

# Song: Harry Chapin's Stories

**H**ARRY CHAPIN has given 2,000 concerts by his own count, and to celebrate he gave six more at the Bottom Line over the weekend. Remarkably enough, he's still believable as the Singing Cab Driver chronicler and friend of the working man, and not just because he still tends to sing flat. His songs continue to tell true-to-life stories in greeting-card verse, and his stage presence is still amiably folksy. There's no reason to think he'll ever change.

Sitting on a stool stage center with his sleeve rolled up and a broad grin on his face, Mr. Chapin flails at an acoustic guitar and spins his tales of frustrated husbands, singing dry cleaners and other average folks. One of his songs paints music critics as pitiless

ogres, and no wonder; he's a sadistic critic's dream come to true. His songs lack harmonic ingenuity, their melodies tend to be predictably sing-song, their characterizations are one-dimensional and their morals are trite. And his band arrangements wring every last drop of sentiment out of them.

But only a sadist would stop there. It's also true that Mr. Chapin doesn't pretend to be anything more than what he is. And if his songs don't plumb the depths of the soul or dazzle the listener with their imagery, neither do they wallow in pretentious self-analysis or flowery verbal obscurtantism. Like stories overhead in bars, they're garrulous, ephemeral and diverting, and one suspects that's just what Mr. Chapin intended them to be.

**Robert Palmer**