

It's music to young ears

Folk fixture
Tom Chapin
has knack for
entrancing
kids, parents

Tom Chapin & Friends

WHERE: The Egg, Empire State Plaza,
Albany

WHEN: 1 p.m. today

HOW MUCH: \$12; \$8 for children

MORE INFO: 473-1845 or www.theegg.org

BY WENDY LIBERATORE
Gazette Reporter

The 10-and-under crowd is unforgiving.

Try to engage this age group's attention and the kids will likely squirm and squawk. But not if you're Tom Chapin. For nearly 20 years, he has managed to grab the ears of the toughest concertgoers.

"If you aren't connecting with them, you know it right away. It can be devastating," said the singer/songwriter, who will perform a family show this afternoon at The Egg. "If you have the right material that speaks to them, you will be able to connect with them."

Known as the "Pied Piper of children's music," Chapin has lured listeners with his warmth, humor and generosity. Since 1988, in 11 family albums, Chapin not only satisfies his young listeners, but their parents, too, earning him the respect of *The New York Times*, which labeled him "one of the greatest personalities in contemporary folk music."

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TOM CHAPIN
Musician

kid. The music is kid-friendly and adult-friendly. There are things that parents will get that the children won't. But the music is clear enough for kids so they can get it too."

At the Egg, with his band mates Jon Cobert on piano and accordion and Michael Mark on bass, concertina and marimba, Chapin will perform songs from his newest family album, "Some Assembly Required." He promises to play "Puppy at the Pound," a Cajun-spiked song that everyone loves, including his 18-month-old grandson, Miles.

"His parents tell me 'Puppy at

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MUSIC



Tom Chapin & Friends will be at The Egg today. Along with Chapin, right, are his bandmates Michael Mark on bass, left, and Jon Cobert on piano.

Chapin

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the Pound' is the nuclear option," said Chapin. "When Miles is really beside himself, they'll play the song, and he'll calm down."

Chapin says, however, that most of his songs are geared toward 4- to 10-year-olds — the ones too old for Raffi and too young for what Chapin calls "sexually driven" teen music. They are a pleasant group to accommodate as "they understand humor and irony. They like a good story. And they are hungry to learn. Music is a great teaching tool."

Off the new album, Chapin will also likely play other new favorites, such as "Questions," about the endless pestering queries from children. "Home is a Welcoming Sound" speaks of the sweet calm that greets Chapin when he returns home from the road. There is also a new song about Bruno, an imaginative young boy who makes his way into many of Chapin's songs. The Egg concert will be filled out with hits from past albums, like "This Pretty Planet" and "Family Tree."

"If I don't do those songs, everyone wants to know why," said Chapin.

Technology has informed the songwriter as to what concert-goers want to hear. Chapin can determine this by checking his Web site and seeing what songs visitors have downloaded. The favorites top the play list.

"We can see what little Tiffany and Brian want to hear," said Chapin. "We love it. It's a way to connect with audiences."

The songwriter also plans to bond with fans after the show. In the lobby, he will greet anyone willing to stand in line to chat with him.

"Some Assembly Required," as well as his new adult album "The Turning of the Tide," demonstrate Chapin's embrace of eclectic styles. For example, on "Some Assembly Required," "Walk the World Now, Children" is a traditional folk tune backed up by a gospel choir. "Quiet Time" is a soothing lullaby, while "Don't Make Me Dance" rocks.

"Each song has its own world," said Chapin, who writes songs with input from Cobert, Mark and John Forster. "We are all musicians. Part of this is self-defense. We want to create and sing songs that we like."

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MUSICAL FAMILY

Chapin's range comes as no surprise when one considers his background. His 87-year-old father, Jim, is a big-band jazz drummer, known for his teaching. He and his brothers, Harry and Steve, were classically trained. Tom Chapin played clarinet; Harry, trumpet and Steve, piano. As teens, they heard The Weavers with Pete Seeger. The brothers were enamored of the musical style and started playing guitar and banjo.

In 1971, Chapin landed a role as host of ABC's Sunday morning show "Make A Wish." His brother Harry worked on the music for the show and got noticed. Harry was signed to Elektra. His debut album, "Heads and Tales," featured the hit "Taxi." The other Chapin brothers, who performed with Harry, watched their brother's star rise. They remained in the background, however, even after Harry's death in 1981.

"I was always Harry's younger brother," said Chapin. "But that is OK because I am very proud of him. He was an amazing guy. We were very close."

Chapin still works with brother Steve. Most recently, they released the "Chapin Family Christmas Collection" CD. Chapin also enjoys watching his three daughters blossom as The Chapin Sisters and Harry's daughter Jen, who is enjoying a solo music career.

"It's a large conglomeration," Chapin says with a laugh.

No matter how large the musical Chapin clan becomes, they have an innate ability to speak intimately with their audience, to touch them directly with an honesty that quells the most cynical of listeners. Chapin is especially pleased when he strikes the right chord with parents and children simultaneously. Chapin says it's a privilege to perform in concert for both, where the live experience is powerfully enriching. And it's an even greater honor when families keep his music spinning after the show.

"When a parent tells me that they bring my music for the long car trips, that's the highest praise," said Chapin. "It makes me proud of all that I have created. I'm blessed."

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