

The **Grand Ole Opry** SPECIAL VOLUME



THE CARPENTERS: Two's Company

SUZI QUATRO: Licks 'n' Leather

ALVIN LEE: Ten Years Later


PLUS: Grand Ole Opry, Oldfield & more

PART 43

30p

EVERY THURSDAY

AUSTRALIA 80c NEW ZEALAND 90c SOUTH AFRICA 80c NORTH AMERICA \$1



THE SUPERSTARS

The Carpenters

It took just a few months back in 1967 for Richard and Karen Carpenter to reach the conclusion that if you can't join 'em you'd better beat 'em. While it seemed that all the public really wanted were heavy rock bands the duo couldn't envisage themselves in that mould, so they determined to stick to their individual brand of timeless melodic pop.

And what developed from that decision was a sound that was quite unlike any other. With the sound came a certain whiter-than-white image which, though Richard admitted wasn't one hundred per cent accurate, was integral to the Carpenters' immense appeal.

The brother and sister's music had transcended the so-called generation gap.

The typical audience at a Carpenters concert invariably consisted of a potpourri of ages, styles and behavioural patterns, for in all age groups there was a hard core of Carpenters fans. Perhaps the only other group that came as close to attracting so much affection from such a cross-section of ages was the Beatles.

Owing to the 'pure' image projected by the Carpenters (and fostered wholeheartedly by their record company and publicists), Richard and Karen attracted a whole heap of perhaps unwarranted criticism. There are those who interpreted the Carpenters' sugar-coated image as the epitome of bad taste, something so obnoxious that its very existence was a threat to reality as they conceived it.

And yet it was this very image combined with the originality of the Carpenters' sound that made them such superstars. If

they appeared on stage scruffily attired with cigarettes hanging from the corner of their mouths and then proceeded to come on with numbers like 'Close To You' and 'Happy Christmas, Darling' the prophets of doom would have had a field day.

So whether they liked it or not, Richard and Karen Carpenter had to face up to the fact that their image was as important a part of their success as their music. Millions of people all over the world see only good in a projection of wholesome clean-living, and these are the sort of people who bought Carpenters records and attended their concerts.

Pepsodent Image

The Carpenters saw themselves as 'just normal people' and the sometimes outspoken Richard has been known to refer to 'those sickly-sweet Pepsodent smiles' that became part of their image but which he and Karen found themselves rather unwillingly and unwittingly being pushed into.

"There's this *thing* that has been built up, where it's implicitly understood the Carpenters don't smoke, the Carpenters don't drink. Never would swear. Never would listen to rock music. It's like we're Pat Boone, only a little cleaner. As if all we do all day is drink milk, eat apple pie and take showers. I don't even like milk. Not that we're totally opposite from that, we're not. But there is an in-between - I don't drink a hell of a lot. I do have wine with dinner. I voted to make marijuana legal. I believe in pre-marital sex. But then, I *don't* smoke."

But when you take a look at the Carpenters' background history it is not so difficult to understand how they had achieved, albeit via a carefully manipulated publicity machine, this kind of status.

Richard was born in 1946 with Karen following three years later. Their father, a lithographic printer, had a large record collection which included favourite discs by Liberace, Les Paul and Mary Ford, Spike Jones and Red Nichols. The children's upbringing in New Haven, Connecticut, included regular exposure to music. Besides the records, Harold and Agnes Carpenter had a piano of their own.

Despite the availability of that instrument, however, Mr and Mrs Carpenter decided that junior had better learn the accordion. Richard was only eight at the time but it soon became apparent that he wasn't going to become an accordion virtuoso, so his parents, determined to give him a musical background, decided to try him with piano lessons. That worked out and by the time he was 16 Richard was seriously studying classical piano at Yale.

Karen, on the other hand, showed little interest in music, being more content to play sports and study like the average American teenager. It was several years before she took a serious interest in playing an instrument. While her brother continued to study the piano at Call State College, Long Beach, Karen was out on the beach

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soaking up the sun, swimming and learning to sail. Though he used to join her sometimes, Richard never neglected his musical studies.

He had become interested in vocal arranging and was piano accompanist for his school choir. His first deviation from always telling the truth came when he told local club owners that he was 20 - an exaggeration of four years - so that he could play with local jazz groups. Not exactly a sin, under the circumstances.

His second 'little white lie' slipped out because of his eagerness to join his college's marching band. He produced an old trumpet that he'd bought for a small sum at an auction and told the band's director that he was proficient on the instrument, as a result of which he was voted in.

"Oddly, I never got round to playing the trumpet," Richard recalled. "The director knew of my piano studies and decided to include me as part of the college's concert band at a big show. He listened to me play and came the day of the show. I was up there playing 'Rhapsody In Blue' - on the piano."

Unbeknown to her parents and brother, Karen had fooled around with a few instruments for several months but soon lost interest and abandoned them. Richard's boldness in claiming prowess on the trumpet and his consequent acceptance into the college band in fact eventually led to his sister taking an instrument seriously.

"There was a guy in the band whose drumming was something fantastic and one day I said to myself 'If a guy can do it, why can't I?'" Karen pointed out. Her initial approach to drumming practice was to bang on hard surfaces with anything that came to hand, be it a knitting needle or a metal spoon. Her father was cheered by his daughter's belated interest in music and bought her a set of drums so that she could practise properly.

Now nearing the end of their days in high school, Richard and Karen had more time to devote solely to music and, like lots of other kids, decided to form their own group. A mutual friend named Wes Jacobs played bass and tuba and he was talked into joining what was to be called the Carpenter Trio, a jazz-orientated outfit.

Against The Tide

In 1965 the trio won a 'Battle Of The Bands' contest which was televised from the Hollywood Bowl, Richard taking the Best Instrumentalist Award as well. As a result of their success the trio was signed to RCA Records - stage one in a recording career. However, lacking proper encouragement from the company, Richard, Karen and Wes became downhearted and the trio split up.

Also with RCA at the time was Herb Alpert, a young singer who was desperately trying to interest the company in a trumpet record. Some years later Herb who himself has sold more records than the Beatles at the peak of their selling power was to become instrumental in signing the

BACK TRACK

1946: Richard born October 16.

1949: Karen born March 2.

1969: 'Ticket To Ride' album.

1970: Singles 'We've Only Just Begun', 'Close To You' and 'Close To You' album, Grammy Awards for Best New Artists and Best Contemporary Vocal Duo.

1971: Singles 'Superstar', 'Rainy Days And Mondays', 'For All We Know', 'Merry Christmas Darling' and 'Carpenters' album, Grammy Award for Best Contemporary Vocal Duo, Oscar for Best Song Of The Year 1970, single 'For All We Know' from the movie *Lovers And Other Strangers*.

1972: Singles 'Goodbye To Love', 'It's Gonna Take Some Time', 'Hurting Each Other' and 'A Song For You' album.

1973: Singles 'Top Of The World', 'Sing', 'Yesterday Once More' and 'Yesterday Once More', 'Now And Then' albums.

1974: Singles 'I Won't Last A Day Without You', 'Please Mr. Postman', 'Jambalaya', 'Santa Claus Is Coming To Town' and 'The Singles' album.

1975: Single 'Only Yesterday' and 'Horizon' album. Prestigious UK tour instant sellout.

Carpenters to his own label and turning them into one of the biggest money-earning acts in the popular music field.

1967 was *the* epoch-making year for rock history, when underground and psychedelia came together; a welter of experimentation dominated the music scene, and everyone around at the time felt that somehow things were never to be quite the same again. Los Angeles, where the Carpenter family had now moved, was one of the centers of the rock industry, and clearly there was a great temptation for Richard and Karen either to change their musical outlook completely to tune in with the times or else to just give up and forget their ambitions.

Believing that there yet existed a market for their particular talents, they formed a group called Spectrum with Danny Woodhams and John Bettis, specializing in vocal harmonies and romantic music. Later, when the Carpenters became a duo, Danny was to become part of the touring band on guitar and John and Richard's songwriting partner.

Gigs at Disneyland and at the Troubadour Club on the oddly-named Hoots Night



brought in work, but not nearly enough for a struggling young band. Though Spectrum had talks with White Whale Records, a contract was never signed and, after one particular club show which led to them being fired because the audience *danced* instead of just listening, the group disbanded.

Richard and John remained together for a time working at Disneyland as singers attired in 1900-style suits and writing songs on odd scraps of paper during their breaks. Not to be outdone, Karen went to singing teacher Frank Pooler to develop her vocal style. It soon became apparent that the brother and sister could harmonize well together and, filled with hope, they teamed up again, but this time as a duo called simply the Carpenters.

Not having much money, they didn't have the means to go into studios to make demo tapes, but they did have Joe Osborne, a busy session electric bass player, who had a studio fitted out in his garage. He suggested that Richard and Karen used his equipment.

The duo achieved harmonic blends through the use of overdubs, producing

two, four and even eight-part vocal harmonies, adding the instruments later. Then came the rounds of the record companies, a well-trod path that had led to disillusionment for so many hopefuls. Even RCA didn't want to give them a second chance.

By this time Herb Alpert had left RCA and, with partner Jerry Moss, established his own company, A&M Records. He was by then internationally famous through his band, Herb Alpert and the Tijuana Brass. Record producer Jack Daugherty heard the Carpenters' work and was impressed enough to engineer a meeting with Alpert for them. It took two months to set up but when it took place Alpert signed them up. It seemed too good to be true for Richard and Karen that after all those years of trying they'd at last found someone who believed in their brand of music and was prepared to spend money on them.

An album titled 'Offering' was released to some critical acclaim and the Carpenters' version of the Beatles' hit 'Ticket To Ride' became a minor hit. Next they tried 'Cinderella Rockefeller' which was a

European smash for Esther and Abi Ofarim, but it didn't work for them. Finding the right song to launch the Carpenters was of paramount importance, everybody realized that – and it was almost by accident that their next release was the spring-board for their breakthrough.

Definitive Success

At a charity show in Los Angeles, the Carpenters met Burt Bacharach, well-known singer and songwriter, who engaged Richard to write the arrangements for a medley of his songs for his stage act. As Bacharach was also an A&M artist, Alpert got to hear of the association between the newcomers and the star and looked through some of Burt's numbers for the Carpenters to record.

He finally decided on 'Close To You', something that Bacharach had penned six years earlier. The record was released at the end of a Bacharach concert tour on which he was supported by the brother and sister act – it became their first number one record and eventually sold over a million copies. But just as important as the first number one record was the follow-up. If initial success could be maintained, they had a better than even chance of becoming established.

The next release was 'We've Only Just Begun', a song penned by songwriter Paul Williams. Williams was earning a living as a songwriter and bit part actor at the time and was eager for the Carpenters to record one of his numbers. Like 'Close To You' before it, 'We've Only Just Begun', went gold. This second and, as it turned out, all-important success meant that the Carpenters were suddenly stars. The money began to pour in, enabling Richard and Karen to repay their father for all that he'd done for them when they were struggling unknowns; they persuaded him to retire and take over organization of their fan mail, which by then was becoming enormous. They also found a house of their own not far away from their family home, so they were able to keep in touch with their parents and friends.

The Carpenters' story has been practically all gold since then. Two more gold records followed, 'For All We Know' and 'Rainy Days And Mondays', another Paul Williams song. The Carpenters had virtually become a hit-making machine and by 1971 the strain was beginning to take its toll. An exhaustive American tour often meant only a few hours' sleep after a show before it was time to set off for the next venue. "Often I'd wish there weren't so many things to do in so short a space of time," Karen said. "But if I ever found myself regretting things I'd think how lucky Richard and I were to have become so successful so young."

Later that same year they went to Britain for a concert in aid of the deaf at the Royal Albert Hall. Also on the bill that night was Labi Siffre, the singing star of songs like 'It Must Be Love'. Pressure of work was to keep them out of Britain until 1973 and more concerts.





Karen and Richard living up to their whiter-than-white image. Left: taking time out to relax during a hectic tour.

And all the time the hits kept on rolling on and on. Their 'Carpenters' album sold a million within three weeks of release, the singles 'Superstar' and 'Hurting Each Other' went gold, as did the 'A Song For You' album. Richard heard 'It's Gonna Take Some Time' on Carole King's 'Music' album, he and Karen recorded it and they had another hit. By mid-1974 the Carpenters had sold over 25 million albums and singles. They had won three Grammy Awards and were earning up to \$30,000 per concert in most countries of the world.

Amazing Popularity

They owned two shopping centres in Downey and two blocks of flats called 'Just Begun' and 'Close To You'. They were both millionaires. An album released in Britain in late 1973 titled 'The Singles 1969-1973', became one of the nation's biggest-ever selling LPs and was *still* in the charts eighteen months later. 'Sing', 'Yesterday Once More', 'Top Of The World', a version of 'Please Mr. Postman' and 'Only Yesterday' have continued the run of hit singles.

Richard and Karen bought their parents a new home and added a recreation wing. They are still very close to their parents and don't care who knows it. Perhaps that's one reason for their amazing, across-the-boards popularity - they *do* seem to be as unaffected and natural as all the publicity surrounding the two would have us believe. A brother and sister whose simple aims of singing and making people happy allows for maximum identification with the broadest possible audience.