

The Unsung Harry Chapin

By THOMAS J. DOWNEY

THE American dream implies that all of us must be actively "involved." Harry Chapin lived his words with a vibrant spirit and love that few of us will ever match.

Harry did more than 200 concerts a year, over half of which were benefits. He raised over \$3 million for national and Long Island causes. Harry was nominated for an Academy Award for a documentary film on boxing ("Legendary Champions"). As an author, he wrote for

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film, stage and television. Musically prolific, he recorded 12 albums; his brother Tom's television show, "Make a Wish," used 160 of Harry's songs. The show won a Peabody and an Emmy. Between all of this, he was a loving father, husband and friend.

Harry believed in causes and acted on those beliefs. His energy came from the people he helped, and it was limitless.

As a Long Islander, he wanted us to have our own cultural identity, "to see all the colors of the rainbow." The arts should flourish and be performed by and for Long Islanders. Through the force of his personality, he kept the PAF Playhouse in Huntington Station alive. His fund-raising efforts for PAF were legend in the business community. Chambers of Commerce, homemakers and college students were all part of Harry's coalition that kept live theater on Long Island.

The Long Island Philharmonic and the Eglevsky Ballet were also part of the Chapin cultural heritage. He served on both their boards and helped develop artistic talent for them.

Harry also served Long Island as a member of the Long Island Action Committee and as a trustee of Hofstra University.

For America's "benefit king," no worthy cause was too small to escape his generosity. When the Deer Park school system had financial trouble a few years ago, Harry was

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The New York Times / Larry Morris

Harry Chapin performing last month

there with his band playing to a teeming crowd in the high school gym. When Long Island needed him, he was always there.

Internationally, he was known as the founder, creator and inspiration for World Hunger Year. WHY's goal was to critically examine the problem of global malnutrition and deprivation. It was not an appeal to guilt, but rather detailed how the policies of nations contributed to hunger.

Harry focused local and national attention on the problems. On Long Island, he helped create, with the help of Nassau and Suffolk governments, the Long Island Regional Food Bank. The "bank" will distribute surplus food to the poor and hungry. Nationally, Harry's idea to focus attention on how United States policies contributed to world hunger was through the creation of a Presidential commission. His audience was the House of Representatives and the Senate, and I was closely connected with this effort.

Harry's political acumen was awesome. He laid the groundwork for his bill by playing fund-raising concerts for Republican and Democratic members of both houses. When the bill made its way to the floor of both chambers, Harry was in the Capitol buttonholing key legislators. It was not a coincidence that the bill passed both houses overwhelmingly.

We have a tendency when a person dies to make him appear greater in death than he was in life. This is not possible with Harry. He lived Bob Dylan's admonition, "He who is not busy being born is busy dying."

We can best remember Harry by continuing his work. His commitment to community services and efforts to eliminate hunger can be magnified by our collective dedication to those goals. If each of us lives by Harry's personal motto, we can't fail:

"We all have the potential to move the world — and the world is ready to be moved!" ■