

Cabaret: A Tribute to Harry Chapin

THE late Harry Chapin, along with songwriters like John Denver and Jim Croce, used folk music as a populist storytelling medium. But more than any of his contemporaries, Mr. Chapin insisted that popular music could be an effective humanitarian platform. The body of work he turned out consisted largely of versified moral fables that were unabashedly sentimental in their appeal to the largest possible audience. These songs, like them or not, were inseparable from the humanitarian causes Mr. Chapin embraced. And Saturday at the Bottom Line, some relatives, friends, and associates of the singer gathered to pay tribute to Mr. Chapin in two shows. The proceeds went to World Hunger Year, the charity of which the singer was a founder in 1975.

Artistically, the evening amounted to a small convention of musicians who covered the spectrum of 1970's

folk-pop styles. Steve and Tom Chapin, the singer's brothers, performed a number of his songs in a quiet low-key style that emphasized the sound craftsmanship of work that almost invariably had a sing-along tunefulness. Jonathan Edwards, a singer with an uncommonly fine folk-pop tenor, sang a series of original tunes, including his hit "Sunshine." Livingston Taylor and Loudon Wainwright 3d performed sets that were respectively wry and pungent in their humor. And the cast of "Pumpboys and Dinettes," the musical in which Mr. Wainwright and Tom Chapin have both appeared, performed a crude but exuberant set of rockabilly tunes.

Without lapsing into mawkishness, the show exemplified the kind of teamwork and humanitarian spirit that Harry Chapin championed.

Stephen Holden