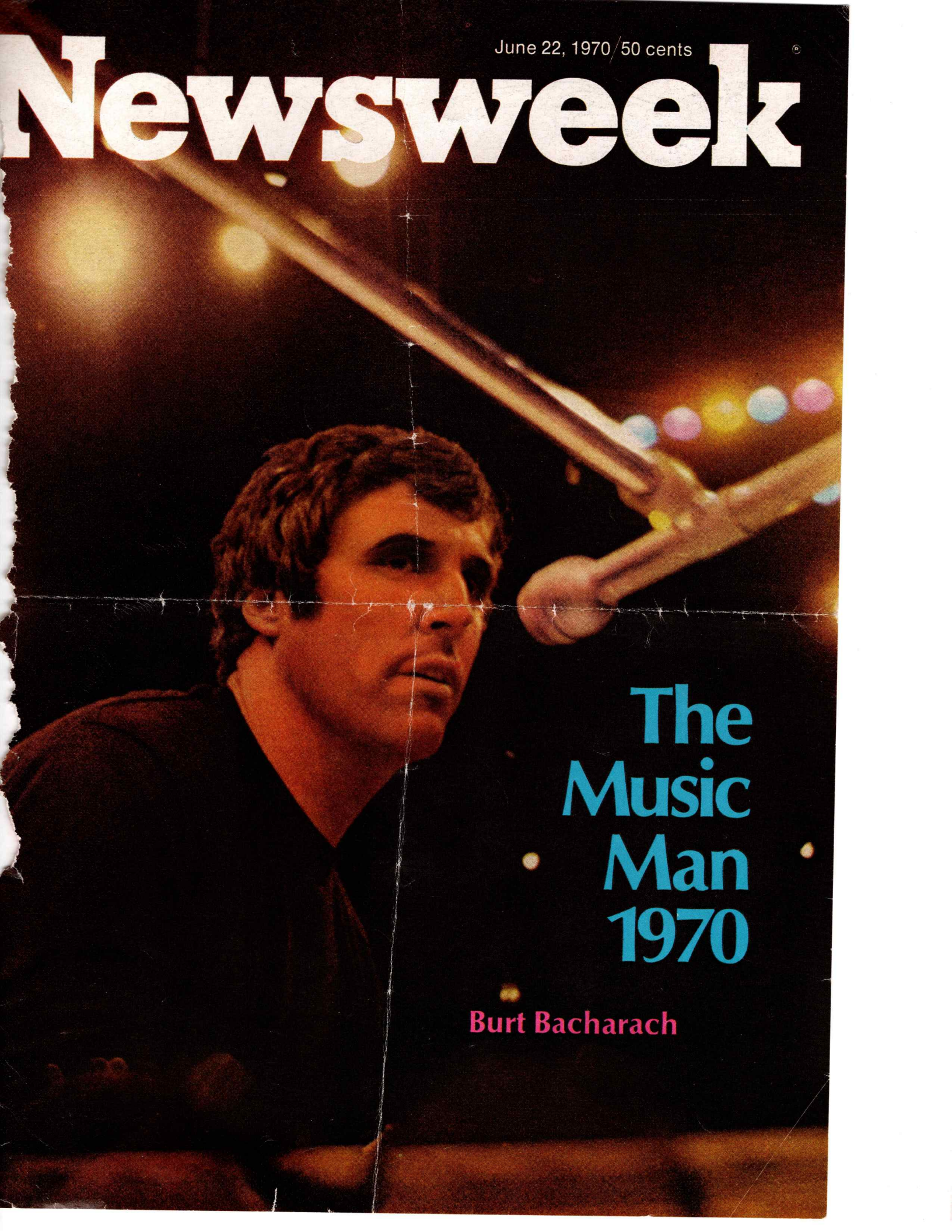


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Newsweek



The Music Man 1970

Burt Bacharach

BURT BACHARACH THE MUSIC MAN 1970

Burt Bacharach is the prince of popular music. He's the latest in a distinguished line of American popular composers which includes Irving Berlin, George Gershwin, Cole Porter—a line that goes back to Stephen Foster and beyond. At 40, Bacharach has chalked up an impressive string of hits, including "Walk On By," "What the World Needs Now Is Love" and "Alfie," each of which has been recorded by hundreds of artists.

He won two Academy Awards this year, for scoring "Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid" and for the movie's song, "Raindrops Keep Fallin' on My Head," which has sold 3 million copies in the original B.J. Thomas recording and, more astoundingly, has sold almost a million copies of sheet music in an era when a big sale is 150,000.

Not only is Bacharach talented and rich beyond the dreams of avarice, he has a shy, winning manner to go with his princely good looks (lyricist Sammy Cahn says he's the only composer who doesn't look like a dentist). He has come out from behind the usual facelessness of composers to become a performer on his own. This week, in fact, he is starring in his second "Kraft Music Hall" television show. And late last month he gave a series of live concerts at the Westbury Music Fair before sold-out, enraptured houses. David Merrick, producer of the Broadway hit "Promises, Promises," which was Bacharach's first musical comedy, says, "Burt has turned out to be a sex symbol. He's probably the biggest instant success since Barbra Streisand."

The essential Bacharach was in evidence at Westbury. The lights dimmed, the drums rolled, a messianic voice cried, "Ladies and Gentlemen, MISTER BURT BACHARACH." Down one of the aisles in the theater-in-the-round sauntered a jaunty Bacharach, grinning broadly as if to say, "I'm as surprised to see me here like this as you are," pausing to shake hands along the aisle with well-wishers, most of whom he insists are cousins. He was raised not too far from Westbury, N.Y.

Centering himself onstage, alongside two pianos (one electric) surrounded by 30 musicians and four girl singers, he led an hour and a half of his own music—suites, medleys and solos of a whole series of hits written with lyricist Hal David: such songs as "I'll Never Fall in Love Again," "The Look of Love," "This Guy's in Love With You," "Do You Know the Way to San Jose" and "Anyone Who Had a Heart." He has a calisthenically

emotional style of conducting that involves doing simultaneous knee bends at the pianos, swiveling to fire musical directions at the different sections of the band, using his hands like karate chopppers, generating an excitement among the musicians and—especially when he sang a little—among the audience.

"I mean, to get the emotion, it has to be generated by somebody," said a perspiration-drenched Bacharach afterward. "I'm not trying to prove anything as a conductor. Or as a pianist. Technically, I'm probably rotten at both. But it's heartfelt, it's honest. It's my music. I've got a feeling, you know, I'm not just beating time. I'm free and I don't care what I look like."

Significant at Westbury was the fact that the youthful Bacharach has already composed enough marvelous songs for an entire evening's entertainment and that his audience was a cross section from 8 to 80. Recently he received a letter from a young girl in a Catholic school asking him to write a school yell for her. "What would take me two weeks will take you only five minutes," she wrote. "P.S. The nuns dig you too."

The tradition of popular song in America is distinctive because the musical mainstream was fed from the ethnic melting pot, chiefly, of course, by Negro music. The songs of Berlin, Gershwin, Porter, Jerome Kern and Richard Rodgers in their own way refracted the time in which they were written. Bacharach's music is as much the '70s as Cole Porter's and George Gershwin's was the '20s and '30s. It pulsates restlessly, charges up and down the scale recklessly, rouses itself from a dying fall into an atomic explosion. The dynamics of "Walk On By" range from a double pianissimo to a triple forte.

It's a lopsided kind of music, full of surprises which keep it fresh and vital and keep the listener off-balance. More than anything, it's alive, with an inner tension, a restrained energy that is intensely dramatic. Even a cantering song such as "Raindrops" seethes with tension; each downbeat is restrained violence and the loping meter is like the gait of a horse ready to gather its bulging muscles and surge over some high fence.

Bacharach's remarkable record of hits is all the more astonishing in view of the fragmented universe of contemporary pop music. None of his illustrious predecessors had to contend with a youth culture concentrated in hard rock and



Newsweek—Bernard Gotfryd

Bacharach rehearsing at Westbury: 'I've got a feeling . . . I'm not just beating time'

with large separate audiences on one hand for rhythm and blues and on the other for country and Western.

"Times change," says Irving Berlin, "not music." But Hoagy Carmichael, composer of "Star Dust," played a new song in California last week and said, "I'll bet you anything nobody will ever record it."

"It was simpler when Berlin was at his height," says Richard Rodgers. "Songs were so beautifully simple. I don't think Burt Bacharach would have been possible in the '30s. He's not interested in the 32-bar form or in 8-bar phrases. And I think it's healthy."

Bacharach has flourished brilliantly by breaking most of the accepted rules, beginning with the cardinal principle that the melody must be accessible to the man in the street. Except for professionals, few people can sing or whistle Bacharach. Everyone can begin "Alfie," but who can go on to the second line? Or who can reproduce the last line of "I'll Never Fall in Love Again" (the hit tune from "Promises, Promises") with its provocative and tantalizing switches between a 4/4 rhythm to a 2/4 rhythm.

Bacharach's musical pulse fibrillates constantly, as in the multiple time changes of "Don't Make Me Over," or the perversely accented lyrics in "Do You Know the Way to San Jose." "When I first started to write," says Bacharach, "the A&R man would say, 'Oh, they'll never be able to dance to it.' And because A&R men were like second lieutenants I listened and ruined some good songs. What I've found is that if it's a good tune people will find a way to move to it."

Bacharach's songs are performers' songs—and not every performer can do them. "You've practically got to be a music major to sing Bacharach," says Dionne Warwick, who was a music major at Hartt College in West Hartford, Conn., when Bacharach discovered her in 1962. Perry Como, who recorded Bacharach's first hit, "Magic Moments," in 1957, says, "'Raindrops' is a helluva tune. You don't quite know what you're doing. Bacharach

thinks wild. But it's premeditated." Polly Bergen, with whom Bacharach first worked fifteen years ago, says, "I did 'A House Is Not a Home' recently—a great song. But I never did find the timing. I made them write it so I could end up with the band—regardless of how I got lost along the way, and did I ever."

"I've never deliberately set out to break any rules," said Bacharach recently, lazing in the spring sun beside the pool at his rented Beverly Hills house where he lives with his wife, actress Angie Dickinson, and their 4-year-old daughter, Nikki. "I look back at songs and wish I could have simplified them. It's not done to be clever. You've got less than two minutes in a song and you want every second to count. Forget rules. Just listen and feel. My trouble is that these so-called abnormalities seem conventional and normal to me."

Bacharach reacts to today's changing musical scene like a hungry lion. "When rock 'n' roll happened," he says, "the authorities, the second lieutenants, missed it, the way I missed 'Hair'—I didn't get it until the sixth hearing. The teen-agers had better taste. They were right about their music, about its beat and validity. In ten years, how the Beatles, and others, have kept growing."

To make an unmistakable sound all his own, Bacharach has assimilated the sounds and rhythms of his time in his music: the electronic wave, the rock beat, the tempos of Brazil, the electricity of rhythm and blues, the fervor of gospel ("I put *that* there," says Dionne Warwick). The Bacharach sound is hard rather than soft, more physical than emotional, more body than heart. It makes you want to dance, not sing.

Bacharach is a new breed in more than musical form. For him the song is only the first step. "I get a greater kick out of making the record," he says. For him the record is the song and the ultimate goal. "You can have a hell of a song," he says, "and have it spoiled by a bad arrangement or production. Because of the competition today and the enor-

mous influence of the record industry, you need the right showcase for a song."

The classically trained Bacharach not only composes the song but orchestrates it, conducts the recording session, oversees the mixing of tapes and has even gone so far as to recall a record—"Raindrops"—after it was already pressed, because he was disappointed in it. Twentieth Century-Fox, about to release the movie, put up flak. But Bacharach, who was in England, was firm. "For me, if it's off a per cent and a half, that looms large. It's my life. And I felt the beginning was too fast." He flew back to New York, dug out some of the previous tapes he remembered liking and spliced number five—actually a monaural take—onto the original master.

A Bacharach record, stamped from beginning to end with his style and vision, begins with the song's composition. "I usually know I've got something if I can't sleep," he says. "It's a healthy sign even if I'm exhausted in the morning. What I hear is pure melody, no beat. I never write at the piano. You want to get free of your hands—they'll go to the familiar, trap you in the pretty chords. I never even orchestrate at the piano except to check. The better you are as a pianist the easier you're trapped. It's lucky I'm not so good."

He and lyricist Hal David have been working together since 1957. Except in a song such as "Alfie," in which the lyrics had to come first because of the movie, there's no pattern to their collaboration. It may be a title, a line of David's, a snatch of melody, a complete stanza, an idea. "The key to Hal," says Bacharach, "is his flexibility. He's a terribly nice guy. When he writes 'What the world needs now is love, sweet love,' he believes it. He's kind and gentle, which is important when you have to stay in a room with him all day. Of course he smokes a lot," adds Bacharach, who can't abide tobacco odors. "But I remember when he stopped smoking once for about three months—his whole personality changed. I was



Howard Bingham

Life in syncopated tempo: With Angie and Nikki



With Hal David

glad when he started again." "He never looks for an edge," says the 49-year-old David about his partner. "So we don't wind up telling each other what we don't believe and don't want to hear. The air—except for my smoking—is always clear."

For Bacharach, the painful process in producing the record is the orchestration. Despite his good intentions, he never seems to start writing until the messenger is sitting there waiting to collect the parts and get them copied. "It's a question of what you hear," he says. "What's going to fit, in the rhythm section, on the second and fourth beat—not how can you show everybody what great orchestrations you write. It's a god-dam crossword puzzle and what I keep is what I think will help the song and free the singer. Of course, if the song isn't there, you're not going to disguise it with beautiful strings."

What Bacharach calls the moment of truth came in the recording studio on an evening not long ago in the A&M Records studio in New York. Along with Bacharach and David were sound engineer Phil Ramone, Bacharach's second pair of ears, four girl singers, and 30 musicians led by the rhythm section whose nucleus is drummer Gary Chester, bassist Russ Savakus and guitarist Bill Suyker. And, of course, the star, Dionne Warwick, ready to record "Paper Maché" (to be released this week), "Let Me Go to Him" and "I'll Never Fall in Love Again."

"I feel," said Bacharach, "as if my whole life stands or falls at this moment. It's really a great challenge, with the musicians, some of whom have played sessions earlier that day, some of whom have colds, and Dionne who has to be hot. A lot of records are made piecemeal, great records too, with the rhythm section on one track and the singer two months later in another country on another track. But I prefer it live, like a crap game, with everyone hearing everyone else at the same time."

As it turned out, it was Dionne who was sick but uncomplaining even when the compulsive Bacharach held up the session for twenty minutes trying to get a subtle hollow sound only he could hear from the marimba. "Honey, you're the

heroine of the century," he said to her as she sipped tea for her sore throat.

He started each song by playing it through on the piano. Only Dionne had seen the song before. One man sat in the back reading *Yachting* magazine and Burt glanced up but didn't speak and the man put the magazine down. Every four or five takes, Burt repaired to the control room and listened with his eyes closed. "I don't want to be distracted," he says. "I want the sound low, I want it monaural, I don't want to dupe myself or let anybody talk me into anything."

Bacharach drove himself and the musicians relentlessly. "He's possessed," says Russ Savakus, "and a little of each man's flesh is left in the session." Dionne Warwick notes, "It's uncanny how the musicians absolutely adore him." Occasionally one, like Gary Chester, who has played for Bacharach for fourteen years, might say something like, "This feels a little left-handed," and Bacharach might let him try it his way. "We're all extensions of him," says Chester. "Mostly the problem is to find out how to do it his way."

He finally seemed satisfied with "I'll Never Fall in Love Again" after about fifteen takes. "Sensational," he grinned. "It really kills me. Let's do it one more time," bringing forth a mixture of laughter and catcalls. They were used to his perfectionism. "If it doesn't work, I've only myself to blame," he says.

Throughout the driving session he seemed never to take his eyes off Dionne. "We got a tremendous thing going between us," he says. "There's a great kind of love transmitted, a happiness, she's the thing that makes everything lighter." He discovered her when she was a background singer. "She had pig-tails and dirty white sneakers," he recalls, "and she just shone, as she shines now. Our first record was 'Don't Make Me Over'—she had to sing an octave and a sixth and did it with her eyes closed."

Dionne has recorded all of the 192 songs Bacharach and David have written and sold 12.5 million singles. "His music is my college degree," she says. "He's fiercely loyal to anybody and anything he loves. He's a groovy cat."

At the last Westbury concert, Bacharach, exceptionally close to his parents,

introduced his mother and walked over and kissed her. She was responsible for his taking piano lessons. It was lucky because he also tried drumming. "I couldn't keep time to the radio," he says of those days growing up in Forest Hills, N.Y., where he was the smallest boy in the high school. "I was also a cellist," he says. "It was a rented cello. They even gave me a bow. The whole outfit."

What he really liked at 15 was Dizzy Gillespie and Harry James. Once in a bus on his way to a piano lesson in Manhattan he was whistling and the young man seated next to him said, "Is that 'The Two O'Clock Jump'?" He was a musician too, it turned out, named Leonard Bernstein. "I never heard of you," said Burt. And when he got off at his stop he said, "So long, Lenny, see you at the top."

During that summer just after the war he was selected to go on a USO tour of Army hospitals, playing boogie-woogie piano. "The first place was in Martinsburg, W. Va., a special hospital for plastic surgery, for guys with their faces shot off. It was my first time away from home and my mother let me take off my braces for the tour. When I came back I wouldn't put them back on."

The next summer he got a quintet together, whose members included Eddie Shaughnessy, currently a drummer with the "Tonight" show band, to play at a hotel in the Catskills. They slept across the road from the hotel on five cots in a converted chicken shack. They were getting \$200 a week, most of which went to Shaughnessy, who was taking care of his mother. Business was bad and the manager kept cutting their salary. Eventually they were down to \$40 a week, which went to Shaughnessy's mother. "We couldn't go home," says Burt. "The city meant polio in those days. We were like prisoners. One morning we woke up to fire engines. The hotel had burned down. We cheered."

Bacharach spent three years studying music seriously at McGill University in Montreal, going out in the summer to Tanglewood and to Santa Barbara to study composition with Darius Milhaud. His ambition to become a serious com-



With Oscar

Howard Bingham



With Dionne Warwick

Ron Galella



With Marlene Dietrich

poser wavered during his two years in the Army and when he got out he became the accompanist for a series of performers including Vic Damone, the Ames Brothers and, memorably, Polly Bergen. They worked together on a ship that cruised nightly between Washington and Baltimore. "I had a terrific crush on her," Burt says. Polly recalls, "What an accompanist. He knew when I was going to breathe before I did."

It was seeing the songs offered to the Ames Brothers that turned Bacharach to writing his own. "I figured they were so simple I could turn out four a day. I got an office in the Brill Building in New York and my songs sounded as if I turned out ten a day. It's not so easy to write a simple song. I worked there every day for ten months and never got a song published. I've got a lot of friends there still, but I can't go into that building. Never."

At night Bacharach moonlighted, playing piano for Georgia Gibbs, for Joel Grey and for Steve Lawrence. Because he loves sports, in 1957 he went on a tour of Army bases in North Africa with the Harlem Globetrotters. "I brought my sneakers," says Bacharach, "because I hoped that Abe Saperstein, the owner, would let me into at least one game. Saperstein used to say to me, 'Bacharach, I may have you suit up tonight,' and I'd say, 'Just one jump shot, Abe, please.' It never happened."

From 1958 to 1961, long before Bacharach became famous as a composer, he was the pianist and conductor and arranger for Marlene Dietrich, and her career blossomed into a beautiful Indian summer. "She's the most generous and giving woman I know," he says. "If I had a cold she'd swamp me with vitamin C. She once pulverized six steaks for their juice to give me energy. She used to wash my shirts. On the first day I met her, I played a song of mine called 'Warm and Tender' and she went to the phone and called Frank Sinatra, who wasn't too interested. 'You'll be sorry,' she told him. 'You'll ask him to write for you one day.' Has he? 'Yes.'"

Dietrich says, "He used to tell me, just relax and sit back and let the notes come.

When you know he is looking after you, you can sit back." For a long time after he returned to songwriting, Burt would drop everything to fly to Dietrich in Copenhagen or London and prepare the musicians for her concerts. At the end of a London concert she said, "I can't love him any more than I love him now. He's my teacher, he's my critic, he's my accompanist, he's my arranger, he's my conductor, and I wish I could say he is my composer, but that isn't true. He's everybody's composer."

Being everybody's composer has made Bacharach an outrageously wealthy man. He's wealthy enough to afford a racing stable, whose most recent acquisition, his sixth, a filly called Lalellah, cost \$37,000. It costs him \$10,000 a year to maintain each horse. He has a music publishing house valued at around \$2 million. He gets \$35,000 a week for concerts alone, plus half the publishing rights to his movie scores. His 8 per cent share on his own records for A&M so far amounts to \$640,000. Scepter Records, which records both Dionne Warwick and B.J. Thomas, pays him and Hal David more than \$1.5 million a year. He has also earned 2 per cent of the \$8 million gross from Broadway's "Promises, Promises," as well as a sizable sum from the five other companies in the U.S. and abroad.

All the money he makes goes to his business manager, who has bought him two restaurants, the Dover House and Rothmann's on Long Island, a car-washing service in New Jersey, and 500 head of cattle and a lot of real estate in Georgia. Burt gets an allowance which he can spend in any way he wants. And free meals in the restaurants.

"Money means freedom to work on what I want," says Bacharach. "And how I want." If he didn't have so much money he would probably be less of a perfectionist. Personally, he's soft-spoken, quick to laugh, warm toward people. Professionally, he's a charioteer who considers himself and musicians as horses. His pulsating, driving, explosive music is his own reflection, his restlessness and his insistent search for new challenges that somehow will satisfy his impatience.

"Promises, Promises" was just such a challenge. Burt remembers composer

Jule Styne saying that you haven't done anything until you've written a Broadway show. Producer David Merrick says, "I've known composers who wrote a hundred songs to get fifteen numbers." In Burt's case all but two of his songs were used. One of them was written to order in Boston the day after Burt got out of the hospital where he had had pneumonia. He and David wrote it in a day and it went into the show the following night. It was "I'll Never Fall in Love Again." Burt has words of advice to musical-comedy writers: "Don't get pneumonia on the road."

Bacharach approached "Promises" with the idea of turning the theater into a record studio, using Phil Ramone, putting seventeen microphones and four girl singers in the pit and speakers all over the theater. "Six days after it opened," he says, "I couldn't listen to it without breaking into a cold sweat at the distorted sound and the speeded-up tempos. That was a year and a half out of my life."

Along with supervising new companies of "Promises, Promises," weighing offers of film scoring, doing TV shows, and writing new songs with Hal David, Bacharach has in the last six months embarked on a whole new challenge of public concerts. "We're exposed, naked, like in a fishbowl," he says. "The music can be damned difficult but you can't stop as if it were a studio. It's a competition, with one chance to win, and what you win is the live audience, to make them really listen and care about the music."

Bacharach sings a couple of songs in the course of the concert. "I don't have as much difficulty in listening to myself as I used to," he says. "They say nobody can sing a song like its composer. That's probably why I shouldn't sing at all. I sing on my records—a little. A deejay called me to say, 'I love the album but why did you have to sing?' Actually he sings well and with great effect. Nobody can sing a song like its composer."

The audiences apparently think so. He's besieged by autograph seekers. "This kind of acclaim is new to me," he says. "And I wouldn't be human if I didn't like it." His wife, Angie, says, "He's surprised that he likes performing and



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MUSIC

the applause. It's different for the rest of us. We work for fame, to be public personalities. He works to write great songs, not be the one they scream for."

She admits that his latest venture puts a strain on their marriage. "I'm a day person and so is our Nikki. I don't think I could be married to a nightclub performer. Anyway, I think that if the dent in his creative life gets any deeper he'll give everything else up. He knows what's important. I think that one proof of how good our marriage is, is that he hasn't stopped writing good songs. The reason it's good is probably separate bathrooms."

Bacharach is acutely conscious of the syncopated tempo of his life. "I'm more highly strung than I was," he says. "You have to pay a price for being what you are. If I could put my head down at night, go to sleep like everyone else, I wouldn't write the music I do. The trouble with being busy is that you either neglect and thus hurt people—or yourself by trying not to hurt them."

Horseracing is his great escape valve. He was inconsolable last week when his horse, Nikki's Promise, finished third at Hollywood Park. "My misfortune," says Bacharach, "was to have my first horse, Battle Royal, win my first race. I had the No. 1 and No. 4 songs in the country and they didn't compare with that feeling. I like the people too, like Bill Shoemaker and my trainer, Charley Whittingham. They don't talk about the movie they just lost or the record that was a smash in Chicago. It's a no-crap world." Trainer Whittingham says, "Burt and I have an agreement. As long as I don't write songs, he won't train horses."

"Sure I do too much," says Bacharach. "You've got to do it all, you've only one chance. How long are you going to live, stay healthy, keep your mind sharp, your body strong? I'm an impatient man. I go one month at a time. That's why Angie and I rent the house. I couldn't wait for one to get built. That's why I don't own a yearling. I can't wait for it to grow into a racehorse."

But there are moments when he gets fed up with his harried life. In a rare moment of introspection, he said, "Maybe work is a private little torture chamber you inflict on yourself to shut out the world. Sometimes I have this fantasy that I'll just stop, go into one of the restaurants, greet the people, play the piano a bit and go to the track every day. A man's a fool if success is more than trying to forget the day that just passed. Happiness is a question of percentages. You're lucky to get a 50-50 split."

"I know it's time for me not to be a public person. I just turned down both Dick Cavett and David Frost. There's writing to do. I have to record Dionne in a week and a half. I've got to get up in the morning, have a cup of coffee and write music. Or improvise, or make contact, touch music. Touch it."

—HUBERT SAAL

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