

A toe-tapping succession of marvelous hit songs has made him the most popular of popular composers

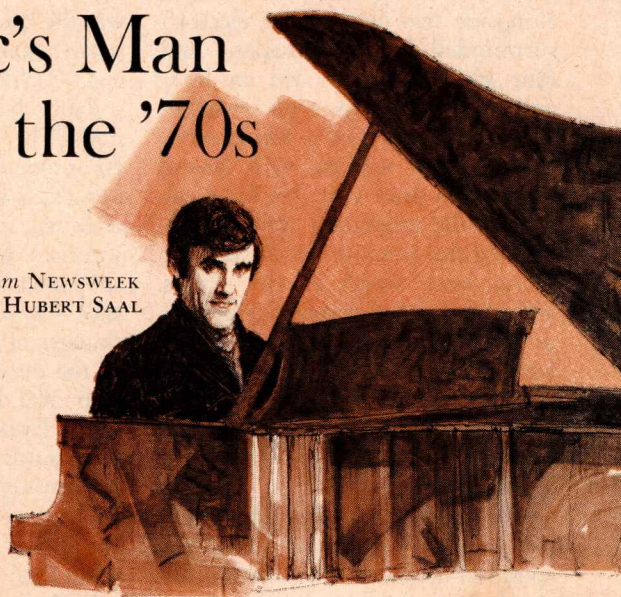
BURT BACHARACH is the reigning prince of popular music. He's the latest in a distinguished line of American composers which includes Irving Berlin, George Gershwin, Jerome Kern, Cole Porter and Richard Rodgers—a line that goes back as far as Stephen Foster. Bacharach has chalked up an impressive string 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."

Not only is the 42-year-old Bacharach talented and rich beyond the dreams of avarice; he has a shy, winning manner to go with his princely good looks. He has come out from behind the usual faceless-

Burt Bacharach Is Music's Man for the '70s

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HUBERT SAAL



ness of composers to become a performer on his own. He has starred on television's "Kraft Music Hall," and last May he gave a series of live concerts at New York's Westbury Music Fair before sold-out 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. Down one of the aisles in the theater-in-the-round sauntered a jaunty Burt, grinning broadly as if to say, "I'm as surprised to see me here as you are." 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 a whole series of hit songs written with lyricist Hal David since 1957. He has a calisthenically emotional style of conducting that involves simultaneously doing knee bends at the pianos, swiveling to fire musical directions at the different sections of the band, using his hands like karate choppers, generating an excitement among the musicians and—especially when he sang a little—among the audience.

"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. 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 enraptured 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."

Bacharach's music is as much the 1970s as Porter's and 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, intensely dramatic, full of surprises which keep it fresh and alive and keep the listener off-balance—as with the multiple time changes of "Don't Make Me Over," or the perversely accented lyrics in "Do You Know the Way to San Jose." Even a cantering song such as "Raindrops" seethes with an inner tension; its loping meter is like the gait of a horse ready to gather its bulging muscles and surge over some high fence.

Bacharach has flourished brilliantly by breaking most of the ac-

cepted rules, beginning with the cardinal principle that the melody must be accessible to the man in the street. Everyone can begin "Alfie," but who can go on to the second line? 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 star vocalist Dionne Warwick, who was a music major at Hartt College in West Hartford, Conn., when Bacharach discovered her in 1962. "His music is my college degree."

"I've never deliberately set out to break any rules," said Bacharach recently, lazing in the sun beside the pool at his rented Beverly Hills house, where he lives with his wife, actress Angie Dickinson, and their four-year-old daughter, Nikki. "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 missed it. The teen-agers had better taste. They were right about their music, about its beat and validity." He assimilates all 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. The result is a sound unmistakably his own—hard rather than soft, more physical than emotional, more body than heart. It makes you want to dance, not sing.

"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. The better pianist you are the easier you're trapped. It's lucky I'm not so good."

For the classically trained Bacharach, the song is only the first step. "I get a greater kick out of making the record," he says. He orchestrates his own songs, conducts, oversees the mixing of tapes and has even gone so far as to recall a record—"Raindrops"—after it was already pressed. Feeling "the beginning was too fast," he flew from London to New York, dug out some of the previous tapes he remembered liking and spliced one onto the original master.

Bacharach calls the recording session the moment of truth. "I feel," he says, "as if my whole life stands or falls at this moment. If it doesn't work, I've only myself to blame." He drives himself and the musicians relentlessly. "He's possessed," comments bassist Russ Savakus, "and a little of each man's flesh is left in the session." After 15 takes he may seem satisfied. "Sensational," he'll grin. "It really kills me. Let's do it one more time," bringing forth a mixture of laughter and catcalls.

"It's uncanny how the musicians absolutely adore him," notes Dionne Warwick, who has recorded most of

Davis



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the 192 songs Bacharach and David have written (and sold 12.5 million singles). "He's fiercely loyal to anybody and anything he loves."

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. He later spent three years studying music at McGill University in Montreal, going in the summer to Tanglewood and to Santa Barbara to study composition with Darius Milhaud. His ambition to become a serious composer wavered during his two years in the Army, however, and when he got out he became the accompanist for a series of performers including Vic Damone, the Ames Brothers and Polly Bergen.

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 worked every day for ten months and never got a song published." So he moonlighted, playing piano for Georgia Gibbs, Joel Grey and Steve Lawrence. From 1958 to 1961, long before he became famous as a composer, he was the accompanist for Marlene Dietrich, and her career blossomed into a beautiful Indian summer. On the day he met her he played

a song of his, and she called Frank Sinatra, who wasn't interested. "You'll be sorry," she said. "You'll ask him to write for you one day." Has he? "Yes," says Bacharach.

Being, as Miss Dietrich puts it, "everybody's composer" has now made Bacharach an outrageously wealthy man, able to afford a six-horse racing stable, two restaurants, a car-washing service, 500 head of cattle and a lot of real estate. "Money means freedom to work on what I want," he says. "And how I want." If he didn't have so much money he would probably be less of a compulsive perfectionist.

Personally, he is soft-spoken, quick to laugh, warm toward people. Professionally, he is a charioteer who considers his musicians as horses. His pulsating, driving, explosive music is his own reflection, his restlessness and his insistent search for new challenges that some-

how will satisfy his impatience.

Bacharach is acutely conscious of the syncopated tempo of his life. "Sure, I do too much," he admits. "You've got to do it all, you've only one chance. I'm an impatient man. That's why I don't own a yearling. I can't wait for it to grow into a racehorse."

Along with supervising new companies of *Promises, Promises*, weighing offers of film scoring, doing TV shows and writing songs, Bacharach has the new challenge of public concerts. 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, responds, "He's surprised that he likes performing and the applause. But he works to write great songs, not to be the one they scream for. If the dent in his creative life gets any deeper he'll give everything else up. He knows what's important."



Beyond Belief

MY MOTHER, a peppy 79-year-old, was going over the ages of her daughters for her grandson: "Your mom's 58, Aunt Win's 53, Rachel's 50 and Gin's 48." She paused, then queried in amazement, "Am I the mother of all those old women?"

—Contributed by Virginia Williams



Answers to "A Diabolical Quiz" (page 167). Be ready to get mad. The answers are: 1. b; 2. a; 3. b; 4. a; 5. a; 6. b; 7. a; 8. a; 9. a; 10. a. That's right. In every case, the answer is the "obvious" one. Thus, Chicago is closer to New York than San Juan is; President Roosevelt *was* elected to four successive terms, etc. Your *knowledge* was not really being tested. It was your *conviction*, your ability to stick with what you believe is true. If you got seven out of ten correct, you did very well indeed!