

Everything Old Is New: '80s icons find new life on screen and stage

Okee dokee folks... Most people remember where they were when they heard that John F. Kennedy was shot. Not many remember where they were on July 16, 1981. I do because that was the day that Harry Chapin died. I was doing a service call on a pinball machine (in another life I ran an arcade), and I was devastated when I heard that Harry had been killed in a crash on the Long Island Expressway. Harry was a huge inspiration in my youth. If, per chance, you don't know who Harry Chapin is, you should — watch the documentary about Harry Chapin, *When In Doubt, Do Something*. Chapin was an incredible singer-songwriter known for songs such as "Taxi," "Cats In The Cradle," "W.O.L.D." and "Circle." He also was a tireless activist for the poor and hungry.

The Chapins, a band made up of the Chapin brothers and sometimes their father, formed in the early '60s and was the impetus for Harry to begin his solo career. He was dismissed from the band and wound up as their opening act. A record company bidding war ensued and Harry secured one of the most lucrative recording contracts at the time. Ironically, my first exposure to a Chapin was through the TV show "Make A Wish," which was hosted by younger brother Tom Chapin. Tom would sing songs, sometimes penned by Harry, which would accompany various interesting and educational segments. It was when "Taxi" became a hit that I first heard Harry. I remember my mother saying how she loved that song except for the last line, "When I'm stoned," which was radical for 1970s radio.

I had the pleasure of meeting Harry in the mid '70s at The Leroy Theatre. Remember the Leroy and the crumbling ceiling? Harry took the time to meet and talk to everyone who wanted to engage. After I met Chapin I marched onto the stage (ballsy, I know) and talked to Big John Wallace, Chapin's bass player and the voice of the angelic part in "Taxi." He offered me a hit from his joint, but I had to refuse — I was with Mom!

Harry became evermore involved in social activism and politics. He is quoted as saying, "Politicians wish I spent more time doing music and the critics wish I spent more time in politics." He began spending more and more of his efforts working to aid those affected by hunger and poverty. He donated the earnings from as many as 150 shows per year to this cause. By 1981 this was taking its toll on his music career and he needed to buckle down and focus on it in order to save that and the fundraising. Unfortunately, he never really got the chance.

Harry's music can still be heard on the radio and is referenced often on television. His charitable work continues through the many organizations he founded, one being World Hunger Year (WHYHunger.org). The Chapins continue to make music and I have had the pleasure of playing shows with Harry's daughter, Jenn. She and her husband headlined the Providence Folk Festival a few years back. People who don't know Harry and his music should really watch *When In Doubt, Do Something* and introduce themselves to a truly noble songwriter/activist. Older folks, like me, will want to watch for the nostalgia and emotional ride. Do yourselves a favor and stream it (available on Amazon). For more, "Shooting Star" over to HarryChapinMusic.com

I am going to stick with the early '80s and bring you back to the time when the band Robin Lane and The Chartbusters was climbing the charts. They had hits such as "When Things Go Wrong," "Why Do You

Tell Lies," "It'll Only Hurt A Little While" and many others. The band had one of the first videos to be aired on MTV, and Lane sang back-up on Neil Young's first solo album. If you catch her in concert, when concerts come back, she augments the show with Laurel Canyon stories. Unfortunately, despite her success, her record label dropped her early on. The Chartbusters dissolved and she joined forces with RI's own The Shake, but she eventually faded from the limelight to raise her daughter.

Lane has been back writing, performing and recording for quite a while now. She was one of the first headliners of the Providence Folk Festival and I have worked with her on many other shows over the years. Lane founded an organization called Songbird Sings where she "helps people write their own songs about their experiences using her musical ability as a form of rehabilitation for those suffering or recovering from heady trauma like domestic violence, sexual exploitation, child abuse or war."

Lane has just released her latest CD titled *Instant Album*, consisting of 16 tracks of new, remastered and unreleased older songs. The first single from the album, "It's Your World," is "a powerful look at today's world and the constant choices one faces in life." Lane's music has only gotten better over the years. Her songwriting is as solid as ever, and her voice has remained just as strong, but now has a lifetime of experience powering it. She has a new site (patreon.com/robinlane) that will feature concerts, guests, interviews, stories and intimate slices of life through her many years of making music. For more "Don't Wait Until Tomorrow," get to TheRobinLane.SquareSpace.com

Pandemic fatigue and denial are setting in for a lot of folks. I want music and entertainment to come back more than anyone, but I think it's still not safe in public places. Stay home, but if you must go out, double-up on the mask and wash your damn hands! A friend of mine, who is a doctor in San Diego wrote to me, "We have achieved the 'COVID Hellscape' that we have feared from the beginning. The hospital is insane right now ... so many sick people ... people dying every day ... working 3 times my normal schedule. The new strain scares the hell out of me."

She is on the front lines, pay attention! Anyway, that's it for now, thanks for reading. JohnFuzek.com