

CARPENTERS

For Richard Carpenter, it was a day of triumph only a hard-core lifelong musician could appreciate. After nearly a year of "listening, literally, to hundreds and hundreds of songs, my own writing, arranging, orchestrating; doing background vocals and piano, and mixing," the mastertape of the new Carpenters album, their first in three years, had finally been put to bed and sent off to the manufacturing plants to become *Made in America*.

The title itself was revealing on a number of levels. It had turned up in one of those offhand, serendipitous flashes that seem to come from nowhere yet are right on the money. "We were playing around with any number of possible titles for the album," said Richard, "when Karen came into the studio one day wearing a running suit with a tag on it that read 'Made in America,' and I said, 'That's it!'"

Karen and Richard Carpenter were born in New Haven, Connecticut, but grew up in Downey, California. From *Ticket to Ride*, their first album, onward, the Carpenters have always been a quintessentially American phenomenon, though a significant portion of their 55 million or so record sales were racked up abroad—in England, Europe, Japan, Australia, Canada and just about every other record-selling nation on earth. Something in their music—its melodic sweep, the flawless arrangements, the bell-like perfection of Karen's vocals—touched a responsive chord that leapt all boundaries and borders and made the Carpenters international ambassadors of that intangible something that was once referred to as "the American way."

Regarding *Made in America*, Richard says: "It's a very American sound—even more so, a California sound. We've been classified as a classic California sound. I have to agree with that." And in spite of recent shifts and trends in popular music, he feels that "things really aren't that different than they have been. There are a couple of things that have a little twist that I enjoy, like the Police, but nothing really that radically different."

And if *Made in America* is not "radically different"—refusing to pay homage to the weirder pop trends that come and go like summer lightning—it clearly documents the depth, growth, and striving for perfection that characterizes all of the best of the Carpenters' work. Richard sums it up simply: "I select songs that hit me at the gut level and fit our style."

The album includes two new songs by Richard Carpenter and John Bettis: "Those Good Old Dreams," a tune Richard suggests "has the flavor of 'Top Of The World,'" and "Because We Are In Love," which they wrote expressly for Karen's wedding last year to Tom Burris.

Burt Bacharach contributed "Somebody's Been Lyin'," with lyrics by Carole Bayer Sager, and Richard believes "it's one of the best things Bacharach has written in years." Also included: a new Roger Nichols/Bill Lane song, "When You've Got What It Takes," that sounds like an instant classic. The remainder of the tunes, with the exception of the old Marvelettes' hit, "Beechwood 4-5789," were written by various relatively new writers: "Strength Of A Woman," by Phyllis Brown and Juanita Curiel, and "a lovely new country/pop ballad, 'When It's Gone (It's Just Gone),' with words and music by Randy Handley.

As has always been the case, the Carpenters' music is eloquent, and above all, has *style*. As a matter of fact, *style* may be the key word in understanding the stunning success of a young man and his sister who felt they had something special to say, who have paid their dues in triplicate ("There were many times," Karen recalls, "when we'd spend four or five months in the studio working day and night on a new

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album, rush out to the airport the day it was finished to start a two-month tour of back-to-back dates. It was unbelievable.”), and who triumphed beyond their most extravagant fantasies.

Of *Made in America*, Richard says: “Karen and I think it’s the best thing we’ve ever done. It’s the combination of production, performance, engineering and material. It’s just that you grow, you hear more things, you grow in your arranging, and Karen, of course, grows in her interpretation. You just grow. . . .”

It took a year of work, it’s been three years since we’ve heard from the Carpenters, but it’s here. *Made in America*. Created by the Carpenters: A matchless achievement.

