

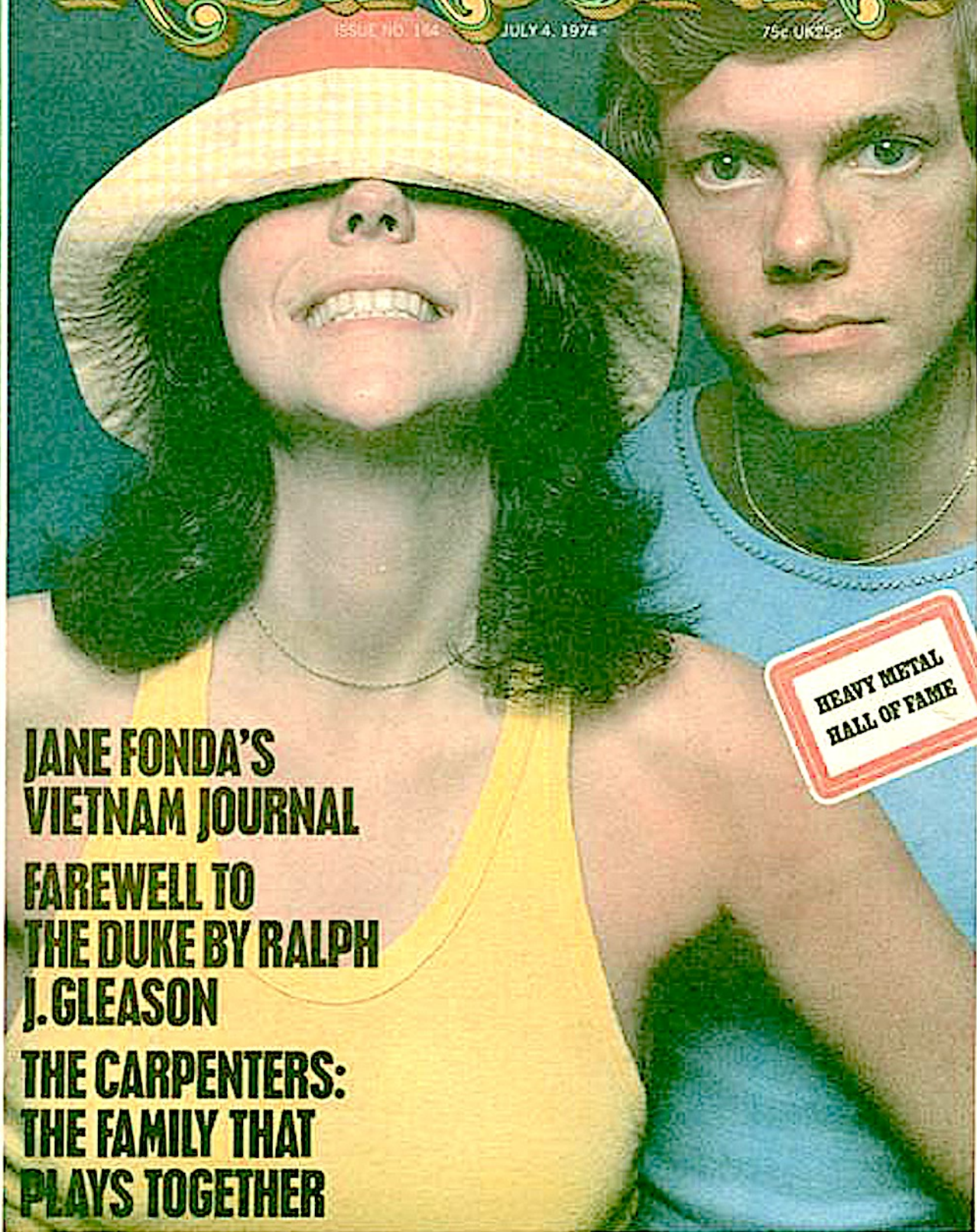
THE BOYS IN THE BAG BY HUNTER S. THOMPSON

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HEAVY METAL
HALL OF FAME

**JANE FONDA'S
VIETNAM JOURNAL**

**FAREWELL TO
THE DUKE BY RALPH
J. GLEASON**

**THE CARPENTERS:
THE FAMILY THAT
PLAYS TOGETHER**

Up from



Downey

Continued

the most important station in the world. And they weren't playin' it, and I was worried. Then ABC went with it, and it was the last station, and I knew the record was a smash, I knew we had our second Number One.

"Then the promotion man in New York says, 'I gotta tell ya, kids, the whole ball of wax... is three. Three, it really puts you in the money.'

"I suppose the guy was serious. I guess he really believed that and the whole thing, but...

"Ever since then it's been, 'OK, get an album out, OK you gotta go here to perform, OK you have to do this, OK now that.' Sometimes I feel like a big... like a robot.

"And yet... I can't complain. This is what we worked for. It's all stuff I want to do. I want to play the *Warsaw Concerto* with the Boston Pops. I want to record a new album. I love to go out and perform.

"It's just so exhausting. We haven't had three days off in all these years, not three days where we were totally free of interviews, rehearsing, composing. It's become a business, whether we like to think of it that way or not. Even though it started as music, and it still is music, you've got like 30 people working for you, and a corporation, the whole thing." The Carpenters' corporation is dubbed "Ars Nova." Richard is its president and chief decision maker. "You get problems, things you never thought you would have to deal with, things you never knew existed. What it's like to have people working for you, keeping them all happy."

"And while all these people are working at the things that have to be done, nothing can be done without an OK from us. So we have to think about all those things still.

"It's not like being a doctor, where you work hard for so many years and then at last you've got your practice, your office, your regular routine. Your El Dorado. In the record business you can have money piled up to the ceiling. You can say, 'Well, I could retire tomorrow.' But you don't *wanna* retire. So you always have to worry about that next hit.

"It got to me. I had like an anxiety thing happen to me. It was November of '72. We were out for too long. We were out for six weeks of one-nighters. We didn't have a single in release. It was in between 'Goodbye To Love' and 'Sing.' And there's always, like for the person picking the single and doing the creative thing, there's always that nagging thought: 'Will we find another single?' On top of going from city to city to city, six weeks of dingy weather, each day more rotten than the last. Business was good, crowds were good, the group was fine, but... Holiday Inn after Holiday Inn... "It just got to me. One night — man, I just didn't know what — it just hit me.

"What happened is, a lot of little things started goin' wrong. Which doesn't mean anything. Every now and then you have a concert where a lot of little things go wrong. I got up there, I didn't like the feel of the place. Which doesn't mean anything either. We've played a lot of places just like it. It was a big domey... ice rink. It was freezing, and... and there was this rumble. The acoustics were so awful, and I hear this rumble, and... then there's a mistake in the music... then a chord fell out... "I felt like I was losing control. I mean, I never felt that bad. I mean you can't describe it. You just get scared and you - don't - know - why type of thing. 'I - don't - wanna - be - here I - don't - wanna - do - this - show.'

"But you're onstage. What are you going to do? What are you going to do? I was so afraid, because I didn't know what was going to happen. I felt I was really going to lose it.

"There was just something, some part of my mind was telling me not to. 'Don't stop. You can't just walk off. You have to finish the show.' I mean, all those people there...

"So then by that time we were getting into the second part, into the oldies medley, things I could do without thinking much, and... I got control of myself. We didn't stop or anything."

Having said this much, Richard seemed to want to retreat from the episode.

"Evidently I just wasn't in the greatest frame of mind. I mean, who's to say? I can't tell all the things that led to it. Ordinarily, and ever since then, if the flute player's mike falls off or something, we roll anyway. But I just... I felt it was really gonna... get me."

Karen clutched at herself, gripped by a comic phantom. "Aah — it's got me!"

"Not funny," Richard said levelly.

"Oh. Not funny."

"I did not enjoy it."

Chastened, she said, "Well, I knew something was going on. I looked over at him and he had the weirdest



Karen at the drums: Naivete, occasional bitchiness, a comic Imogene Coca mask which fits her imperfectly.

expression on his face."

Richard said, "Well it wasn't a nervous breakdown. I've never had anything like that.

"Just about then that article about the Beach Boys was printed in *ROLLING STONE*. Someone showed it to me, and I read about Brian Wilson freaking out on that airplane. And I said, gee, maybe that's what's... happening to me. Brian of course, being the genius that he is, could handle that.

"No, I just felt it was time to... pull back a little. "But who would have thought it could get even that heavy? I mean, who knows about anxiety when you're 20, and you're doin' the things you love. Lugging big amps onto the Troubadour stage for hoot night. Having a wonderful time.

"Then you get all the things you've worked for so hard all along, and it *changes*. And there's lots and lots of pressure. But still... it's something you want to do!"

What would happen if the group took things at a slower pace?

"I don't know," he said, as if he had never given it thought. "It wouldn't affect record sales or anything. The part we'd have to cut down — which we are, bein' we cut the summer tour — is the concerts. We can't cut down on recording. We only come out with one album a year anyway, so... That's what it would have to be.

"The way I see it, I mean, we have to cut down a little. It was getting to be too much. Now we've had the Europe thing, now we have the Japanese thing, and the summer tour, before that the April tour, and... yeah, May. It was too much.

"But it's what we worked for, you know. And we really... It's exhausting, and it's a lotta problems, but I still... It's something we like to do. The whole thing is.

"But we have to cut down."

"I want to start cutting down."

When the Carpenters tour certain parts of America it would not be much of an exaggeration to say that Richard and Karen are like visiting deities. A paucity of entertainment in these areas combined with the Carpenters' huge appeal ensures almost entire towns will turn out for their concerts. Thus it was in Beckley, and Wheeling, West Virginia; in Richmond, Virginia, and in Hershey, Pennsylvania; they bring glamour to scenes of devastation, to small cities scarred by open mines and strewn with tornado debris. Their limousine glides through narrow streets suited to Dublin slums, past felled trees, railroad yards, mounds of coal, wrecked house trailers...

Glimpsed from the driver's seat the three figures in the rear look like a Fellini parody of *Don't Look Back*. Karen, in dark glasses and fox fur collar, chews gum as she gazes at the dreary town gliding by. Randee Bash, Sherwin's daughter and Richard's girlfriend, her gamin face animated or bored, hangs on Richard's arm and on his every word. Richard, projecting nervous hauteur, holds in his lap the Sony CF550 cassette player-radio which he personally carries everywhere. Richard tunes the radio to the local pop station — he imitates the morning man's nasal boss-jock tones. "Yes they've got that sound here in St. Clairsville, Ohio!"

The clackety-click of tapping on metal in time to the music: Karen's long carmine nails.

In every town they play, mention of their names brings smiles to faces young and old. "They're really special. Lotta groups been through here, but... they are the only ones really worth seein'." Their records are on all jukeboxes, squeezed between the country records that predominate. Muzak plays their hits, and Karen and Richard prick up their ears, comment on the arrangements. This is Carpenter country. (But then, so is Las Vegas. So is Europe, and Japan.)

They are quite gracious when asked for autographs, considering how often they are approached in restaurants, after concerts, while riding in limousines. "I'm going to act like a fan now," a driver will announce. "My

other daughter would never forgive me if I got one for her sister and not for her," a woman at the Sheraton Inn will say ingratiatingly as she begs for a second signature. Approached during breakfast in Richmond, Virginia, by a rotund and particularly nervy fellow bearing five napkins to be individually inscribed, Karen blurted in disbelief, "Oh, f---!"



ouch me and I end up singing..."

Karen is in some ways like a child, which is not surprising. A star since 19, a committed musician even longer than that, she probably missed out on one or two normal stages of adaptation to "the real world." Richard is similarly detached, but he is older; Karen at 24 most noticeably shows the effects of an early success. She has been sheltered and pampered and behaves accordingly. Finished at lunchtime with the gum she often chews, she drops it unwrapped into a clean ashtray, where it glistens wetly like a kitten's tongue throughout the meal. She is capable of doing childlike things with the unself-consciousness of a ten-year-old: Giving directions to some destination, she uses her body like a walking car, driving down an imaginary boulevard, pivoting herself to the left for a turn... Onstage she sometimes projects the air of a spoiled, slightly heartless prom queen toying with the emotions of the audience, a willing collective beau. "There she is," one of the Carpenters' band muttered sourly one morning as Karen and her hairdresser/wardrobe girl, laden with traveling bags and beauty kits, descended downstairs to a Sheraton Inn lobby. "The princess."

But petulance or overobvious use of privilege are mere compensations for being in a position she is not truly able to enjoy. She is the star of the show, but her lot seems more like a band singer's of an earlier decade, the amiable thrush along for the ride; except Karen rides private jets instead of band buses, and there's not much hearty fraternization going on. The partially forced naivete, the occasional bitchiness on the road, the comic Imogene Coca mask which fits her so imperfectly are all forms of a will which cannot find its proper outlet. So long has she deferred to her brother, it seems, she cannot express a distinct personality of her own. The two of them are like a couple married too long, in whom passion has been replaced by accommodation. When agreed-upon patterns are deviated from, the transgressor (usually Karen) is quickly slapped down. Then again, Richard can be stronger only because Karen lets him.

The closest she is to her brother is when they are making or talking about music: During a rehearsal, discussing a four-bar break, the two of them will suddenly burst into song as if they possessed ESP. On tour, huddled over a coffee-shop table, discussing the chart positions of their latest releases, she consoles him when their single hasn't debuted as high on the Top Hundred as might have been hoped. At other times, when she needs reassurance from him, at least in public he isn't there. So Karen retreats into giggles and facial takes, becomes a gum-chewing comedienne or a spoiled princess who doesn't allow herself to think out loud with strangers. Or close friends? Or even alone?

When she really comes alive is when she sings; she changes completely. Joking or talking one moment, she becomes a different person the very next, as soon as she opens her mouth. Out comes that unique and wonderful voice, exactly as on record, expressing fascinating contrasts: chilling perfection with much warmth; youth with wisdom. Then she seems to be someone who knows something of life. She must be aware of the transformation she brings about, yet when asked to describe

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He was openly angry about the Carpenters' image, about the wholesome halo made to hover over the two of them from the very first. The problem, he thought, began and was perpetuated by the publicity pictures and album covers prepared by their record company.

"The pictures, the album covers, the eight-by-ten glossies." He sighed in disgust. "There had been no brother-sister act since Fred and Adele Astaire. They just hadn't known what to do in a photography session. You can't be embracing. And yet . . . they wanted that.

"We didn't say anything when we were getting started except 'yes sir.' So they said: 'OK, sit on the floor back-to-back and smile. Put your arm on his shoulder and smile. Richard, put your arm around her waist and smile.' Every stock Steve and Eydie pose you could imagine.

"In Europe, just last month, it was the same thing. Press conferences with 80 photographers, all saying, 'Smile! Cheer up! Come on, smile smile smile! I'm sick of smiling. But they're all upset if you don't. So we oblige them, and we get it back in the press. The sticky-sweet Carpenters — still smiling those Pepsodent smiles!"

"This . . . thing they've 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. They can't figure out how the fast car could have gotten in there. 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's an in-between, you know what I mean? I don't drink a whole hell of a lot. I do have wine with dinner. I voted to make marijuana legal. I believe in premarital sex. But then, I don't smoke."

"The image we have," Karen said, "it would be impossible for Mickey Mouse to maintain. We're just . . . normal people."

Richard returned to the subject of press photos and album covers. "Some I can stomach, as far as sending 'em out with the press kits. But I'm still waiting for something that really knocks me out. And some, especially that *Close To You* cover . . . zero imagination.

"They took me to Mister Guy's for that, outfitted me in all this stuff that didn't fit worth a damn. I can't buy stuff off the rack. I have big shoulders and I sort of taper in. I said, it doesn't fit. They said, you let us worry about it. The coat had to be pinned. The coat is held . . . in . . . with all these pins, all the way down, just for the picture. Cashmere coat, must have cost 250 bucks. Super expensive pants. Shoes. The whole outfit.

"They gave her some expensive dress and then they take us and sit us — for an album cover that's sold four million copies or something — took us to Palos Verdes, have us scramble down a 200-foot embankment. Waves splashing over the \$400 outfits. Freezing, sopping wet. We're supposed to record that night. And they sit us on a rock. And here's this amateur right next to us, some amateur just out on the weekend, takin' pictures of his girlfriend — the same identical pose! And I'm thinking . . . something isn't right here.

"OK, sit," they say, and, "OK, smile!" And there's the album cover.

"When they brought it in I said, 'I don't like it.' They said, 'Learn to love it.'

"I have never learned to love it. I hate it.

"That's all the early stuff was, the same old thing, whether we did it at A&M or whether we went to this guy or that guy. And it still is!

"The *Song For You* cover. Whew . . . it's hard to explain. They came up with this heart, against a big red background. I said, 'It's gonna look like a Valentine's Day card.' 'Oh no, you're wrong,' they said, 'this is hip, it's, it's camp. People will look at this and they'll say, oh yeah it's the Carpenters all right, but they're putting us on.' I said, 'They're gonna think it's a Valentine's Day card.' I mean, that's what it looks like: a bunch of syrupy love songs, all packaged up with a heart on the front.

"On top of that they put these stickers with a picture of the two of us, cheek to cheek, smiling . . . in the heart! It looked so . . . sweet! So . . . lovey dovey!"

"Then they decided they wanted to redo it, after it was released. Probably the first album that ever sold a million copies that they took back and redid the cover. They thought it would be 'improved.' It was worse. I mean . . . they're experimenting on our album cover.

"The cover for *Now And Then*. That was supposed to be — very original — a picture of us standing in front of the house, smiling. I said, 'No. No. No.' Then it was, well what else can we do now that we're here, how about if you get in your car and drive down the street.



The Carpenters rehearsing: "We get good reviews, but they never get into why the music's good or bad."

"Immediately someone sees the picture of us in the car and says, 'You're not smiling. You look mad.' 'No,' I said, 'I just don't smile when I drive. If I were smiling it would look like a 1952 DeSoto ad!'"

The photos and the album covers contribute to an image which is then reacted to by the media, a process which really exasperates Richard.

"This guy from Louisville, who went on and on about 'the vitamin-swallowing, milk-fed Carpenters.' You could just read between the lines, he was so uptight that we wouldn't give him an interview. 'I'll show them!' The most inane things . . . Remember, Karen? About . . . their songs are about . . . Karen falls in love with someone who's test-piloting an airplane, and the plane crashes, and . . . It was so ridiculous we kept it."

"We've narrowed the interviews we give now down to . . . practically none.

"This DJ from Toronto called me up on the air. It was different, I'll grant you that. He opens up by saying, 'What's the difference between you and Paul and Paula?' 'There were two of them. There's two of us,' I said. 'That's where it ends.' 'OK,' he says, 'what about Sonny and Cher?'"

Karen: "She's thinner."

"All right," he says finally. "I know where it's at. We might as well bring it out. I've listened to the lyrics of your songs. I know that Karen's singin' 'em to you. I know they're about incest. You want to talk about this? I couldn't believe it. I was stunned. I tried to explain, absolutely not. Imagine — I tried to explain! I don't even write all of those songs. They just happen to be love songs. Karen sings them. I sing and arrange. We happen to be brother and sister."

"I remember how you threw the phone down when that was over."

"Yeah. That was the last phone interview we ever did."

"In Toronto, when we did the oldies medley, some writer thought we were a group from the Fifties and that those were our hits! How do you deal with people who have the intelligence of an ant?"

"We get good reviews, but they're surface good. 'They were here, boy, it's nice to see an all-American group. The audience was dressed neatly. The music wasn't too loud.' They never get into why the music's good. Or bad. It's just image.

"I wouldn't mind a bad review of things that are bad."



Richard carries a great many things in his head. Every pop hit since 1962, for instance, theme songs from all the Fifties TV comedies and every detail of the Carpenters' struggle to be accepted. To an outsider their rise may seem meteoric, but for Richard it is an ongoing story, with past details as fresh and clear as yesterday's

rehearsal. Bitterness is one of the qualities he subliminally projects, although he hastens to cover its traces when he becomes aware of them.

One of the Carpenters' first gigs was a charity show where they met Burt Bacharach, who complimented them lavishly and asked them to prepare and perform a medley of his tunes for another upcoming benefit. Initially he gave them carte blanche, but when he heard the medley Richard had arranged he dictated all kinds of changes the day before the show, necessitating frantic all-night work from the group, who had to learn a radically different medley from the one they had been rehearsing for weeks.

When Richard first told this story, the confusion and hurt he felt at the time lay heavy in his words, but as Karen embroidered the incident, essentially repeating what he had said, his attitude reversed completely and he finished by denying any thoughtlessness or folly on Bacharach's part, as if it were necessary that he officially remember his relationship with the man who wrote "Close To You" as nothing short of perfect. There are touchy areas, places he is not willing to probe. He fills his conversation with verbal shorthand and clichés. . . . type of thing. "I was stunned." (Karen, too, on the brink of a revelation about someone, will stop short and say instead, "Well . . . she's quite a character.") He has no time to probe those areas. He is busy working, maintaining the style of life and work he and his sister have become accustomed to in the last five years.

"It all changed very gradually," Karen said.

"For a long time it was the same," Richard picked up. "First of all, you don't get a royalty check for six months. In six months we had three gold records: 'Close To You,' 'We've Only Just Begun' and the *Close To You* album. But we were still at our old house, still living in the same neighborhood, with the Number One record in the United States and it was odd."

"Then we decided to move, to the other side of the tracks. There's a street in Downey that's both north and south of the tracks. We were south of the tracks."

"Right. There's actually tracks in Downey to be on the wrong side of. We bought a place right around fall of '70, when 'Begin' was out, and we moved in December, when 'For All We Know' was released."

"Even so, we were scared."

"Well, you know some royalties are going to come in, you just know it. You've sold those records. But you still haven't seen it. We were wondering if we should buy a place that cost so much."

"Then the first royalty check came. Herbie [Alpert] signed it himself, and he'd written 'hello' all over it, made all kinds of little drawings . . ."

"Yeah. And it was for 50." Fifty what? "Fifty thousand."

"I'd never seen anything like that in my whole life," Karen recalled. "We sat and stared at it all through dinner. I'd never seen that many zeros . . ."

"That's when you start noticing a change. That's an awful lot of money. You know? You still feel the same inside, you're still the same person. But to come from the financial situation we grew up with, right into staring at something like that . . ."

"It takes a long time for it to sink in. There are all these habits you've been brought up with all your life. That you don't just go plowing through a store, buying everything you like. I'm getting better at it, but . . . Compared to a lot of other people, what I buy is nothing. Like my accountant told me last week to go spend some money."

"He was kidding, Karen," Richard smiled. "That was humor from the accountant." But Richard grew reflective.

"I never thought it would get as big as it has," he said. "I never thought it would have as many pressures as it does. How could you imagine it? Before, when the two of us were going to college, it was just screwing around. We rehearsed and said, 'Someday we'll make it,' and . . . no worries. What worries? Our biggest worry was not being able to afford some microphone we wanted."

"The first thing you know you need to do is get a contract," Karen said. "If you're lucky enough to do that, you say, 'I've got to have a hit.' When you get your hit . . ."

"Everyone tells you, 'That's not enough. You need another one right away. You don't want people thinking you're a one-hit group, do you? There are lots and lots of those around.'"

"Waiting for our second hit. We were in New York to do the *Sullivan Show*. 'We've Only Just Begun' had taken off, but WABC hadn't put it on their playlist yet. I was worried about it, because WABC was the biggest,

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autographed. Especially *Close To You*. You should see them . . . all crumpled up . . .

"Only the really important letters are handled personally. There was a 12-year-old girl in Utica, New York, who was dying and who wanted a drum set. We got her the drum set. She was supposed to die a couple months before we played Utica, but she wanted to see that show so bad that she stayed alive for it. A few weeks after that . . . that was it. That also happened with a little girl in Notre Dame.

"It's weird to think you could have a meaning like that for someone, to make someone go on living. That's a hell of a responsibility. Someone loving something that much, to keep them alive. . . . It's a very strange feeling, to think you could have that much . . . power . . ."

Karen concentrated on articulating thoughts she did not seem often to entertain. "That you could mean that much to someone. It's an eerie feeling. I don't dig being responsible that way.

"I mean . . . we only wanted to . . . make a little music. . . ."

I guess I'm really very lucky
That I've got this thing to play
'Cause it can really make me feel good
Even when it's cloudy and grey

Yes, after years and years of practice
And awful allergies that made me sneeze
And now the other guys are out playin' with
their girlfriends
And I was still . . . bangin' on the keys
And it got me

Right where I am
This is me
Playing the piano
I hope ya like what I do
It's for you
And I'll try and sing right too*



ometimes I feel like a . . . robot.

Richard Carpenter is technically handsome but really much more interesting looking than that easy term implies. His face reflects his sarcasm, talent, arrogance and pride; his mere good looks are a product of careful grooming. He is a creature of his own design. As assiduously as he has done everything else, Richard transformed himself from a gangly, short-haired, horn-rimmed music student into a chubby fellow with Prince Valiant bangs, then into a thin young millionaire with a certain poise and a Sebring cut.

Richard never stops working. It is he who is the driving force behind the Carpenters. It is he who selects the material, arranges it, makes most important decisions and in general keeps the ball in the air. If he is not actively making music, he is thinking about it. His preoccupation extends from the most obvious attention to his own group's performance, through a general and encyclopedic awareness of current pop product, down to the tiniest particular factors bearing on actual sound: that the turntable at L.A. radio station KHIS is a mite slow, for instance, and that KLOS's is a bit fast. Recent cuts he likes include "Puzzle People" ("a perfect track!"), Paul Simon's ballads ("great strings, great everything") and "Jet." Among the pop musicians he has most admired are Frank Zappa, Brian Wilson and Jim Morrison.

Music is almost his sole interest in life. He does not read books. He is not concerned with politics and feels



Richard and Karen onstage: They seem to be going through what they would like to be a transition period.

no affinity for either major party, although he was outraged at the 18-minute gap in the White House tapes and at the lenient sentence given Spiro Agnew, two developments which managed to come to his attention.

"I'm not into much besides my music," he says frankly. "And cars. And investing my money. I like to have money, because I like what it gives me. I like to buy nice clothes. I like to eat well at good restaurants. If I hear about some new amplifier or something I want, I like being able to say without thinking twice, 'Yeah, get it.'"

He did not always have that option, and some of his single-mindedness may come from remembering the financial difficulties experienced earlier in his life when their parents worked wonders with a lower middle-class income in order to give their children what they wanted.

"When we were trying to make a go of our music," Richard said, "our parents bought everything they could afford for us. We had a drum set, a piano. Basically the whole thing. But we couldn't really afford to buy amplifiers, or an electric piano, or even mike stands.

"When we wanted to buy a tape recorder, to make demos of this first group we had . . . Dad, he wanted to get it for me, but we just couldn't swing it. It took us months to save enough even to make a down payment on a little Sony."

The Carpenters' early history is not as smooth as some might assume. Children of a lithographic printer, they grew up in New Haven, Connecticut, where 16-year-old Richard studied piano at Yale. The family moved to California in 1963, to Downey, a low-lying, bland suburb near L.A. International Airport. Richard continued his music studies at Cal State Long Beach, where he became interested in vocal arranging and was accompanist for the school choir. A few months after high-schooler Karen had begun playing drums, the Carpenter Trio was formed—a jazz instrumental group consisting of Karen, Richard and a bass-playing friend. In 1966, the trio won a city-wide "Battle of the Bands" televised from the Hollywood Bowl, with Richard taking the Best Instrumentalist award as well.

The trio was signed to an abortive contract with RCA, and some instrumental tracks were cut which pleased no one. Karen had started to sing by this time, but RCA was not interested in listening to her. While Richard and Karen Carpenter were recording light jazz instrumentals for RCA, the company was also cutting vocal tracks with a young unknown singer named Herb Alpert who was unsuccessfully trying to stir up RCA interest in an idea he had for a trumpet record.

When the trio disbanded, Richard and Karen became the nucleus of a vocal group called Spectrum which stressed the harmonies Richard had loved in choral work. Spectrum included four other members—all of them Cal State students—two of whom would eventually find a home in the Carpenters' organization:

Dorothy Woodhams, who sings and plays in the Carpenters' touring band, and John Bettis, a tail end folkie who became Richard's lyricist.

Spectrum, all dressed alike and singing original compositions, not pop hits, had difficulty getting gigs. For the year they were together (1968) they mostly played Hoot Night at L.A.'s Troubadour Club, waiting their turn to appear for 15 minutes on the same stage as other unknown hopefuls like Jackson Browne and Brewer and Shipley. After some unsatisfactory contract talks with White Whale Records, Spectrum disbanded.

Richard and John Bettis worked at Disneyland for a time, singing on Main Street dressed in 1900s ice cream suits, writing songs on Pepsi napkins during spare moments.

Soon Richard created a vocal sound similar to Spectrum's with a new group made up of just him and his sister Karen; they achieved harmonic blend through overdubs. Demo tapes were cut in the garage of well-known session bassist Joe Osborn, and Richard made the rounds of the record labels as he had done for Spectrum. He was turned away at the A&M gate, but in 1969 a friend of a friend got the Carpenters' tape a hearing from that company's now famous cofounder Herb Alpert. Alpert gave the Carpenters freedom in the studio, said nothing when their first album stified, and brought them "Close To You," a little-known Burt Bacharach-Hal David tune which became their first Number One single.

The rest is well-known. Twenty-five million singles and albums sold. (Even their atypical debut LP, *Offering*, is headed for the million-dollar mark.) Three Grammy awards, phenomenal concert attendance in all countries, with concerts bringing them up to \$30,000 a night. The Carpenters refrained from issuing figures telling their monetary worth, but they do state they are both millionaires. Their investments include two shopping centers in Downey and two apartment complexes, one named "Just Begun" and the other "Close To You." According to the success ethic, they should be completely untroubled. Life, alas (or fortunately), is not that simple.

The Carpenters have real pressures and problems, hard feelings and confusions which few would associate with the image of the group. Richard and Karen themselves are far from fully acknowledging these feelings. They suffer under strains which even they only dimly comprehend.

The Carpenters seem to be going through what they would like to be a transition period. They have an idea of what they are unhappy with but apparently no clear picture of what would make them more content. They would like to change the image people have of them. They would like to change their way of life. It is just that they are not at all certain what they would like to become. They are reluctant to give up the sheltered existence they have known, and change is such a foreign concept to them they can only approach it with great caution.

Well into their 20s, they still live with their parents in the suburb where they grew up. They are about to move from Downey at last—not into two separate homes, however, but into one home for the two of them.

There is evidence the Carpenters' special circumstances have made it especially difficult for them to break old habits. Their parents have remained parents. When told that Richard and Karen would be driving back to Los Angeles immediately after the final evening performance of a recent Las Vegas engagement, their mother warned, "I wish they wouldn't do that. They are just too tired after a show."

The Carpenters are protected from outside stresses not just by their parents but by a retinue of publicity and management people who carefully screen anyone wishing to make the acquaintance of Richard and Karen. One of the things Richard and Karen are particularly sensitive about at the moment is their home in Downey. It was decorated in their parents' taste, which embraces a Japanese garden, artificial waterfalls, and Astroturf and was probably always meant to be a present to the elder Carpenters.

Although unsure of where they are going and how to get there, they are on firmer ground discussing grievances incurred in getting where they are.

During dinner at Au Petit Cafe, a Hollywood restaurant the Carpenters frequent, Richard and Karen made forays into personal territory. Or rather, Richard expounded while Karen demurred to his lead. Richard had many things he very much wanted to discuss. It seemed he had had few opportunities to explain himself on these points, and what he wanted most was to be understood.

—Continued

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AFTER
25 MILLION RECORDS,
10 GOLD SINGLES
AND 5 GOLD ALBUMS
RICHARD & KAREN CARPENTER
HAVE DECIDED
TO LEAVE HOME

By
TOM NOLAN



e're just . . . normal people.

Karen Carpenter, the solo singing half of a brother and sister musical duo that has sold over 25 million records world-wide, has classic "good looks" but with something extra. It is the something extra that makes her interesting to look at, some unrealized firmness in her features, a womanliness she does not always allow herself to express. It comes out when she sings — in the emotion that makes her voice intriguing and beguiling.

Karen insists on the right to be normal, even though she is a celebrity known all over the world, but it is impossible for her or for her brother Richard to regain the placid existence of their youth.

At a back table in Beverly Hills' La Scala restaurant, Karen described some conditions that would tend to make an "ordinary" life impossible for her. While everyone else at dinner (including her brother) was enjoying sumptuous pasta, she had before her a simple green salad and iced tea. She was, as usual, on a diet.

"A lot of kids write and ask me for advice," Karen began.

"Some of the things they ask are normal. How do you get into the business? How do you learn to sing?"

"A lot write and say they were hung up on drugs, but since they've heard our music they've gotten off of them."

"But a lot of kids who write have mental hang-ups. They're lonely, they want to know why their parents don't love them, why do their brothers and sisters hassle 'em. They haven't had a good life at all, and they just live for our music."

"They ask for advice that I'm not capable of giving. Because I'm not a doctor. It's hard to tell someone how to live their life even if you know 'em, let alone if you've never seen them. It's hard. It really is."

One girl, her boyfriend had gone to Vietnam and gotten himself killed. She wanted to kill herself, and what should she do? I said, God, don't kill yourself! I mean . . . what do you tell 'em?"

"Another girl, in Phoenix . . . Remember, Richard?"

"Oh yes," Richard Carpenter said, looking up from his meal. "The first time we played Gammage Auditorium. That big hall Frank Lloyd Wright designed."

Former child TV star Tom Nolan is an L.A.-based writer and film actor who has appeared with Cher in 'Chastity.'

"This girl. It was her mother's third marriage. The stepfather hated her. Truly sad. What else, Richard?"

"Something to do with her brother," Richard said slowly. "I can't remember."

"The ones that are really . . . freaky, if you answer once and they write back, then I give them to our manager, Sherwin Bash. You can't really get involved. It gets too heavy. You have to handle each one in a different manner. When you're playing with personal feelings, with someone who's that hung up on you. . . ."

One of the first times the Carpenters worked with their current opening act was in a huge coliseum in Houston. During Skiles and Henderson's comedy turn, a young man walked up the ramp to the stage and sat down at Karen's drums. Skiles and Henderson thought maybe the Carpenters were putting them to some kind of test, and the group supposed the guy at the drums was part of the comics' act.

He punched a policeman who approached him and was forcibly carried off, shouting, "Don't touch me! I'm engaged to Karen Carpenter!"

At the jail it was found he had on his person a wedding ring and airplane tickets for the honeymoon.

Another man who inserted himself memorably into Karen's life began his courtship with a letter which she received while they were playing Tahoe. Torturously scrawled like a five-year-old's mash note, it read, "Guess what. I've been waiting all this time to marry Melanie but it looks like it's not gonna come off, so you know who I picked to be my next old lady? That's right, Karen — you!" She and Richard laughed and kept the letter just for kicks, as they keep all the "strangies."

Three months later a GTO with JESUS SAVES stickers on the back bumper pulled up in front of a home in Downey, California, where Richard and Karen lived with their parents. Their father was in the garage working on a car. The fellow in the GTO got out and asked him if Karen was home.

"Yes," said her father, who cannot learn to lie.

"I'd like to speak to her."

"I really think she's busy right now."

"Oh," the fellow said, "she'll want to speak to me."

"Why is that?"

"Well," he explained, "you know all those songs she's been singing for the last four years? She's been singing them to me."

He showed up the next day, and the day after that. They came to recognize his car as it approached, the GTO of this guy who was not playing with a full deck, the guy who had written the letter they laughed at in Tahoe.

The night Richard and Karen went to the Ali-Norton fight at the Inglewood Forum with Herb Alpert, they returned to find the GTO parked and empty in front of their house.

While their parents were away GTO had pried open a door, setting off the burglar alarm. The police had come instantly. GTO had been very calm. He was not there to rob anything. He was engaged to Karen Carpenter and he had just come in to say hello.

They locked him up for 72 hours, after which he returned for his car.

He sat in the car for another day.

A neighbor called the police. As he was leaving, the black-and-whites pulled up, fencing him in. That was the day Karen had had enough. The police said they couldn't arrest him, all they could do was escort him to the city line, to Norwalk, mere minutes away. "Look," she said, "let's be serious about this. The guy has broken into my home. I don't know anything about the law. But don't tell me I'm supposed to be calm about this guy sitting and staring at my house, looking for me. If you just take him to Norwalk he'll turn around and come right back here."

Sitting there, day after day, staring at the house.

The police said that he had spent some time in a home. He had been in a mental home.

The police wanted her to go outside and say hello to him. Since he wanted so badly to speak to her, maybe that would satisfy him. She told them they were crazy.

The final day of his vigil he got out of his car and walked to the far end of the house. Perhaps that's where he thought her room was. He stood there ten minutes and at the top of his lungs screamed her name, over and over. . . .

"Some people center their whole lives around us," Karen continued. "They only live to see us, to hear us. That's getting awfully heavy."

"People get so involved. It's sad to see kids cry if they can't get backstage to see us. They go to sleep with our album covers. Sometimes their mothers send them to be

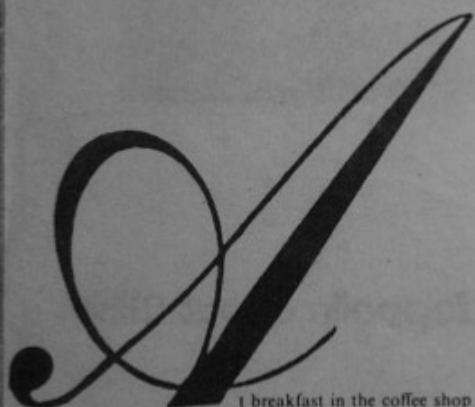
—Continued



With PR exec Paul Bloch: When she really comes alive is when she sings. Out comes that voice, exactly as on record, expressing chilling perfection with much warmth, youth with wisdom.

Continued

what happens at such a moment, all she will guardedly say is, "I don't know what you mean. I'm not thinking of anything in particular. I'm just . . . trying to get it right."



I breakfast in the coffee shop of the Beckley Ramada Inn, Karen said she had a sore throat.

Richard had a complaint of his own. The group had ordered an expensive piece of sound equipment from the firm that supplies the hardware for their concerts, and the equipment was months overdue. Richard seemed in some way to blame Karen, because her sometime boyfriend worked for the firm when the order was placed. He began nagging her in a scolding manner.

"We were supposed to have that thing by January. Then we were going to get it for Europe. Then they said it would come in time for *this* silly little tour. And now — they're telling us, wait till Japan. Karen, I want that \$15,000 back."

Karen floundered, out of her depths and for once in more human waters. Piteously, unconsciously touching her throat, she said, "Look, Richard. I don't know anything about that equipment. All I know is, I don't feel very well."

Elliot Abbott, Sherwin Bash's dry-humored representative, began uncharacteristically to hum "Tea For Two" in a strained and significant voice, as if to remind them of a writer's presence at the table. They didn't notice. Richard stared at his sister as if she were pulling feminine rank on him by having a sore throat, but for the moment he let the matter drop.

The waitress — this one had decided to treat the Carpenters as just plain folk — brought the news that there was no orange juice this morning.

"No orange juice?" Richard slumped against Randy in astonishment and mock despair.

"Gee, I guess this is gonna be the first time in 17 years that Richard hasn't started his day with a big double glass of orange juice," Karen offered. Richard nodded like an endearing little boy. His disappointment was partly comical and dispelled the previous moment's mood, but it also betrayed a real letdown. Not a \$15,000 letdown, but certainly something worth remembering.

"Boy, there've been a lot of firsts on this tour," he said. "No grapefruit yesterday, no ice cream the day before . . ."

"No vanilla ice cream," Karen said with wonderment. "I almost died when I heard that one. Could not believe it."

"And now this."

Allowing for unforeseen mechanical annoyances, the show itself is as seamless as could be. It never varies. It features all of the Carpenters' many hits: "Rainy Days and Mondays," "Top of the World," "Close To You," "We've Only Just Begun," all the others. There is a fun oldies medley, narrated in terrific boss-jock fashion by superb guitarist Tony Peluso, the man responsible for the incredible solo on "Goodbye To Love."

The Carpenters' conservatively mod wardrobe consists of expensive and attractive "semi-hip" ensembles, generally embroidered or sequined denim suits. Karen and Richard's patter has been created for them by a professional writer, and they speak it word-for-word during every performance.

"How many of you remember the Mickey Mouse Club? You do? I want you to think back to the end of the show, when the camera would focus in on two of the littlest Mouseketeers: Karen and Cubby. Well, I'm not the same Karen. But the newest member of our band is the same Cubby! Ladies and gentlemen, let's have a big round of applause for our drummer, Cubby O'Brien!"

When they speak nonmusically to their audiences, for some reason — insecurity? a misguided sense of propriety? — they become something very close to the image of wholesomeness they are so weary of. They are here to present a series of tunes as professionally as possible, and there will be no nonsense please!

The music is wonderful. Karen sings like a dream, a wish fulfilled, a sorrow resolved in the telling. Richard conducts from his electric keyboard with the precision and brilliance that has won him respect as an arranger and producer from such peers as Henry Mancini and Burt Bacharach. When Karen plays the drums she flails away with unthinking enthusiasm; she is a very good drummer. It all makes an excellent show.

In Wheeling, West Virginia, the Carpenters play two shows back to back in the Capitol Music Hall, home of the WWVA Jamboree, a well-known counterpart of the Grand Ole Opry. The hall holds approximately 3000. Both concerts are sold out, and an official guesses that if a third performance had been scheduled it too would have attracted a capacity crowd.

The Wheeling audiences are respectful without being dull, enthralled but enthusiastically appreciative on cue: the kind of audiences Richard likes. The setting helps —

a marvelous ratty old theater with proscenium stage, velvet curtains, balconies — "A dump," as Karen says. The night before, in Beckley, the Carpenters had played semi-in-the-round in a domed athletic stadium, and the informal atmosphere had encouraged a lively cheering and whooping which Richard had found rude. Here in Wheeling the loudest sound except applause to be heard from the other side of the footlights is a shushed and sibilant hiss, a whispered chorus of many young women singing softly along with Karen on "Close To You."

One of the thousands attending the first show of the evening is an eight-year-old girl named Karin, who is dying of cancer. She weighs 40 pounds. Her fondest wish was to see the Carpenters perform in person. This was arranged for her by the men who are serving as the Carpenters' drivers in Wheeling. There is no limousine service in Wheeling or St. Clairsville, the town in Ohio across the river where the group is staying; these part-time chauffeurs were recruited from their usual jobs as drivers for the town's private ambulance service and funeral home. Through their work they had heard of Karin, and they made possible the special treatment which allows her attendance tonight.

Karin is lying on the wide shelf of a balcony, looking down on the stage from the left. Sitting behind her in aluminum folding chairs are her mother and a hospital nurse. Karin rests on a litter, dressed in pajamas, covered by blankets, supported by pillows. She clutches a teddy bear to her side, and in one attenuated hand is a tattered Kleenex like a paper lily. When introduced to someone saying he is with the Carpenters, Karin beams suddenly with an intensity that is hard to bear. The skin on her face, on all her body, is sparse and taut, barely covering the bones. Her head is skeletal and looks enlarged, too big for the wasted frame that carries it. Karin reminds one of embryos photographed in the womb, but her gaze is informed with a century's wisdom not native to the unborn, nor to eight-year-old humans. Her being has taken on through pain a beauty it seems blasphemous to contemplate. With great effort she summons the energy to speak. "I really like their songs," she says. "I really like to listen to them."

In each of their concerts the Carpenters perform their hit "Sing" with the help of a local children's choir recruited from whatever town they are playing. The Wheeling Elementary School Choir is in tune and particularly well-kempt, fresh-faced and exuberant as they cheerily endorse the virtue of facing life while delivering your personal melody. "Aren't they something?" Karen Carpenter asks, and the audience applauds its endorsement of these adults of the future, and Karin applauds them too.

The Carpenters' unofficial observer leaves the balcony before the concert's finale, before the end of the show that someone has stayed alive to see.

As the Carpenters finished, there was much applause from their second capacity audience of the night, but the cheering faded and stopped before the hem of the curtain had quite touched the boards of the stage of the Wheeling Jamboree. As her brother led her off gently by the arm, Karen asked in subdued alarm, "What was — what happened? What went wrong?" Richard, walking her briskly toward the stairs to the basement dressing rooms, amused by her faith in the infallibility of their magic, said with a chuckle, "Well honey, sometimes it just doesn't . . . work . . ."

The 12-passenger Hansa jet was less than full. Murky weather enveloped the small airfield and promised a bumpy 40-minute trip ahead. Police cars had stood guard around the Carpenters' two chartered planes. Autographs had been extracted in return for a swift departure: Sign these albums, and you're free to leave.

Now, inside the small craft, a stewardess prepared to quietly distribute orange juice, coffee, beer, vodka; copies of *Time*, *National Lampoon*, *ROLLING STONE*. She made no announcements. The Carpenters had made it clear at the start of this tour they wished no extraneous disturbances.

It was a short field. The pilot took all of the runway to lift the Hansa up into the bleak gray morning.

Karen confessed to her hairdresser she had chosen the wrong color socks the night before — orange instead of tan to match today's slacks — then settled back, no one beside her, resigned to the flight.

Richard, eyes closed, his head on Randee's shoulder, seemed to be listening for the sounds of the landing gear retracting. He counted the thuds with the fingers of his right hand: one . . . two . . . three . . . He nodded, satisfied. He gave himself up to sleep.

Below, through drizzle and hazy clouds, a grim panorama of American landscape inched by beneath the plane carrying Richard and Karen away from and toward what they had created for themselves.