

# TOM CHAPIN

In a career that spans five decades, 22 albums and three Grammy awards, multi-talented singer-songwriter-guitarist Tom Chapin has covered an incredible amount of creative ground. In addition to his work as a recording artist and concert performer, Chapin has acted on Broadway, as well as working extensively in television, radio and films.

As a music-maker, Chapin has maintained two long and productive parallel careers, both as a highly respected contemporary folk artist and as a pioneer in the field of children's music. In the former role, Chapin has established a reputation for insightful, heartfelt songcraft and effortlessly charismatic live performances. In the latter, he continues to engage the hearts, minds and imaginations of young listeners with witty, life-affirming original songs delivered in a sophisticated array of musical styles. In either format, Chapin's infectious songs, sterling musicianship and personal warmth consistently shine through, whether he's performing on record or in a concert hall, an outdoor festival, a school, in front of a symphony orchestra or in an intimate coffeehouse.

The New York Times called Chapin "one of the great personalities in contemporary folk music," while Billboard called him "the best family artist around" and described him as "totally captivating." Parents magazine stated, "Nobody today is writing and performing better kid's songs than Tom Chapin."

The son of noted jazz drummer and teacher Jim Chapin and the grandson of author/critic Kenneth Burke and portrait painter James Chapin, Tom grew up in a family that encouraged artistic pursuits. He began performing professionally as a teenager in the early 1960s, playing in Greenwich Village folk clubs alongside his siblings Harry and Steve as The Chapin Brothers. In 1971, he began a five-year run as the host of the Emmy- and Peabody award-winning ABC-TV children's series Make A Wish. Chapin and his songs were also featured in the seminal 1970 documentary film Blue Water, White Death, for which he spent six months sailing the Indian Ocean searching for great white sharks.

Chapin launched his solo recording career with 1976's Life Is Like That. It was the first of a string of albums that further established his reputation as both a gifted storyteller and a natural entertainer, winning him an uncommonly loyal fan base in the process. He also continued to venture into other creative areas, playing the lead role in the hit Broadway musical Pump Boys and Dinettes, working off-Broadway as musical director of both Cotton Patch Gospel and Harry Chapin: Lies and Legends, and serving as host of TV's National Geographic Explorer. He's also written and performed satirical topical songs for National Public Radio's Morning Edition, and had a cameo role as the Vice Presidential candidate in Jonathan Demme's 2004 remake of The Manchurian Candidate.

Chapin was already firmly established as a performer and recording artist when he first

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# T O M C H A P I N

branched out into family music with his 1988 album *Family Tree*. He's since released eleven more family CDs aimed at post-toddler, pre-teen listeners and their parents, comprised of original songs addressing such issues as family life, positive self-image and respect for the environment.

"When I was hosting *Make A Wish*, people had suggested to me many times that I ought to make a 'children's record,' which to me meant singing songs for toddlers about little duckies and didn't seem particularly interesting," Chapin explains. "Then I had children, and when they were eight and six, I realized that there was not a lot of music for that age group. They understand language and story and humor, but were too old for toddler music and too young for rebellion and love songs. So I did *Family Tree* with that in mind, and it won all kinds of awards. Suddenly I had a new career as a family artist."

Chapin's latest family release is the punningly-titled *Give PEAS A Chance*, subtitled *Whole Grain Music for Free-Range Earthlings*. The 14-song album continues his longstanding practice of delivering positive, entertaining songs that engage without preaching, showcasing his ingratiating voice and the instrumental and compositional talents of his longtime collaborators John Forster, Michael Mark and Jon Cobert, whose contributions grace his adult-oriented recordings as well. Also lending a hand are Chapin's daughters Abigail and Lily, who in recent years have achieved considerable acclaim of their own, recording two well-received albums as *The Chapin Sisters*.

"What feels great to me about this CD," Chapin notes, "is the way it connects to and comments on some longtime interests of mine: hunger and food issues, the environment and sustainability, education, self-image, community, and personal and generational relationships. But the songs began with the same rules as all of my family recordings: make it delightful, musical, singable, kid-friendly and adult-safe.

"Writing family music," he observes, "has been a wonderful course in songwriting. You have a dual agenda: keep it understandable and fun for kids, but well-written and intelligent and musical enough to keep adults listening as well. Within these parameters, we've found an enormous amount of topics and approaches and musical feels that continue to excite us to keep coming back and doing it again."

Chapin also serves as narrator of a series of children's books, three of which: *Mama Don't Allow*, *There Was An Old Lady Who Swallowed A Fly* and *The Train They Call The City Of New Orleans*, have won Grammy awards in the Best Spoken Word Album for Children category.

In addition to his varied musical and media endeavors, Chapin is also a powerful advocate on behalf of a variety of charitable causes. He is an active board member of *WhyHunger*, the organization which the artist's older brother, the late singer-songwriter/activist Harry Chapin, founded (as *World Hunger Year*) in the 1970s. He also remains active in a variety of environmental causes, as well as efforts on behalf of music and the arts in our public schools.

"I'm at that place in my life where I follow what interests me," Chapin concludes. "I still love the guitar, I still love to sing, and I still love the thrill of creation: a good song, a good recording, a good concert. I feel blessed to be my own boss, creating my own material and performing it to different audiences, ages and generations."