

Carpenters: Made in America

Richard Carpenter, producer

A&M SP 3723

BY BILL ADLER

Nothing has changed. Three years have passed since the Carpenters' last album, eleven since their first hit, *Close to You*. But every aspect of "Made in America" is absolutely of a piece with what has come before.

As usual, Richard produced and arranged this set. His keyboard fills and trademark orchestrations are Hollywood lush but never bombastic. Several tunes sport a decorous country feel in their loping bass lines and keening pedal steel guitars. Background vocals are somehow massed and ethereal at the same time, a trick that Abba knows well too.

Also as usual, Karen's lead vocals are rich, fluid, a little throaty, almost sexy, and overdubbed to good harmony effect on the choruses. Even her attitudes remain the same. She swings from nostalgia for lost innocence on *Those Good Old Dreams* to submissiveness on *I Believe You* to the dispensation of sisterly wisdom on *When You've Got What It Takes*. Her emotional range spans the Valium-limited spectrum of wistful regret to dewy-eyed joy, and Richard's arrangements cleverly complement. On several tunes the last chord swells like a technicolor sun setting on a beautiful California day with the promise of an even brighter tomorrow.

The odd thing is that, though the

Carpenters' work has remained the same, it has taken on a new meaning in the context of 1981 and Ronald Reagan. That lush sound, the hearth and home values, the defensiveness and pride implicit in their choice of album title, the idealized red, white, and blue cover illustration of Karen and Richard looking like the triumph of eugenics—all of it makes "Made in America" seem like a musical valentine to the once-silent majority.