

Richard Carpenter: Pianist - Arranger - Composer - Conductor

Richard Carpenter is known throughout the world as one half of the brother/sister duo The Carpenters he founded with his sister Karen. While Karen drew most of the media attention as the vocalist and drummer, Richard's behind the scenes contributions to the group's success were incalculable. He acted as a one-man A&R Department, selecting all their tunes; he wrote many of their hits (such as "Yesterday Once More" and "Top of the World"); produced the recording sessions; sang vocals and background vocals; and he played piano and keyboards. In addition to these roles, Richard also arranged and orchestrated nearly all of The Carpenters repertoire, leading to his reputation as among the most talented and skilled pop arrangers of the last fifty years. Indeed, the editors of *Billboard* recently selected Richard as one of the top 500 producers of all time, and his biography is featured in the upcoming *Billboard Encyclopedia of Record Producers*.

Carpenter's musical instincts are legendary: on several occasions he selected songs for The Carpenters to record that had been passed on by other more seasoned A&R executives, and in every case his instincts yielded a Top 40 hit. Burt Bacharach's "Close To You," for example, had been floating around Hollywood as a demo for several years before Richard Carpenter heard it and instantly knew it could be a hit (it reached #1). While "Close To You" was still on the charts, Richard was trying to decide whether to release "Superstar" or "Rainy Days and Mondays" as the duo's next single.

"The then-president of Capitol Records came by our dressing room at a Las Vegas show," Richard recalls, "and I played both tracks for him. He said that neither of them would ever be a hit." Undaunted, Richard eventually released them anyway, and both became gold singles and both reached Number 2 on the *Billboard* charts. All in all, Richard's intuitions gave The Carpenters an astonishing 20 Top 40 singles, (12 of them Top 10s) including such pop standards as "Superstar," "Rainy Days and Mondays," "Sing," "Top of the World," "Only Yesterday," and "Yesterday Once More."

Richard Carpenter was born October 15, 1946 in New Haven, Connecticut. At 16, Richard was already studying piano at Yale, and when the family moved to LA in 1963, he took music classes at USC and Cal State University, Long Beach. After winning a Hollywood Bowl battle of the bands, the Carpenters were signed to A&M, and their debut album "Offering" was released in October, 1969. (The album was subsequently retitled as "Ticket to Ride" after their first single, a Beatles cover, was a Top 100 hit.) It was principally the enormous commercial success of The Carpenters that provided the financial fuel for label owners Herb Alpert and Jerry Moss to expand the label's roster, making possible the eventual signing and promotion of such seminal artists as The Police, Joan Armatrading, The Sex Pistols, Cat Stevens, and Peter Dinklage.

Over the next thirteen years, The Carpenters released an average of one album a year and became one of the most popular groups in recording history, selling over 100 million records worldwide. In the summer of 1971, Karen and Richard hosted their own variety series on NBC television, "Make Your Own Kind of Music." They toured internationally through the seventies, and their 1976 tour of Japan was that country's largest grossing concert tour. The timeless quality of their recordings continues to win them new fans, including Sheryl Crow, k.d. lang, the Cranberries and Sonic Youth. "The Carpenters are the best group ever," k.d. lang enthuses. "I became a singer because of Karen." A recent tribute album by alternative rock bands, "If I Were A Carpenter," is testimony to the enduring influence of the Carpenter's legacy.

In addition to having an uncanny ear for "hits," Richard's genius is as an instrumental arranger and orchestrator. Among musicians and industry insiders, Richard is known for his ability to create instrumental textures that continue to hold interest after hundreds of listenings. His carefully crafted string, horn, and background vocal parts are delicately and cleverly interlocked. In recognition of these skills, he has been nominated for a "best arrangement" Grammy 5 times. RC, as he is known

to his friends, believes that the most important things to bring to a session are the song and the arrangement. "The arrangement is everything," he explains. "You can have the best singer on the planet and the best song, but if you don't have the right arrangement for that song and singer, the singer's going nowhere and neither is the song. The arrangement is everything that makes a hit record." Carpenter's arrangements have been studied and analyzed at numerous Universities music departments, including The Berklee College of Music and Stanford University; in 1997 Carpenter was invited to lecture at Stanford University on Arranging.

Karen Carpenter died unexpectedly at her parents home on February 4, 1983 from heart failure, the result of years of suffering from anorexia nervosa. RC has worked continuously since then. In addition to managing The Carpenters' vast publishing, licensing, and business interests, he has gone back into the studio on several occasions to remix (and sometimes re-record parts of) the Carpenters repertoire for compilations such as 1991's boxed set *From The Top*. He served as executive producer of the made-for-TV-movie "The Karen Carpenter Story" (ABC, 1987), a starkly honest account of his sister's battle against anorexia. In 1987 RC released his first solo album "Time," a stunning collection combining his own vocals with those of guest vocalists such as Dusty Springfield (Richard has taken lead vocals on Carpenters albums, and of course was a key ingredient in their background vocal sound). A highlight of that album was a new Richard Carpenter composition, the haunting tribute to Karen, "When Time Was All We Had." In 1994, Richard oversaw the assembly and digital remastering of a new collection of his favorite Carpenters songs written by outside songwriters, "Interpretations." 1994 also saw the release of a new Carpenters biography, painstakingly researched by the late Ray Coleman (who also wrote biographies of Lennon and Clapton).

In 1997, Carpenter released his second solo album, "Pianist Arranger Composer Conductor," in which the artist combined his favorite Carpenters tunes with new material. The result is a harmonically rich album, featuring intriguingly clever arrangements, at times pushing the harmonic envelope of the AC format that Richard is generally credited with having invented. "It was important to me to do something new with the tunes," Carpenter explained "and that led me to writing extensive rearrangements. I thought they could be treated in almost a light classical mode - very little rhythm, more symphonic." The album is a showcase for RC's formidable talents as a pianist as well, the piano often being the focus around which the arrangements were written. The album's standout tracks include "Yesterday Once More," "Time," "One Love" and "Karen's Theme."

Richard is happily married and lives in the Los Angeles area with his wife and children. In his spare time, he collects classic American cars.

CARPENTER'S FACTS

- The Carpenters were the #1 best selling American group between 1970 and 1980 (even selling more units than The Eagles or Hall & Oates).
- 9 Gold Albums and 10 Gold Singles in America.
- 5 Top Ten Albums
- Over 100 million records sold worldwide.
- In their first year, from July 1970 to June 1971, the Carpenters had four top five hits: (Close To You, We've Only Just Begun, For All We Know, and Rainy Days & Mondays), twice as many as any other artists during that same period.
- The Carpenters are one of the best-selling duos of all time, rivaling Simon & Garfunkel, and the Everly Brothers.

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