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## The Man From Heaven

**The songs of Burt Bacharach are enjoying a revival that seems unlikely only at first hearing**

*by Francis Davis*

Burt Bacharach, the composer with the lyricist Hal David of "The Look of Love," " (They Long to Be) Close to You," and "Do You Know the Way to San Jose," was once the subject of an article in an academic quarterly, though the larger social significance of those and his other pop hits of the sixties and early seventies would seem to be nil. Almost two years after Bacharach won a pair of Oscars for his work on the movie *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, one for best original score and the other for "Raindrops Keep Fallin' on My Head," Bruce A. Lohof's "The Bacharach Phenomenon: A Study in Popular Heroism" appeared in the Winter, 1972, issue of *Popular Music and Society*, a journal published at Bowling Green State University. Lohof discussed Bacharach's music in some detail, acknowledging its melodic sophistication and metrical complexity, but what most interested him was Bacharach's emergence as a "national idol" -- a celebrity songwriter who was to his day what Stephen Foster, Irving Berlin, George Gershwin, and Cole Porter had been to theirs.

According to Lohof, Bacharach met several of the criteria of popular (as opposed to classical) heroism that had been outlined by a sociologist named Orrin E. Klapp some twenty years earlier. Bacharach's two Oscars, along with a pair of 1970 Grammys, qualified as "formal recognition and honor." As for "the building up of an idealized image or legend of the hero," two television specials devoted to Bacharach and a series of best-selling albums that featured him conducting orchestral versions of his hits had gained for him a degree of visibility almost unheard of for a songwriter not primarily identified as a singer. He had even appeared on the cover of *Newsweek*. And though Lohof discreetly downplayed the point, it didn't hurt that Bacharach was married to the actress Angie Dickinson, a thinking man's trophy blonde who had been John Wayne's love interest in *Rio Bravo*, Frank Sinatra's in *Ocean's Eleven*, and, according to rumor, one of John F. Kennedy's in real life.

Lohof's thesis appeared to be that a modern-day hero like Bacharach, as much image as flesh and blood, was made of flimsier stuff than the mythological heroes of antiquity. On what seems to have been intended as a lighter note, the author observed that Bacharach's "total" heroism -- his fulfillment of Klapp's final two criteria, "commemoration" and

"established cult" -- might depend on his death in an automobile accident or a plane crash.

Yet a quarter century later, after dying only in the metaphorical, show-business sense -- nothing new on the pop charts for a seven-year stretch beginning in 1974, and then nothing new on them since Patti LaBelle and Michael McDonald's No. 1 recording of "On My Own," in 1986 -- Bacharach has seen his name become synonymous with the craft of songwriting at its most elegant and imperiled. He is a cultural signifier -- far more meaningful than being the face on a posthumous postage stamp. Just as John Coltrane's name is dropped by black essayists and novelists to signify artistic commitment and racial pride, Bacharach's is pressed into service by pop-record reviewers to commend groups that at least recognize the value of good songs, even if they haven't figured out how to write any yet.

BACHARACH and David's hits, because they were pop rather than rock, were anomalies in their own day -- bridges across the generational divide, built by men born in the 1920s, whose musical sensibilities were formed before the onslaught of rock-and-roll. While competing for a rung on the Top 40 with Lennon and McCartney and with the Motown songwriting and producing team of Holland-Dozier-Holland, Bacharach and David were also competing for movie assignments with older writers such as Dimitri Tiomkin, Johnny Mercer, and Jimmy Van Heusen. ("Raindrops Keep Fallin' on My Head" was Bacharach and David's fourth song to be nominated for an Oscar, following their title songs for *What's New Pussycat?* and *Alfie* and "The Look of Love," from *Casino Royale*.)

Bacharach and David were also, however fleetingly, men of the theater. On her 1995 album *The Story Goes On*, the cabaret singer Liz Callaway includes a medley of "Promises, Promises" and "Knowing When to Leave," from Bacharach and David's only Broadway score (*Promises, Promises*), alongside songs from *Annie Get Your Gun*, *South Pacific*, and *Merrily We Roll Along*. The two Bacharach and David songs seem out of place in this company only because Callaway, with the overearnestness typical of so many younger cabaret performers, sounds as if she's mentally counting beats on them. Her rendition of "Promises, Promises" -- a song that starts off in a 3/4 time too fast and diabolically syncopated to be called a waltz and then changes meter twenty times, often after just one bar -- makes one yearn for Dionne Warwick, Bacharach and David's premier interpreter. On her hit 1968 recording of the song Warwick refused to be thrown by any of this rhythmic trickery, let alone by the many notes she was required to hold for a measure while the chords and instrumentation behind her shifted along with the rhythm.

Warwick appeared with Bacharach on cable television last New Year's Eve. American Movie Classics promoted their gala concert at the Rainbow Room (which had been

taped several weeks earlier) as an attempt to restore "elegance" and "glamour" to a New York New Year's Eve -- that is, as an alternative to Dick Clark and rock-and-roll in Times Square. Thus Bacharach was positioned as the new Guy Lombardo.

Yet Bacharach, in the language of marketing demographics, also "skews" young, and this is what I find surprising -- that with no apparent effort on his part he has become a figure of cult adulation among the young. A tip-off that Bacharach was again becoming at least a mini-phenomenon was the color poster of him as he looked thirty years ago, plainly visible on the lower left-hand corner of the booklet for *Definitely Maybe* (1994), the first CD by Oasis, a British group that has since become a favorite on college and alternative-rock stations. Noel Gallagher, the group's primary songwriter and lead guitarist, joined Bacharach on stage to sing "This Guy's in Love With You" during one of Bacharach's concerts in London last year.

Gallagher's own songs sound nothing like those of his reputed idol: they have too much guitar, and too much adolescent snarl. But his admiration for Bacharach seems genuine, in contrast to that of those younger musicians whose admiration for Bacharach takes the form of a postmodern smirk. Rumor has it that Green Day will record a version of "Do You Know the Way to San Jose" for a Hollywood Records collection called *Loungapalooza*, and no one will be surprised if the thunderous grunge band gives this catchiest of Bacharach's numbers a nose ring and a few unsightly tattoos.

Not all new bands are having sly fun. The most awkwardly sincere of recent tributes to Bacharach, and also the most ambitious, is *Great Jewish Music: Burt Bacharach*, a two-disc set produced by the avant-garde composer John Zorn for his own label, Tzadik Records, on which instrumentalists and singers from Zorn's inner circle of noisemakers and deconstructionists give what perhaps only they would consider to be reasonably faithful interpretations of Bacharach classics. "More than great pop songs," Zorn writes in his liner notes, "[these songs] are deep explorations of the materials of music and should be studied and treasured with as much care and diligence as we accord any great work of art." He might have added that it seems the peculiar fate of major artists to attract disciples they would be hard put to recognize as theirs.

THE title *Great Jewish Music* tells us more about Zorn, who now gives interviews only to the Jewish press, than it does about Bacharach, who has never made an issue of his religion or ethnicity. Still, the title serves to remind us that songwriting was a quick way up the ladder for the Jewish songwriters of Irving Berlin's generation -- Eastern European immigrants and their sons. Popular songwriting in the first few decades of this century was as much a business as an art, often dependent less on inspiration than on salesmanship. Berlin, if asked the secret of his success as he made the rounds of publishers along Tin Pan Alley in the early years of the century, might have given the same reply as a man in dry goods or the rag trade: "Volume!" The true secret was

writing all manner of songs and peddling them to all manner of singers, in the hope that a few tunes would capture the public's fancy.

Berlin wrote more great songs than any other American, but he also wrote hundreds that no one remembers. Bacharach and David, too, wrote their share of forgotten songs, beginning with two that actually made the Top 40 in 1957 and 1958 ("Magic Moments," recorded by Perry Como, and "The Story of My Life," recorded by the country singer Marty Robbins). Whatever else had changed about the music business, songwriting was still a hustle. Writers were the first workers on an assembly line that included music publishers, independent record producers, record-company directors of artists and repertoire, arrangers, singers, promotion men, and disc jockeys. Singers were considered interchangeable during this period, and so were songwriters. This system of making music hardly encouraged experimentation or originality, but it somehow produced a steady stream of songs that still sound great when you hear them on the radio.

Common wisdom has it that nothing of lasting value happened in pop between Elvis Presley's induction into the Army in 1958 and the Beatles' arrival in the United States in 1964. In conspiracy with other manic rockabilly and renegade rhythm-and-blues acts such as Little Richard and Chuck Berry, Presley is supposed to have "blackened" pop -- to have loosened both its beat and its restraints, giving voice to rude emotions that pop had never before been allowed to express. A few years later, the story goes, the Beatles and Bob Dylan came along and shut down the assembly line once and for all, reshaping pop into a vehicle for self-expression by performing their own songs. The period in between is supposed to have been dominated by innocuous pop idols mouthing (to the best of their limited abilities) words and melodies provided by hacks whose only incentive was a fat royalty check.

Of course, this isn't the way it seemed if, like me, you were a teenager with an ear glued to a transistor radio. Nor is it the way that pop of the early sixties sounds to me now, as a middle-aged adult. It isn't nostalgia that makes me think of the Shirelles' 1960 recording of Gerry Goffin and Carole King's "Will You Love Me Tomorrow" as a great record. It could be the way the song combines the identities of the young white woman who co-wrote it, the young black women who sang it, and that era's teenage girls, who fretted over the consequences of surrendering their virginity and for whom "Will You Love Me Tomorrow" became a sort of anthem.

During the first several years of their partnership Bacharach and David each continued to work with other collaborators, aiming songs at both the adult and the teen market with occasional commercial success but little artistic distinction. They seemed an unlikely bet to surpass not just Goffin and King but Lennon and McCartney, to be the leading songwriting team of their era. The song that is usually pointed to as their breakthrough is "Don't Make Me Over," the first of their numbers to be recorded by Dionne Warwick, in

1962. To that day's teenagers it was simply another "slow" song: a dreamy record of the sort that a TV dance-show host might designate a ladies' choice. In retrospect it seems one of the most innovative songs of the early sixties, if only for the way its meter fluctuates between 12/8 and 6/8 (each an uncommon time signature in pop) and for the way Bacharach's orchestration spaces Warwick and the background singers so far apart. It was followed the next year by "Anyone Who Had a Heart," an erotic chant with passages in 5/4 (a signature only then becoming popular in jazz, as a result of its use by Dave Brubeck and Paul Desmond), and the majestic "Walk on By," with its driving wood blocks, flügelhorns, and strings. These proved to be the earliest in a long string of hit recordings by Warwick of Bacharach and David songs which lasted into 1970, spanning what are usually defined as two eras of pop.

Warwick has since become a figure of fun, because of her infomercials for the Psychic Friends Network. As singers frequently do when age robs them of breath and plays havoc with their pitch, she cheated quite a bit in the Rainbow Room show with Bacharach. For example, she changed the legato connecting phrase she sang to such thrilling effect on her recording of "Do You Know the Way to San Jose" -- the ooh before "L.A. is a great big freeway" -- into a bumpy A-oh, A-oh; she didn't even chance "Promises, Promises." In her prime, though, Warwick was Aretha Franklin's only rival as the finest female pop singer of the 1960s, and she surpassed Franklin in versatility. Atypically for singers of the time, Warwick was a trained musician -- a music student who was part of a gospel group that was doing studio backup vocals when Bacharach and David happened upon her. She sounded as though she could sing anything put in front of her, and when Bacharach started writing for her, he began sprinkling his melodies with accidentals and descending intervals greater than a fifth.

Bacharach and David never worked exclusively with Warwick, and the series of hits they wrote for Gene Pitney in the early sixties demonstrates the ingenuity they brought to assignments that might just as easily have resulted in confectionary ballads and corny novelty tunes. The Bacharach and David song for Pitney that most people are likely to remember is "Only Love Can Break a Heart," a tearjerker in keeping with Pitney's image as the most sensitive of the day's male pinups -- the one in whose voice the ache seemed most genuine. A song more worth remembering is the follow-up: "True Love Never Runs Smooth," a full-blown chanson disguised as a cha-cha, with what sounds like an accordion and a zither (but could be a concertina and a bouzouki) lending an exotic air to the instrumentation. The title song from *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* may have represented an attempt by Pitney's managers to put some hair on his chest. Instead of dashing off a vague cowpoke narrative in the tradition of the famous theme from *High Noon* -- all that was really called for -- David encapsulated practically the entire movie in his lyric. Bacharach matched him in ambition, juxtaposing a country fiddler against a full string section and using rhythms evocative of square dances and horse clops to capture more than the required hint of the Old West.

"Twenty Four Hours From Tulsa," my choice as Bacharach and David's masterpiece for Pitney, was meant to give the singer another hit in the same vein. This time, in the absence of an actual movie, David had to invent a plot -- a southwestern noir about a man who succumbs to the charms of a beautiful stranger on his way home to his sweetheart. Bacharach's double-timed, out-of-phase mariachi trumpets give the song its nightmarish momentum: we half expect the singer and his new flame to go on a killing spree south of the border after the final diminuendo.

THE variety of Bacharach's songs just for Pitney should indicate that there is no such thing as a typical Bacharach song, despite the composer's many identifiable melodic traits. Bacharach has probably written more songs in triple meter than any other popular songwriter since Berlin: "What's New Pussycat?" is a waltz, and so is "What the World Needs Now Is Love." Bacharach's melodies are deceptively simple. Despite what the ear thinks it's hearing, they rarely change key; what often accounts for their oddity is Bacharach's refusal to modulate into an easier key where another songwriter might, in order to give the singer a break. Meter does change constantly in Bacharach's songs, and they gain even greater rhythmic complexity as a result of his fetish for a kind of syncopation more common in Stravinsky than in jazz and for eccentric note groupings like the sixteenth-note triplets that begin "Anyone Who Had a Heart." Writers of early feature stories on Bacharach marveled that his songs had achieved great popularity despite offering nothing that the man on the street could easily whistle. (This is the same poor fellow who is said to have problems with Stephen Sondheim.) A more justifiable complaint would have been about Bacharach's failure to give dancers much of a toehold: that teenagers of the early 1960s found a way to push each other across the floor to "Anyone Who Had a Heart" is a tribute to their youthful insouciance.

Many of the flourishes that one might think characterize Bacharach as a songwriter turn out on closer inspection to be evidence of his skills as an orchestrator. Bacharach himself might not see the point of such a distinction; he explained in a recent interview that writing a melody and determining which combinations of instruments go where is often virtually a one-step process for him. This may also explain why he has never seemed very interested in orchestrating other composers' songs. Early in his career Bacharach had a reputation for showing up in the studio when one of his songs was to be recorded and gradually taking over every detail of the production. When he and David began producing Warwick's albums, he sometimes entrusted to others the task of orchestrating and conducting those songs he hadn't written.

Tone color and voicing are as important to Bacharach as they were to Debussy and Ellington. He hears bells: triangle and chimes on "You'll Never Get to Heaven," vibes on "Alfie" and "Make It Easy on Yourself," glockenspiel on "A House Is Not a Home." We hear a poky trumpet or flügelhorn in many of his songs where in others of the era we would hear a honking tenor saxophone. Even when a tenor saxophone is featured, as on

Dusty Springfield's hit recording of "The Look of Love," from 1967, it is light and airy - consciously evocative of Stan Getz rather than of King Curtis, and set atop rhythms borrowed from Brazilian samba and bossa nova.

The best evidence of Bacharach's genius as an orchestrator might come from comparing Jonathan Tunick's orchestrations for Promises, Promises with Bacharach's orchestrations for Warwick of three songs from the show: "Knowing When to Leave," "I'll Never Fall in Love Again," and the title song. Tunick's orchestrations of Stephen Sondheim's scores have been of such high quality that often it's difficult to tell where one man's contribution ends and the other's begins. But Tunick's orchestrations for Promises, Promises on the long-out-of-print original-cast album are drab and colorless compared with Bacharach's for Warwick.

As a young man Bacharach studied with Darius Milhaud -- a fact duly noted in most early articles about him, as if to suggest that his greater technical sophistication gave him the edge over other pop songwriters of the early 1960s. I find it of greater relevance that before establishing a clear identity as a songwriter Bacharach served as music director for a number of singers and big-time entertainers, including Marlene Dietrich. "He's my accompanist, he's my arranger, and I wish I could say he's my composer, but that isn't true," Dietrich said about Bacharach, introducing him to her live audience on the album Dietrich in Rio. "He's everybody's composer." In addition to his formal training, Bacharach's wealth of practical experience set him apart from most of the other pop songwriters of the early 1960s. Like them, he was writing songs calculated to appeal to teenagers, which were usually recorded by singers not much older; unlike them, however, he also knew what it took to put a song across to adult nightclub audiences. Once given the opportunity to produce his own songs, he made dramatic use of this knowledge in the recording studio.

Phil Spector, the first pop record producer to be written about as an artist in his own right, was also the first to recognize the operatic scale of adolescent emotions, on such early-sixties records as the Ronettes' "Be My Baby" and the Righteous Brothers' "You've Lost That Lovin' Feeling," which featured Wagnerian orchestrations by Jack Nitzsche and Gene Page, respectively. Bacharach's writing for strings was more sophisticated than either Nitzsche's or Page's, and he took Spector's big sound and slowed it to an adult pace. The first Bacharach song to sound vaguely like a Bacharach song was "Make It Easy on Yourself," a 1962 hit for Jerry Butler, a Billy Eckstine-like baritone. All these years later what's remarkable about the song is how grown-up it sounds -- as much a reflection of Bacharach's elegant melodic line as of the stoicism conveyed by Butler's vocal and David's lyrics.

The unassuming David played a role even greater than Warwick's in Bacharach's success. Bacharach and David complemented each other: Bacharach's melodic phrases

often extended across several bar lines, and David often wrote uncommonly long, complex sentences. The team's movie title songs provide the best evidence of David's resourcefulness. It's no easy trick to craft an affecting lyric about love and separation around a song called "A House Is Not a Home," the title song from a movie about an aging madam and her stable. In 1966, the year Time devoted a cover to the New Theology and the question of whether God was dead, David put secular humanism on the hit parade.

As sure as I believe there's a heaven above, Alfie, I know there's something much more, Something even non-believers can believe in ...

David's lyrics were forever gazing heavenward; on "You'll Never Get to Heaven (If You Break My Heart)," Bacharach's beatific arpeggios created the impression that the number was written by a man who called heaven home.

Not surprisingly, Bacharach's fellow professionals were the first to recognize his genius. Early "cover" versions of his songs -- for example, Sandie Shaw's 1964 remake of "(There's) Always Something There to Remind Me," a song written and produced by Bacharach for Lou Johnson earlier the same year -- tended to copy his arrangements practically note for note, amounting to a sort of tribute. And when a performer took great liberties with a Bacharach song, as Aretha Franklin did in bringing gospel fervor to her 1968 interpretation of "I Say a Little Prayer" (produced by Jerry Wexler), it usually had the effect of drawing attention to a detail Bacharach had written into the song but chosen not to emphasize.

BACHARACH soon went from being a behind-the-scenes favorite to being a star -- an astonishing transformation at precisely the moment when assembly-line songwriters were being told that their services were no longer required. For a time Bacharach was as famous as any of the singers who put his songs on the charts. When Promises, Promises opened on Broadway, he eclipsed not only his nearly invisible lyricist but also the show's producer, David Merrick, and the author of its book, Neil Simon, neither of whom was ever accused of being a shrinking violet. People who would have been unable to say for sure who wrote "Raindrops Keep Fallin' on My Head" or "What the World Needs Now Is Love" knew Burt Bacharach by name, just as they might have known the name of Irving Berlin without being able to identify him as the composer of "White Christmas" and "Easter Parade." After a television commercial for a brand of vermouth in which Bacharach and Dickinson (best remembered as Sergeant Pepper Anderson in the TV series Police Woman) appeared together as themselves, people knew what Bacharach looked like -- more than could be said of Berlin even at the height of his fame. Bacharach was handsome in a tousle-haired, sleepy-eyed, long-jawed, blissed-out-genius sort of way. In the vermouth commercial Dickinson gazed at him as though ready to serenade him with the lines from "(They Long to Be) Close to You"



about angels getting together to create a dream come true.

Why Bacharach's moment ended so abruptly is difficult to explain, beyond observing that mass taste is unpredictable. Of possible significance is that he and David acrimoniously terminated their partnership after writing the songs for *Lost Horizon*, a lavish and unrelievedly sappy 1973 movie musical that brought them nothing but embarrassment. Much as Richard Rodgers's music changed for the worse when, after the death of the clever Larry Hart, he began writing with the sanctimonious Oscar Hammerstein, Bacharach's suffered when he began working with his third wife, the singer and lyricist Carole Bayer Sager. Three of their collaborations reached No. 1 during the 1980s, but of these only the poignant "That's What Friends Are For," recorded by Dionne and Friends in 1985, was instantly recognizable as Bacharach's. Originally sung by Rod Stewart in the 1982 movie *Night Shift* as just a song about friendship, the song has since become a fundraising tool in the fight against AIDS, with the proceeds from Warwick's recording going to the American Foundation for AIDS Research. This stirring anthem cemented Bacharach's reputation as our day's Irving Berlin.

More typical of the songs Bacharach wrote with Sager before they parted were "Arthur's Theme (Best That You Can Do)," from 1981 (written with Peter Allen and Christopher Cross and performed by Cross), and "On My Own," from 1986 -- plush, gold-card soul. Better Bacharach should have married Hal David, who never again reached the heights he scaled with Bacharach; one of his hits of the 1980s was the maudlin "To All the Girls I've Loved Before," recorded by Willie Nelson and Julio Iglesias. And many of Bacharach's later songs would have sounded livelier if the composer had been allowed to produce them.

BACHARACH'S resurgence has been as unexpected as his disappearance from the charts. Despite his not having written a new Top 40 song in more than a decade, his name and his music are suddenly everywhere. Earlier this spring *Promises, Promises* was performed in concert five times as part of the *Encores!* series at City Center in New York. The series is the same one that was responsible for the full-scale Broadway revival of *Chicago*, and there has been speculation that similar plans are in store for Bacharach's musical, especially given that the cast for the modest concert presentation included a name actor in Martin Short. (A breakthrough show in its own time, for merging traditional Broadway song forms with contemporary pop rhythms, *Promises, Promises* has always seemed to me to have been the secret inspiration for Sondheim's *Company*.) One of last year's offerings Off Broadway was Tim Pinckney's *Message to Michael*, a show about New York's gay dating scene that, although "laced with references to Barbra Streisand and [Stephen Sondheim]," according to *The New York Times*, took its title from a Bacharach and David hit for Dionne Warwick. Also last year Warwick's recording of Bacharach and David's "Wives and Lovers" was featured in the hit movie

The First Wives Club, and Harry Connick Jr. sang "This Guy's in Love With You" on the soundtrack of *One Fine Day*, a romantic comedy starring Michelle Pfeiffer and George Clooney. *Grace of My Heart*, a movie set largely in the pop-music world of the early 1960s, featured as its take-home song -- the number heard over the closing credits and leading off the soundtrack album -- a gorgeous new song called "God Give Me Strength," written by Bacharach with the singer Elvis Costello.

The pianist McCoy Tyner and the arranger John Clayton turned nine of Bacharach's classic songs into gauzy mood music on Tyner's recent *The Music of Burt Bacharach* (Impulse!): this disc is significant only for being, to the best of my knowledge, the first album of jazz interpretations of Bacharach songs since Stan Getz's *What the World Needs Now*, in 1967. *The Look of Love*, a British compilation of hit versions of Bacharach songs, last year entered the UK charts at No. 6, selling 60,000 copies within two months of its release. (I'm told that Bacharach's soundtrack for the 1967 movie *Casino Royale* is one of the out-of-print LPs most sought after by audiophiles, even though it has been reissued on CD; vinyl is said to capture better the sensuality of Dusty Springfield's rendition of "The Look of Love.") Early next year Rhino Records plans to release a far more ambitious three-disc Bacharach retrospective, featuring obscurities as well as classics. And just last month, as part of its Great Performances series, PBS broadcast a British-produced documentary called *Burt Bacharach: This Is Now*.

Even Bacharach's pompous long-form instrumental versions of his songs have found their champions, not just among the musicians who participated on Zorn's tribute album but also among fans of what is variously called "cocktail," "bachelor pad," and "E-Z listening" -- those strange young record collectors with an overdeveloped (or underdeveloped?) sense of kitsch, wardrobes of Rat Pack leisurewear like Kramer's on *Seinfeld*, no girlfriends, and too many good albums in their collections already.

Bacharach now enjoys a hip cachet he never enjoyed when a new song of his was practically guaranteed a spot on the Top 10. In its own day a song like "(They Long to Be) Close to You" -- best remembered as a No. 1 hit by the Carpenters in 1970 (though it was first recorded by Richard Chamberlain, TV's *Dr. Kildare*, seven years earlier) -- could be dismissed as a sticky favorite of slightly out-of-it young people who grew their hair long but continued to have it styled. Bacharach's songs gave off a scent of Cashmere Bouquet at a time when most songs on the radio, including those sung as well as written by Carole King, smelled of patchouli. Amid the political protest and guitar sputter of that day's music, craftsmanship of the sort Bacharach epitomized was taken as a sign of inauthenticity.

POP songs that endure for decades often do so by discarding their original meanings, or by acquiring new ones. Karen Carpenter's voice means something very different to us now from what it did in 1970, in light of her death from anorexia. We can now

appreciate her for what she was -- a pretty young woman who had a poor self-image and a better sense of rhythm than the white female singers of her day who foolishly thought that growling lyrics and pushing hard on the beat would make them sound black.

Bacharach's songs now mean something different too, as a result of belonging to the past without seeming to belong to a specific era. People in their twenties or early thirties, to whom Gershwin and Porter must seem as ancient and remote as the Greek gods, might not be old enough to have heard "The Look of Love" and "This Guy's in Love With You" on radio the first time around, but it means something to them that these are songs in the classic manner that were written in their own lifetime, or close enough. (A friend of mine who just turned thirty says that one of her earliest memories is of her divorced mother singing her and her brother to sleep at night with "I'll Never Fall in Love Again.") Unlike the hits of Motown and the Beatles, which will forever conjure up images of the sixties, Bacharach's hit songs of twenty-five or thirty years ago strike younger people as having always been there.

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