little effect, however, because both Steve, who studied organ and

harmony with Ann McKittridge, the organist at Grace Church, and Tom, who studied clarinet, found the training "too regimented." What got them into their own kind of music was the purchase in 1957 by their uncle, Mike Burke, of a Sears Roebuck guitar.

The three brothers gave their first public performance as folk singers in 1957 at the Grace Church Choir show, an annual benefit to send Brooklyn children to camp. They continued to sing as young imitators of the Kingston Trio, mostly at parties, until 1961, when Harry wrote his first song.

### The First Regular Job

"That was a watershed," Harry says. "It made us realize that we could be something besides an imitation of the Kingston Trio. The song was called 'Stars Tangled in Her Hair' and," he added with a smile, "it still holds up, it really does."

By 1962 half the songs the Chapin brothers sang were their own material, primarily Harry's, and they were appearing at hootenannies at the Bitter End and the Gaslight in Greenwich Village. Two years later they got their first regular job at the Bitter End, second on the bill to an act called Jim, Jack and Joan (the "Joan" was Joan Rivers).

In 1965, as folk music became electrified, they acquired some pickups for their instruments and their father joined the act on drums.

By 1966 Harry had become involved in film production, making documentaries with Drew Associates, and Tom and Steve were moving from folk music to rock.

This created a problem for their father, the jazz drummer, "who was not into the rock thing," Harry explained. "But Phil Forbes, who played drums and had been in the

Grace Church Choir with us, was—in a funky way—more effective than Dad."

So Dad got the pink slip and Phil Forbes became one of The Chapins, bringing along Doug Walker, a guitarist from Brooklyn Heights in whose blues band Phil had been playing.

This is the group as it is today, though it was broken up for long periods, primarily while Tom Chapin was on the Indian Ocean working as a jack-of-all-trades and assistant diver during the shooting of the film, "Blue Water, White Death."

When The Chapins decided to rent the Village Gate last spring, Harry, who had continued to write songs although he had not performed since 1966, came in as a separate act.

Harry, who lives at Point Lookout, L. I., did his single act on weekends during April and May. But with the

decision to go six nights a week at the end of June, he decided to build a back-up group.

"I remembered an old thought," he says, "that if you take a less than beautiful voice and add a beautiful cello, it frees the voice to do something else."

So Harry is now singing to the accompaniment of his own guitar, and a cello played by Tim Scott, a lead guitar by Ron Palmer and the bass of John Wallace, who is still another graduate of the Grace Church Choir.

Despite their base in Greenwich Village, the Chapin brothers still feel very close to Brooklyn.

"Every year we play the street fair on Columbia Heights in the late spring," says Tom. "And we played for the Brooklyn Happenings at Borough Hall in June and I hope we'll do it again in August."