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People

weekly

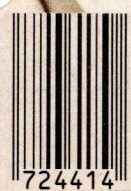
**Redford has
a (foot) ball**

**Why aerosols
are a danger**

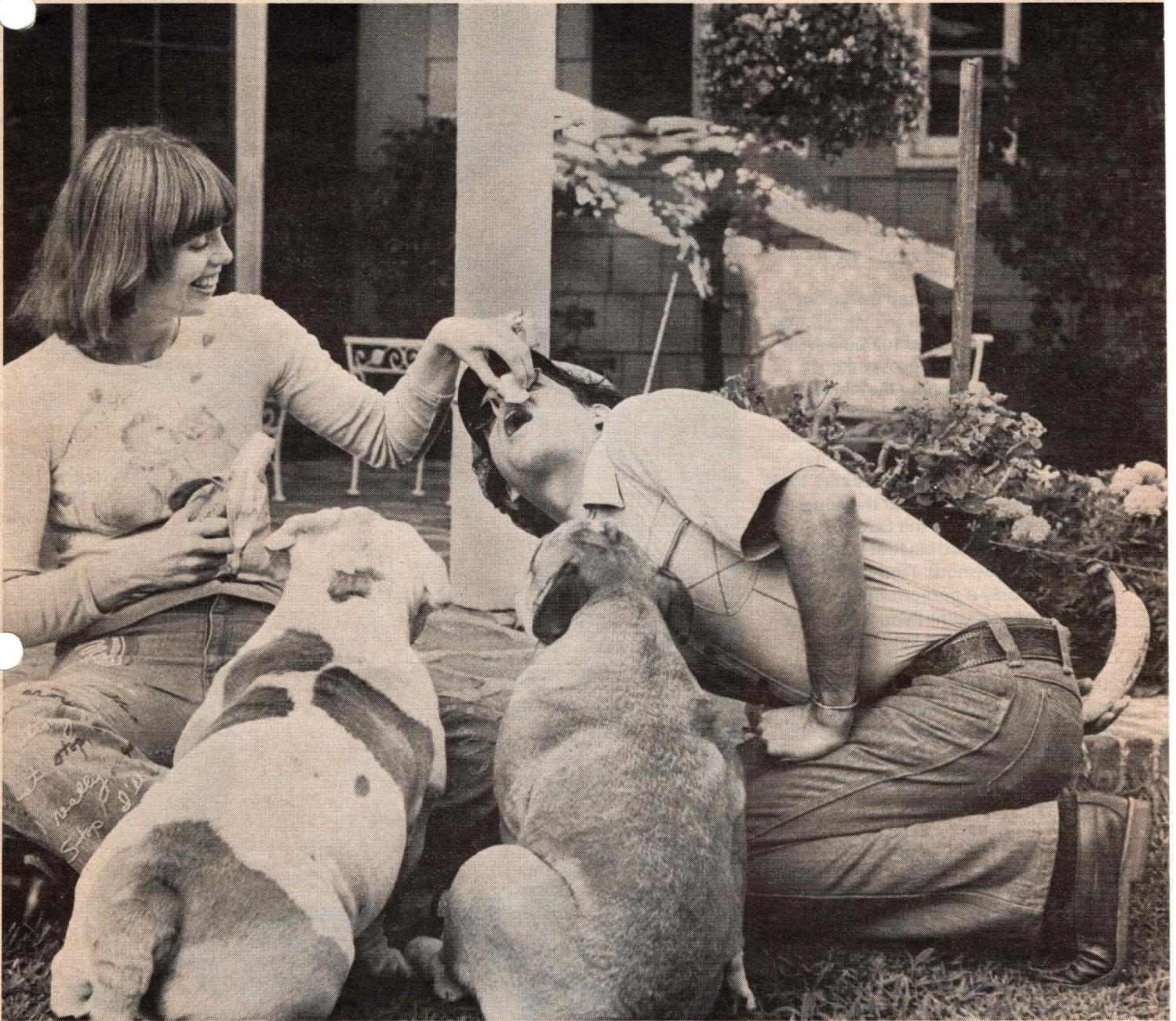
**Don't take his
wife: the happy
Henny Youngmans**

Captain & Tennille

**Trying to
make it as
TV's square
Sonny &
Cher**



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Captain Daryl Dragon isn't what he eats. His wife, Toni Tennille, is the top banana on their TV series.

DARYL IS DRAGGIN', BUT THE CAPTAIN & TENNILLE MAY HAVE A TV SLEEPER HIT

By its 200th year, America might have outgrown puppy love. But how else to explain the sudden national crush over two sunny Californians with cornball

cropped up with last year's top pop song, *Love Will Keep Us Together*. Coyly, they had gotten married on the previous St. Valentine's Day. His goofy

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are on their way to turning 1976 in the U.S., just as it is in China, into the Year of the Dragons.

ABC's gamble that *The Captain and Tennille* might make a sort of square Sonny & Cher has yielded a variety hour that's one of the sleepers of the fall TV season, so far anyway. It's Tennille who carries the show, combining a beguiling Jimmy Carter overbite with her Amazonian life-force. Meanwhile the catatonically shy Captain is less the anchor he appears than low-keyed relief, playing an amiable Ike Turner on keyboards to her Tina.

The proof that Toni and Daryl, both 33, can do no wrong came in July when, at a White House dinner for Queen Elizabeth, they somehow grossed out a few guests while singing their cutesy ditty about anthropomorphic muskrats. One woman, Lady Keith (an American whose title came from a former marriage to a knighted British banker), took it upon herself to sniff that the song "was not suitable for the Queen." Prince Philip tapped his feet (while Nancy Kissinger yawned). Toni gamely shot back that "only a person with a dirty mind would see something wrong. It's a gentle Disneyesque kind of song."

Even Gerald Ford rang up Toni long-distance after their second TV segment this fall to wish her "huge success." It wasn't lust in the President's heart that stirred the call (even though he did two-step with Toni at the White House). More likely, it was election year politics.

Daryl and Toni are as astonished as everyone else that they're hanging top-20 on TV. "We really put our heads on the chopping block doing TV at all," Toni marvels. No one on the tube has more flounce to the ounce than the 133-lb., 5'11" Tennille. But, as for her man, even Daryl admits, "I kept asking myself what I would do." His perpetually bug-eyed expression actually results not from terror but from a congenital disorder (which is why he is usually seen in shades off camera). Daryl is meanwhile unstiffening with the help of a drama coach "to learn to relax. There's always been a ham in me, way down deep," he insists. "I get a lot of letters from people who identify with me. They say they're shy too."

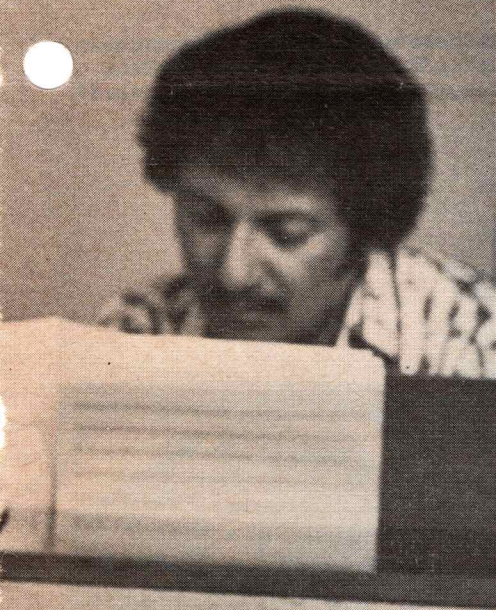
"He's always been funny and talkative with our friends," Toni pipes up supportively, and she sees them evolving into a Burns and Allen act. Daryl's old Beach Boy colleague Mike Love agrees. "They could be that and Jack



Benny combined. Of course, Daryl would rather stick to his music."

Daryl is in fact a well-trained musician who was encouraged to study classical piano for 10 years by his renowned father, Carmen Dragon, a former conductor of the Hollywood Bowl Symphony. He was no silver-tongued Dragon. "I was going to a Catholic school in Santa Monica," Daryl explained recently. "They told my parents, 'Your son is disturbed.' I was just shy."

He chucked his traditional training ("I never got over Fats Domino and the blues") at Cal State (Northridge), and with his brothers Dennis and Doug formed a boogie-woogie group called the Dragons—just in time to be swamped by heavy metal rock. "I waited 12 years for the happy sound to come back," he explains. "I couldn't relate to dope groups and was afraid of destroying my ears with sound." Instead, Daryl backed up the Beach Boys, picking up his sobriquet "Captain



Even in rehearsal, ebullient ex-Beach Girl Tennille packs the all-American pizzazz that's captivating TV's family hour.



Daryl doffs his cap to no man, not even for his conductor dad, Carmen Dragon, at the paternal homestead in Malibu.

The Dragons cultivate organic crops at their Pacific Palisades garden. Their bulldogs are vegetarians too.



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Keyboard" and soloing on their 1965 hit, *Help Me, Rhonda*.

Toni is the eldest of four musical daughters from Montgomery, Ala., where her father, Frank, who once sang with Bob Crosby's Bobcats, owned a furniture store. Her mother, Cathryn Tennille, had a local TV talk show, and as a child Toni "would go on Mom's show every chance I got: to sing, dance or play piano for the exercise lady." In 1963 the Tennilles moved to L.A. when Frank's business failed.

"Mother, being a good wife, went with him and gave up the show," Toni remembers. "She's always regretted it and they were divorced soon afterward." After studying music at Auburn, "where if you're not married by the time you're 22 you're an old maid," Toni fell into a brief first marriage to a one-time rock drummer. Kenneth Shearer, she says, "is and was a lovely man. But we both knew it was wrong almost from the first." They were eventually divorced, and Toni now ruefully observes, "I didn't 'shop around.' That's why I sing that song with feeling."

As for Toni and Daryl, it was music that kept them together at first. He'd heard Toni singing on tape before arranging the score of an ecological

musical she'd written called *Mother Earth*. "I just followed that voice to San Francisco," he says. Adds Toni, "If he hadn't liked my music that would have been the end of it. He can't work with anybody whose music he doesn't respect." (Neither can Toni, who uses sisters Louisa and Melissa to fill out their live act.)

Daryl introduced Toni to the Beach Boys and she became the first and last Beach Girl, riffing the electric piano on their 1972 tour. (The Dragons are still friendly with the Beach brethren and contributed background tracks to their new LP, *15 Big Ones*.) Toni also sang backup vocals on Elton John's *Caribou* LP. They cast off together on L.A.'s \$70-a-night club-and-gay-bar circuit before lucking into their Grammy-winning smash with Neil Sedaka's *Love* etc.

They shared quarters along the way. Their marriage, Toni explains with her magnolia-blossom accent, "was for the families' sake, especially my mother's, who is a daughter of the Old South. Daryl and I knew we were going to spend the rest of our lives together anyway, so what difference did it make?" They've planned no parenthood, though, other than their sad-sack bull-

dogs Broderick and Elizabeth. Instead they happily talk about "getting old and becoming eccentric Aunt Toni and Uncle Daryl to all our nieces and nephews." Yet they're close enough the youth audience to boycott Vegas or clubs where minors are banned.

Right now Uncle Daryl and Aunt Toni have moved from their stucco bungalow in the San Fernando Valley to what Toni calls a "cozy" 7,000-square-foot English country manor atop the Pacific Palisades, with a walk-in fireplace, avocado trees, an organic garden and paddle tennis court.

One of his siblings mutters that "Daryl sold out" for accepting ABC-ordered guests like Bob Hope to hypo ratings. Daryl and Toni are pushing for more with-it acts later in the season like Gladys Knight and the Pips, and trying to beat the rep they share with the Carpenters as the archetypical flaccid rock group. In the meantime, they feel somewhat vindicated in watching their likely next and fifth gold single bounding up the charts. It's the one that offended the Lady, *Muskrat Love*.

ROBERT WINDELER

All those hats help cover a thinning area up top. Daryl boasts, "It's the big time. They give me two a week." He's up to 17.



STEVE SCHAPIRO