

Chuck Mitchell Brings Homey Glow To Raven Gallery

BY CHUCK THURSTON

Free Press Staff Writer

It takes Chuck Mitchell 7 minutes, 45 seconds to sing the ballad of Stagger Lee, a card shark who not only had things his own way on the old Mississippi, but later reorganized Hell as well.

Mitchell sings such ballads and nonsense songs while accompanying himself on either six- or 12-string acoustical guitar.

THE RAVEN GALLERY is a warmly intimate room with green Italian lights outlining the black drapery that backs the stage. Mitchell adds to the hominess by proudly displaying his wife-made shirt and confiding to the crowd that he caught the flu on his day off.

His songs come from many sources. Some are from Flanders and Swann and some are his own. And he sings

John Stewart's road songs. One of Mike Smith's tunes is paired with a Sandburg poem on the futility of hate.

Then there's a hippo love song with a verse about beautiful mud that becomes a sing-along for the audience.

The mood of Mitchell's show is light. There are no heavy, preachy passages — you just can't sing about a hippopotamus in love and then come back a moment

later and save the world. So Mitchell doesn't try. His songs wander from one to another in smooth transitions that would squelch quick mood changes even if he wished any.

Last year at this time, Mitchell was wondering if the Raven Gallery patrons weren't a little too young for his act. Then the drinking age was lowered from 21 to 18 and the Raven never did get a liquor license, so it lost many of the young people who went in other directions looking for beer and Ripple.

So an older audience moved in to fill the gap, and this year Mitchell has been held over an extra week.



Chuck Mitchell