

# THE CARPENTERS

MARK PAYTRESS TALKS TO RICHARD CARPENTER ABOUT THE SUCCESSFUL POP GROUP HE FORMED WITH HIS SISTER KAREN, ON THE OCCASION OF THE RELEASE OF A BOXED SET OF CARPENTERS CDs



Almost every artist you'd care to mention has at one time or another directed material towards the middle of the road market. The term 'Easy Listening' is often used as an accusation, though when artists as varied as Rod Stewart, the Bee Gees and Stevie Wonder have embraced the genre, it has been difficult to sustain old prejudices. So much so that, today, many old rock stalwarts (and not just Phil Collins) make music as simple and as easy on the ear as, say, Andy Williams and John Denver. (Witness the resurgence of interest in the raw energy of that allegedly old-timer Tom Jones.) The essential difference between the easy listening of today and yesteryear is that the current crop have years of life as rock'n'roll outlaws behind them.

Perhaps the first act to fully exploit the easy listening/pop crossover was the Carpenters. With Richard's intuitive gift for spotting a good song, and Karen's remarkably controlled voice, they notched up a massive 80 million record sales and, together with glam rock, pretty much dominated the first half of the Seventies' pop world. They kept a firm hand on their material, never straying far from hummable melodies and the ups and downs of love as subject matter. Happiness and misery were at their fingertips; and, sadly, spilled into the brother-sister team's personal lives by the end of the

decade. Karen battled with anorexia nervosa until February 1983 when the disease finally claimed her as its most famous victim. Richard, meanwhile, had his own problems fighting his addiction to prescription drugs.

He pulled through relatively unscathed and, since his sister's death, has busied himself with solo and production work. But he's also been bringing the Carpenters' recordings up to scratch by supervising the compilation of "The Compact Disc Collection", a 12-CD set which only confirms what we've already suspected — that CD lends itself perfectly to the lush, textured sounds of the Carpenters.

## APPRECIATION

The box set, complete with rare photos, an appreciation by Ray Coleman and notes by Richard himself, contains just about every note recorded by the duo. The dozen discs, all digitally remastered, and in a few cases, remixed, cover the band's career from their A&M debut right through to a previously unreleased disc of material from their final years. It is intended that this limited edition box set will pave the way for the release of each disc individually. With a price tag remarkably close to three figures, it's probably only die-hards and the financially buoyant who will be able to invest in the box. The rest of us will have to make do with old, worn vinyl copies until A&M get

their finger out! But Richard's recent visit to publicise the set offered a rare opportunity to take a close look at the Carpenters phenomenon — their struggles to secure a deal, why the hits kept coming and why they finally dried up, the personal tragedies and Richard's subsequent renaissance.

**Q:** It's an expensive way to buy the CDs!

**A:** Yes, but in Japan and the States, the whole catalogue is still available. I'm sure they'll come out individually in time.

**Q:** Why did you remix several of the songs for the new set — "A Song For You", "It's Going To Take Some Time", "Goodbye To Love", "Intermission", "Bless The Beasts And Children", "We've Only Just Begun" and "Calling Occupants Of Interplanetary Craft" — was it to improve the quality for the CD market or to remedy a poor original mix?

**A:** I was never that happy with the original on some of them. So it was a combination of both, because we got the mix more the way I'd grown to want it, and in the process, we transferred the original 16-track master onto 24-track to open up the sound and redo the piano in Dolby stereo where originally it had been done in non-Dolby mono. So right there, you eliminate the hiss that shows up



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so severely on CD; it also gives a more spacious sound. The main reason I wanted to do "Occupants" wasn't because of the mix — I liked the mix — but because it was such a complicated piece with so much going on. Even though "Occupants" was made in full Dolby, it's a far quieter record now we've remixed it.

**Q: Why did you choose to omit the Japanese live album, and combine the two Xmas LPs onto one disc?**

A: Well, the Palladium album's not there either. Neither are the singles' albums. The thing is, they wanted it to be 12 albums. And originally what they had was the two Xmas albums to make it 12. When we first started to think about CD in the States, one of the first ones I wanted released was the two Xmas albums. Well, they were a little unsure so they said, since the format can hold a lot more information, would you combine what you feel is the best of the pair. So I agreed to do it, it turned out very well, and that's the way it stayed.

And so I thought, if it has to be 12, it wouldn't be right to the fan for this set not to include the new album, "Lovelines". I just felt it wasn't right. So even though it doesn't say it, to me this represents the complete Carpenters, save for live and compilation discs. It's the complete studio record. And the thing is about those Xmas albums, they were never promoted here; most people don't even know they exist. So I figured, why leave the new album off and give two Xmas albums that most people don't even know about? You see, if we do what you're talking about, we'd have to include "Live In Japan", "Live At The Palladium", a second Xmas LP and then maybe the singles' album to make a whole new page. (The set opens up like a book.) And then it would be very expensive!

**Q: I'm sure you see CD as an excellent medium for the Carpenters' music.**

A: I certainly do. It's dynamic, and with many of our songs starting quietly, you used to hear pops and roar no matter how good the quality of the vinyl.

**Q: Can you explain "the chill factor", with which you assess possible new material?**

A: Well, if something really touches me, whether it's a scene in a movie or a melody in a song, I get goosebumps. And when I am selecting music, I just go by what really strikes me in the gut, rather than try to analyse or approach it cerebrally.

**Q: It obviously worked. But on top of selecting first-class material, you then went on to make songs like "Close To You" and "Superstar" your own.**

A: Well, they were treated differently than the others. "Please Mr. Postman" was a success every time it was done. I think it was a combination of some having eluded other people — like Leon Russell's "Superstar" was there for anyone to record, and the same with "We've Only Just Begun". It was there on the TV advert and people could have heard it but they didn't. So it's a combination of that, the right arrangement and Karen's lead.

**Q: Did you ever commission material?**

A: No, but some writers like Paul Williams and Roger Nichols always had us in mind. Their first hit was our second, and they felt that we really did their songs the way they were meant to be done. So I know that when they went on to write "Rainy Days



*Richard and Karen Carpenter first began working together in their teens, and they recorded an early single under Karen's name in the mid-Sixties.*

And Mondays" and "I Won't Last A Day Without You", that we'd be the first to receive those.

**Q: What's your musical heritage?**

A: Les Paul and Mary Ford were the first. I heard them when I was five, and that overdubbed sound! I didn't know how it was achieved but I knew it was something different than anything else on the air. They probably had the most profound effect; and then years later, bands like the Beach Boys.

**Q: What about show music?**

A: Oh yeah. I was very big into Richard Rodgers in particular. Jerome Kern, of course, Cole Porter, Gershwin, all the greats.

**Q: Why is it that the Carpenters hit that right note at the end of the Sixties?**

A: I've heard some opinions, though no-one knows for sure. Looking back, "Close To You" was a very strong record and it was different. I've been told that the radio Programme Directors were looking for something new, although we didn't realise it. We heard the song, recorded it and crossed our fingers when we released it. And its acceptance was instantaneous; it was added to playlists everywhere. Boom. It was No. 1 in six weeks! It must have been a combination of being a strong song and performance, and just good timing.

**Q: Tell me about your instrumental trio back in New Haven.**

A: I was 16, and working with two guys in their 20s, just performing standards out of the book. I had a lot of technique but hadn't really much in terms of style. I'm sure it was all a bit baroque and very busy!

**Q: Had you begun composing by then?**

A: Oh yeah. I was writing melodies. It was just to make some money at the weekends, playing dives like the Coast Inn and Paddy's Pizza.

**Q: Then, in 1963, the family moved to the Los Angeles suburb of Downey, you studied piano full-time, and put together the Richard Carpenter Trio who, I believe, issued two 45s on the local Magic Lamp label.**

A: Now that record was Karen. The Carpenter Trio was really instrumental and jazz-orientated, and we won a prestigious competition, the Hollywood Bowl Battle Of The Bands. The Head of West Coast A&R at RCA heard us and signed us to the label. We cut several sides but none were ever released. They're fun for what they are but definitely not commercially viable. But at the same time, Karen had been signed to a small record label, Magic Lamp, and we cut some sides. Both the tunes that were released were mine, and the personnel was Karen (drums), I was on piano, Wes Jacobs (bass), and I'm sure Joe Osborn played some electric bass on there.

**Q: They were vocal sides?**

A: Yeah, with Karen singing. And though she was just 16, the sound is there.

**Q: Quite sought-after releases now!**

A: They only made 500 of them, if that, and I have about eight copies myself.

**Q: Weren't there two singles?**

A: No, just one. We cut some more things and I have those on tape. They were never pressed into records, and the master-tapes were destroyed in a fire, which is a damn shame. It went under the name Karen Carpenter: "I'll Be Yours"/"Looking For Love", both originals, ML 704 I believe. But don't hold me to that; I may be a digit off! The trouble with Magic Lamp, as with most of these upstart labels, is there's no promotion or distribution. So you end up giving copies to your friends. It didn't have a prayer.

**Q: Why didn't RCA take Karen up?**

A: Well, by this time we're getting into 1967 and I was putting together Spectrum, which was very Carpenteresque, and they were about to buy us out of the deal which amounted to just a few hundred dollars. So I spoke to the A&R man and said, look, my sister sings, and I have this vocal group now which I think you ought to listen to. So he did, and I remember exactly what he said: "Just another folk-rock group." You know, Herb's (Alpert) career parallels ours in a way

in that some of his original stuff was recorded in garage studios and then he was on RCA at one time as a vocalist and they weren't interested in the brass sound, and when we were signed to RCA as instrumentalists, they weren't interested in our vocal sound. So they dismissed us. We had a lot of doors slammed in our faces.

**Q: So wasn't Karen singing with the Carpenter Trio by this time?**

**A:** Oh yeah. We did little engagements here and there. We'd get away from the jazz stuff and we'd do pop, and I'd ask her to sing songs I'd written. I remember her singing "The Twelfth Of Never", "The Sweetheart Tree" and "Merry Christmas Darling", which I'd written at that time. So she'd sing, begrudgingly.

**Q: After leaving RCA, you ended up back in Joe Osborn's garage recording demos.**

**A:** Yes. Joe was a partner in Magic Lamp and a session bassist. He believed in us and was nice enough to let us record there. One of the songs, "All I Can Do", ended up on the first album right out of the Osborn sessions. There were also several others which were reworked for that album, "Your Wonderful Parade" and "All Of My Life" spring to mind.

**Q: So by this time, you'd shrunk to a duo and had, by 1968, begun to call yourselves the Carpenters. And then along came Herb Alpert.**

**A:** Well, Herb played quite an important role in several ways. First off, he heard what no-one else had; and was in a position to sign us. And secondly, there was his belief after the first album did not do well. He knew we still had something and he was willing to spend even more money by letting us go on and record another album. And out of that came "Close To You", which he brought to our attention. In addition to being a fine musician, Herb's one hell of an A&R man.

**Q: You could also count on Burt Bacharach as an early supporter.**

**A:** He had heard our "Ticket To Ride" on the radio, and had mentioned in passing to Jerry Moss how much he liked our version. Jerry told him, it's our act, and, to cut a long story short, Burt asked us to perform a medley of his songs at a benefit show he was preparing to do. We were honoured, of course, and while we were putting this together, Herb brought along the song "They Long To Be Close To You" (I shortened the name; I thought it was too long). He mentioned that it was obscure, and that he had a record of it, but he didn't want me to hear it. He wanted nothing to influence my arrangement, save for keeping the little piano fill at the end of the bridge. So he sang it to me, we sort of put together our own version of it, and it took off.

**Q: Do you think Burt was sizing you up to take over from Dionne Warwick, who'd recently severed the close working relations with him?**

**A:** Lord knows. Dionne told me in so many words that Burt had said, well who's going to sing my songs?; and she said that Karen Carpenter is the only person she could think of who could really do them justice. But we were never approached. He brought us out on the road to open other shows for him, and so did Hank Mancini. And of course this was all a dream come true for us, all these idols of ours, here they were now saying

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how much they enjoyed our music and asking us to come out and open shows for them!

**Q:** Were you prepared for this sudden exposure?

**A:** On the whole, yes, though not to the degree that it got to. Herb felt that sooner or later, we were gonna have a hit — so did I — but the two of us have said that we never thought it was going to take off to the extent that it did. It just exploded. One minute, we were trying to get on any TV show, and then “Close To You” comes out and everything you ever hoped to do, there it was: Johnny Carson, Ed Sullivan, tours, the whole shot. The thing is, we were really working. Cause it took a while to do each one of those albums: finding the songs, writing songs, arranging them, playing them, overdubbing, mixing, it all took time. Then there were the concert tours, Vegas, TV guest spots, photo sessions, interviews, our own TV shows. We started to tire out, though I knew that, first and foremost, we were a recording act. I wanted to be back in the studio and actually have enough time so that I could really pick and choose material and make nice albums.

**Q:** This pressure obviously affected Karen too.

**A:** I don't think it had anything to do with the anorexia nervosa, I really don't. She was a plump child and in 1967, she went on a special diet. But between 1967 and 1975 — save a few pounds up or down — she stayed the same. She was a huge success at the weight she was. And then she got down to 115 lb and she looked fine. But then it kept going, and that's the big trouble. It's very easy to say it's the pressure of a career or it's her mother, all these things psychologists love to say. I think that's much too easy and I just don't think that it's correct. People devote their whole lives to understanding anorexia and they still don't really know.

**Q:** How do you explain the dip in the Carpenters' popularity in the late Seventies?

**A:** I picked a couple of duds as far as singles were concerned, but on the other hand, I think I picked some which deserved to go a lot higher than they did. Our detractors had pounded away at us for so many years that



One of the last publicity photos of the Carpenters, around the time that their career was being stalled by their health problems. The new boxed set of CDs includes some of Karen's final recordings.

I think it was starting to really sink into certain Programme Directors' minds that the Carpenters were just too square. And then there were other records in the same genre which suffered. One of ours which should have gone Top 10 was “I Need To Be In Love”, and at the same time, Barry Manilow had one out that I also felt should have gone Top 10 called “This One's For You”. Ours went to 25, his to 28. So you tell me. Maybe the PD's had moved over to disco; but I do know that, later on, the name had something

to do with it. But sooner or later, had Karen lived — “Touch Me When We're Dancing” went Top 20 for a month, so it was on its way back — we would have come along with something that they just could not have turned down. It's the way this business goes.

**Q:** Did you find it difficult to take Carpenters' music into new territories? In your sleeve note, you recall getting hate mail because of that guitar solo in “Goodbye To Love”!

**A:** We did get some people who just thought we'd sold out on “Goodbye To Love”. But, no. We did what we wanted to do. Things I like, at least for us, were pretty commercial. It wasn't designed that way. I loved songs like “Hurting Each Other”, “Superstar”, “For All We Know” and “We've Only Just Begun”. It's just that I heard this guitar solo when I was putting together “Goodbye To Love”, and nothing else would have cut it to me than fuzz guitar. I mean, now it sounds tame.

**Q:** “Lovelines”, the bonus CD on the set (which has also been issued in its own right on vinyl and CD), features four songs from Karen's 1979 sessions for her solo album. Why is this the first time material from it has surfaced?

**A:** The album was finished, they'd spent a lot of time on it, and I know they had at least 20 songs. And what happened was that the powers that be at A&M wanted her to go and record more. Karen didn't want to. I don't know whether if she had put her foot down and said it's coming out this way, they would have put it out — I imagine they would have — but I don't think she was that sold on the whole thing. So I picked her fav-

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ourite four for the record, including the one we liked best, "If I Had You".

**Q: What made her go off and record alone?**

**A:** You see, I got hung up on prescription pills in the mid-Seventies, and it had reached fairly serious proportions by late-'78 so I had to check into a clinic. I didn't make it public. But I first mentioned it when we were starting to put together the TV movie, out of respect to Karen's memory. So it's included in the movie ("The Karen Carpenter Story"). What happened was, I went in during January 1979 for a six-week programme, and after that, I knew I wasn't going to be ready to just bounce back into a recording studio. I wanted to just settle back before I got back into the swing of things. And I told Karen (who had a lot of nervous energy), now while I'm doing this, you ought to go and see if you can get to the root of what the hell's troubling you. It's perfect timing; and then we can hit the 80's healthy. But at that point in time, she wasn't ready to admit that there really was a problem. So that left her with all this free time, so that's when she decided she wanted to make a solo album. The other reason is that I always felt that, as much as she loved working with me and would never have thought of giving that up, she still wanted a little bit more recognition as the great singer that she was.

**Q: So the Carpenters would have continued had Karen lived?**

**A:** Oh, no two ways about it. We'd recorded one album in 1981, "Made In America", and we had started on another one when she passed away. And we were gonna tour, had she been up to it.

**Q: By calling upon Dusty Springfield and Dionne Warwick to guest on your "Time" album, does this confirm that working with a female voice is your preferred medium?**

**A:** I guess it is, though it's odd 'cause I prefer male singers on the whole. Of course, I worked with Scott Grimes and that was a very nice experience. Herb signed him and I produced his album after he guested on my "Time" record. I've also produced albums by Canadian and Japanese female singers.

**Q: Have you any new plans in the pipeline?**

**A:** Yeah, I'm gonna start my next album in the new decade, but I haven't really given it much thought because I've been busy with all this other stuff.

**Q: Any more archive Carpenters' material to come?**

**A:** No. This is it. We have other things, but nothing I think which is worthy of release.

**Q: Finally, could you tell me about "The Karen Carpenter Story" movie, which we've yet to see over here.**

**A:** I think a deal's been made with ITV, that's what I've heard. But when it's to be aired, I really don't know. It's a TV movie, I scored the music, although we use two songs from "Lovelines" because they fit the storyline so well, plus many of the hits. We even use something from the Magic Lamp record in one scene!

**Q: Does the actress who plays Karen mime or is her own voice used?**

**A:** Oh, totally mimed. Yeah, we'd have to keep Karen's voice. But Cynthia Gavin's done a good job; she really had her work cut out, playing somebody well-known and not having the opportunity to have met that person. And then to lip-synch and drum-synch simultaneously, 'cause there were times

when Karen would sing right from the drum. It was tough, but she cut it pretty well.

**Q: You oversaw the complete project?**

**A:** I was Executive Producer, technical adviser and musical person. But I knew there would be compromises because it wasn't a documentary. It's an entertainment piece and so there were certain things that I compromised on to get the other things in that

were important to her. It's fairly accurate, but it's not gospel. It did do a lot of good, because at the end of the broadcast, I appeared on screen to say, if you wanna learn more about what you've just seen, these books about the anorexia nervosa disease are available at your local library or bookstore. The next day, the CBS-TV switchboard was jammed with callers.

## THE CARPENTERS COMPLETE UK DISCOGRAPHY

Thanks to PAUL PELLETIER for his help with the discography.

Cat. No.	Title	Current Mint Value £
<b>SINGLES</b>		
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EMI 5501	MAKE BELIEVE IT'S YOUR FIRST TIME/LOOK TO YOUR DREAMS (10/84)	2
Old Gold OG 9541	YESTERDAY ONCE MORE/(THEY LONG TO BE) CLOSE TO YOU (9/85)	1.50
A&M AMCD 901	COMPACT HITS: (THEY LONG TO BE) CLOSE TO YOU/WE'VE ONLY JUST BEGUN/I WON'T LAST A DAY WITHOUT YOU/GOODBYE TO LOVE (CD, 4/88)	4
<b>LPs</b>		
A&M AMLS 998	CLOSE TO YOU (1/71, No. 23)	6
A&M AMLS 63502	THE CARPENTERS (10/71, No. 12)	6
A&M AMLS 64342	TICKET TO RIDE (4/72, No. 20)	6
A&M AMLS 63511	A SONG FOR YOU (9/72, No. 13)	6
A&M AMLH 63519	NOW AND THEN (7/73, No. 2)	6
A&M AMLH 63601	THE SINGLES 1969-1974 (1/74, No. 1)	5
A&M AMLK 64530	HORIZON (6/75, No. 1)	6
Hamlet AMLP 8001	TICKET TO RIDE (budget reissue, 6/75, No. 35)	4.50
A&M GSW 301/302	LIVE IN JAPAN (Japan only, 1975)	10
A&M CARP 1000	COLLECTION (3-LP set, 3/76)	15
A&M AMLK 64581	A KIND OF HUSH (6/76, No. 3)	6
A&M AMLS 68403	LIVE AT THE PALLADIUM (12/76, No. 28)	6
A&M AMLK 64703	PASSAGE (9/77, No. 12)	6
A&M AMLT 19748	THE SINGLES 1974-78 (1/78, No. 2)	5
A&M GXF 9001/2	SILVER DOUBLE DISC OF THE CARPENTERS (2-LPs, 4/79)	15
MFP 50431	TICKET TO RIDE (budget reissue, 7/79)	3
A&M AMLK 63723	MADE IN AMERICA (6/81, No. 12)	5
World Records ALBUM 92	THE BEST OF THE CARPENTERS (4-LP set, mail order only, 12/81)	15
A&M AMID 117	A KIND OF HUSH (mid-price reissue, 3/82)	3
A&M AMLX 64954	VOICE OF THE HEART (10/83, No. 6)	5
Pickwick SHM 3142	LIVE AT THE PALLADIUM (budget reissue, 5/84)	3
EMI/A&M SING 1	THE CARPENTERS COLLECTION — THE VERY BEST OF (dblr. LP, 10/84, No. 10)	8.50
A&M AMA 3270	AN OLD FASHIONED CHRISTMAS (12/84)	5
A&M AMA 3931	LOVELINES (11/89)	5
<b>CDs</b>		
A&M CDA 63601	THE SINGLES 1969-1973 (6/84)	9
EMI/A&M CDS 2602968	THE CARPENTERS COLLECTION — THE VERY BEST OF (dblr. CD, 10/84)	16
A&M CDA 64954	VOICE OF THE HEART (1984)	9
A&M CARCD 20	THE COMPACT DISC COLLECTION (12 CD box set, 11/89)	85

**FEB**

CLOSING DATE  
FOR ADVERTS  
IS 3rd JAN.

**MAR**

CLOSING DATE  
FOR ADVERTS  
IS 29 JANUARY