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## The Carpenters

The Carpenters' *Lovelines* is a special album in more than one way, for here is a work that is at once an anniversary, a postscript, and a revelation.

It's an anniversary because the release of *Lovelines* comes fully 20 years after Karen and Richard Carpenter's first album for A&M. It's a postscript because this, the duo's fourteenth album of new and/or previously unreleased material, is also their final one. And it's a revelation because here, at last, are four songs from Karen Carpenter's solo album, a project that few besides her most devoted fans even knew existed.

Among *Lovelines*' 12 tracks are two that have been issued before, although never on a Carpenters album in the United States. Of the remaining 10, four are from the Phil Ramone-produced solo album, while two were heard as source music in "The Karen Carpenter Story," this year's top-rated television movie about Karen's life and tragic death in 1983.

Richard Carpenter had already begun planning the album that would become *Lovelines* by the time the TV movie aired. "Sometime ago," he recalls, "I started thinking that we had quite a few (unreleased) tracks that could be used.

"Back in 1983, when I was doing promotion for the *Voice Of The Heart* album, a lot of people asked if that would be the final Carpenters album because Karen had died earlier that year. Even then, I didn't think it would be, and that's what I said. It just seemed that timing with our 20th anniversary at A&M was the best way to release the music."

A number of *Lovelines* tracks come from the period of *Made In America* (1981), the album that followed the one year hiatus for the Carpenters. It was a prolific time for the Carpenters; some of the unused *Made In America* songs made it to *Voice Of The Heart* three years later, and even then an abundance of good material remained.

"In any given project," Richard notes, "you'll find that you have several songs of the same genre; you like them both, but you can't use them both. If you have that luxury of having more tunes than you need for an album, you simply pick one over another — maybe even by a flip of the coin. But it's also a luxury — at a later date — to be able to use the ones that weren't selected."

The duo's late-'70s hiatus didn't simply mean that they would return to action with almost more songs than they knew what to do with. It was also during the break that Karen Carpenter recorded a complete solo album, her first and only project without Richard, with Phil Ramone, the New York producer renowned for his work with Paul Simon, Billy Joel, and many others.

Ramone had known both Carpenters for years; he had even been their soundman when the duo opened concerts for Burt Bacharach in their early years. When he was told that Karen was interested in doing some work on her own, it didn't take Ramone long to define their objective: "how to make a solo album that would be different from the Carpenters, taking that divine voice and working with it another way.

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"Karen and I talked quite a bit about the concept," Ramone adds, "and the focus was on the kind of songs she wanted to do. since it was her first record without Richard, we were both a little nervous; there are always those doubts about messing up the team. But my reputation, I think, was that of someone who dealt well with songs, and could retain the artist's identity regardless of the style."

Ramone was also interested in matching the singer with some of the musicians he'd been working with in New York, players like guitarist David Brown and Russell Javors, drummer Libert De Vitto, and bassist Doug Stegmeyer from Joel's band; pianist-arranger Bob James; songwriter-arranger Rod Temperton, who was fresh off writing hits like "Rock With You" and "Off The Wall" for Michael Jackson; and a variety of other top studio names.

"I wanted her to play with these kinds of players, to put that voice in new surroundings, says Ramone. "My style is a little more aggressive than Richard's, and I wanted to give her another feel, somewhat in the style of the things I'd been doing with Paul Simon and Billy Joel.

"With Karen, you could have done a Quincy Jones big band, and then turned around and done a Machito thing, and then a couple of small rhythm dates. Were I to work with her now, I'd probably do some things similar to what I've been doing with Gloria Estefan.

Ramone and Karen became good friends during the solo sessions; indeed, Karen lived with the producer and his wife much of the time, and was to be the godmother of their child, who was born within a week of Karen's death.

"I wasn't unaware that she had some problems," Ramone concedes. "A state of happiness and a state of anxiety would appear at different times during our sessions. But by and large, I think Karen had a great time.

"In Los Angeles, she was used to parking in her spot on the A&M lot, working in Studio D at A&M Studios, and doing things the way the Carpenters always had, which worked beautifully for them. It was different in New York. In New York it's cold and overcast, and you have to put a coat on and push and shove, and Karen learned to deal with that, too."

In the end, the solo album was shelved. A decade later, when it came to deciding which tracks to include on *Lovelines*, Richard made that decision according to "what struck me in the gut, what I felt worked best for her voice, and what I considered to be the strongest songs and arrangements." His personal favorite: "If I Had You," which will be released as a single under Karen's name.

All told, Richard adds, compiling *Lovelines* was a bittersweet affair. "I feel sad, of course. I keep thinking about how many more years of great music should have been made, in addition to missing Karen in other ways. But in the end, I think this is an album that showcases Karen's remarkable talent and versatility — from standards, like 'When I Fall In Love' and 'Little Boy Blue,' to things like 'Kiss Me The Way You Did Last Night' — above all."

Phil Ramone agrees. "A voice like Karen's — rich, womanly — comes along perhaps every 20 years," he says. "To me, Karen had an instrument like Sarah Vaughan's; I honestly felt I was working with a Charlie Parker without the bebop side. There was no tonality like that. And it makes no difference that some of these songs are ten years older or more. It doesn't matter how much styles change; Karen Carpenter had a voice that would work in any era."