

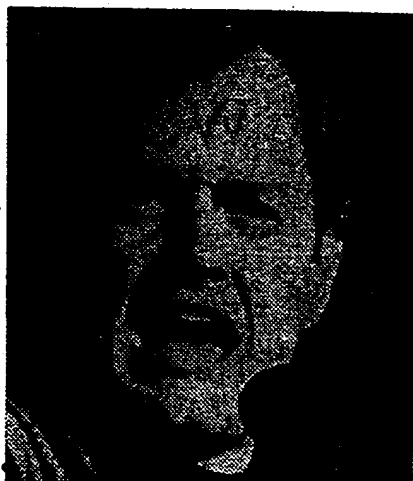
# Jazz Tree in Flower

By ROBERT PALMER

**T**HE FIRST of Harry Chapin's two performances at the Dr. Pepper Festival in Central Park was rained out on Monday, but on Tuesday at 5 P.M. the show began under faultless blue skies, opening with the Jazz Tree led by Mr. Chapin's father, Jim. This Chapin nepotism is becoming something of a fixture in Central Park. Last year's show also opened with Jim Chapin's jazz group and proceeded to an energetic song recital by Harry Chapin, with his brother Steve featured on piano.

Jim Chapin and the Jazz Tree mix swing, bop and avant-garde styles into a brassy, slightly frenetic sound. One wonders what John Carisi, who was writing brilliant progressive arrangements for Miles Davis almost 30 years ago, is doing singing "I Can't Give You Anything but Love" to Dixieland accompaniment, and just how Peter Loeb's screaming, Coltrane-inspired tenor saxophone solos fit into a swing-oriented ensemble style. But these elements are juxtaposed, if not fused, in the Jazz Tree, and the result, while essentially a pastiche, is good fun.

Harry Chapin does not seem to have changed much since last year. He has written some new songs, and they are not unlike his old songs. That is to say, they are demonstrably proletarian in tone, narrative in structure, and full of the sort of sentimental plot and not-really-surprising denouements that one encounters in ersatz O. Henry short stories.



Associated Press

## Harry Chapin

But lest the critic be considered needlessly dour, like the critics who destroy the simple Midwestern dry-cleaner's musical aspirations in one of Mr. Chapin's songs, he should add that pop songs are not required to be profound and that while some of Mr. Chapin's tales might be more comfortable as prose, there is no denying their appeal.

They are not the critic's cup of tea, but neither are they the moon-June variety of song that seems to be proliferating once again now that relevance has run its course. Mr. Chapin is too concerned with his plots and characters and surprises to be relevant and too robust to be blandly platitudinous, and for this at least we should be thankful.