



Cool Carpenters only coasting

CARPENTERS: victims of their past high standards.

CARPENTERS: "A Kind Of Hush" (A&M AMLK 64581). All vocals by Richard and Karen Carpenter. Musicians include Richard Carpenter (keyboards), Joe Osborn (bass), Tony Peluso (guitars), Jim Horn (baritone sax), Bob Messenger (tenor sax), Tom Scott (flute and clarinet).

THE CARPENTERS seem incapable of turning out anything less than good on record. Their perfectionism shines through. And yet there's something slightly unsatisfying in this new album, compared with the milestones of their career so far.

Those milestones have been "Rainy Days And Mondays," "Superstar," "For All We Know," "Goodbye To Love" and "Yesterday Once More." Peerless songs which transcend all barriers.

Aside from the finely-honed "I Need To Be In Love," which kicks off side two and looks like being a hit single, there's not a track which comes anywhere near the memorability of their earlier successes.

This is not to deny the worthiness of the album. It is loaded with classy arrangements by Richard Carpenter, who has taste, and songs like "I Have You" come pretty close to capturing the glory of the Carpenters' past, with the music of Richard, and words by John Bettis, making melodic perfection.

"I Need To Be In Love" is a stunningly beautiful track, with Karen's melting voice breaking at just the right point, and her innately emotional warmth sliding into the words with an almost unmatched feeling.

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But elsewhere, there is thin fare. Really, who needs the Carpenters doing out yet another version of the unspeakably dumb "There's A Kind Of Hush?" As on Neil Sedaka's "Breaking Up Is Hard To Do," the Carpenters add nothing whatsoever to hackneyed hits of yesteryear, and indeed they damage their credibility rating by resting on such tired oldies.

"Can't Smile Without You" is a song with insufficient substance: "Goofus" is inexplicit, hammy and comically embarrassing; "Sandy" is better, but still below par for a Carpenter-Bettis collaboration.

The Carpenters have always displayed good taste, and musicians of such calibre don't suddenly lose that quality. This is in no sense a bad album. But the Carpenters are victims, in a sense, of establishing their own enormously high standards — perhaps we now expect every new release to eclipse, or even match, the astonishingly high standards of their past.