

back together again

Karen Carpenter, at 32, was acting just like a dreamy-eyed teenager – and all because of that old fashioned thing called love.

Married three years ago – to American businessman Tom Burris – Karen couldn't get over the fact that love and marriage all happened so quickly, and completely changed her life.

Karen and her brother Richard are the two halves of the famous singing act The Carpenters, a few years back the undisputed No.1 vocal duo in the world.

Then, at the peak of their careers, The Carpenters shocked the pop world by splitting up. The brother and sister who had been at the top for eight years and sold more than 50 million records, and had always been so inseparable, went their separate ways.

Now, they are back, working together again. And all set, they hope, to launch a fresh assault on the pop charts they once used to dominate so consistently.

"We laid off the act for different reasons," said Richard. "We'd been working at breakneck pace for a while. It just got to me after a while. I wanted to lay back and not do a lot."

But ironically, it was Karen suddenly meeting Tom Burris, falling in love and deciding to marry, that



sparked off brother Richard into working full time again.

I met them during a break in rehearsals at A & M's recording studios in Los Angeles, where Richard and Karen were just completing a new album, *Made In America*. Their much played single *Touch Me When We're Dancing* came from this album.

"I can't tell you how happy I am. I'm so head over heels in love, it's not true," said Karen, babbling on enthusiastically like a schoolgirl who is out on her first serious date.

"Tommy asked me to marry him on June 16, 1980. I only met him on April 12. And then when I said yes, we were going to get married, and we wanted to put a wedding of that size together in two months, well, I can tell you, Richard's hair almost fell out!"

But when Richard could see that Karen really was in love and was determined to get married, that did it. It cemented their working relationship stronger than ever, she insists.

"Richard hadn't written in four years. I said 'Why don't you write me a wedding song?' And boy, he came up with a beauty.

"At first, he didn't want me to hear it. It was called *Because We Are In Love*. It was the flipside of our 'comeback' single.

"I sang it myself at my wedding. So there I was in that beautiful dress and gorgeous hat, standing there trying to remember the lyrics of the song when I could barely remember my name through wedding nerves and excitement.

"Richard wanted me to do it live, so we recorded the whole thing with a full

orchestra and a 60-voice choir, and Peter Knight, the musical director, conducting. It was just unbelievable. It really meant a lot to me.”

Karen is the chirpy, bubbly half of The Carpenters. Richard, notoriously the serious one, very rarely known to smile except on stage, said: “People may have said I was ‘written out’, but I simply wanted to re-charge.”

So when they decided to lay off, Richard did nothing – except look at his collection of 40 cars – while Karen went off to try for a solo career as a singer.

Said Karen: “I went to work in New York, which was completely new for me. I started work on a solo album, but I missed Richard terribly. When he wrote that wedding song, he came in and he had that grin on. I knew then that he was back. He had that ‘Yesterday Once More’ gleam, y’know.

“He suddenly said, ‘I got a hook’. I said, ‘Oh yeah?’ And out popped this tune, called *Those Good Old Dreams*. It’s got that same happy, positive feeling of some of our old hit songs – like *Top of the World*.”

Richard is obviously the major talent behind The Carpenters act – the man who not only first created their unique sound, but also writes some of their songs. While Karen adds the inspiration and the ‘niceness’.

It’s the blending of their two voices and their amazing harmonies which accounts for their tremendous success.

Today they are both millionaires several times over. They could afford to sit back and never work again.

“Married life? I shied clear of it for a long time,” said Karen. “It was a total accident, really – no kiddin’. Everybody kept saying it takes only one man to fall in love, and you’re not going to know.

“Well, it took one, and I didn’t know! It was so odd. For so many years my life was pretty planned out, touring, all that normal stuff. But your social life suffers. It doesn’t only suffer, there *isn’t any!*”

Her husband, Tom Burris, is a businessman and property developer who was a financial adviser to Ronald Reagan when he was running for President.

Karen now regards her marriage as the most



important thing in her life, she says. “The percentage of marriages breaking up in our business is probably heavier than in any other. I never really met anybody I fell in love with before. If I had met that person, I would have taken a chance before.”

Now that he is back, Richard Carpenter is obsessed with work, says Karen. “Yes, it’s Richard who is the musical driving force behind us. He’s more interested in the business side of things, but I’m more of an organiser. While he’s busy being Mr. Genius, I keep things straight.

“We feed each other. It’s weird. He’s constantly telling me to back off. If one of us is going at 150 miles an hour, the other one has to slow things down.”

The Carpenters are now touring again, getting back to their audience. They came to Britain last year.

“We’re looking forward to coming back to Europe again soon – and to appearing on *Top of the Pops*, hopefully!” said Karen.

And, equally hopefully, of course, in that coveted No. 1 chart spot.

