

Through Vinyl and Video, Carpenters' Music Thrives

Chuck Davis • Published: Oklahoma September 15, 1985

Someone with a voice as perfect as Karen Carpenter is only born once every 100 years or so. The tone, the carry, the pitch. The ability to reach just the right note at the right time. A voice such as that is a rare jewel indeed.

"I believe Karen will be remembered for many, many generations as one of the finest female pop singers who ever lived," says her brother, Richard, who is carrying on the Carpenters legacy.

Richard Carpenter has overseen the completion of three Carpenters albums and a 55-minute music video since Karen's untimely death in December, 1982. Through vinyl and video, we never will forget this gifted singer.

"The past two years, I've worked on various Carpenters projects. I completed (the album) 'Voice of the Heart' which was released in the fall of '83. That was under way at the time Karen passed away," Carpenter said, during an interview with The Oklahoman. "In (November) '84, we put out 'An Old-Fashioned Christmas,' our second Christmas album. That had seven songs featuring Karen's lead (vocals). The songs were recorded when we were recording 'Christmas Portrait' that came out in '78. So we had about 50 percent or more done on it. We added some piano/orchestral things."

In February of this year, A&M Records released a two-record set of Carpenters' greatest hits, called "Yesterday Once More." The release of that successful album led to another hit the "Yesterday Once More" videocassette.

"Video is a great invention," Carpenter said. "It's not a necessity of life but I enjoy having it in mine.

"The 'Yesterday Once More' video was taken from the different promotional pieces we had done. We had to find the negatives, clean them up, put them in a nice order and drop in the digital remix."

From inception to post-production, the "Yesterday Once More" video took about six weeks to complete. Fifteen of the group's top hits spanning the late '60s through the early '80s are included, including "We've Only Just Begun," "Superstar" and "Close to You."

"The music video is relatively new, as far as consumer purchase," Carpenter says. "I'd thought about something like that briefly, but not really paying a great deal of attention to it.

"One of the members of the A&M staff in England was over here on business and happened to see the television edit for the 'Yesterday Once More' TV package. In that ad are some brief sections of different promotional clips we had done through the years.

"He was curious as to whether they existed in toto and he got ahold of me and they do. I have them all on 3/4-inch video here at home (in California). The masters are at A&M (studios). He stopped by and we looked at what I had, and he thought it would be a nice

idea to produce a compilation video. That's how it came to be.

"With the advent of MTV, the music video single clip is very big business now," Carpenter said. "But they used to be called promotional films years ago. They were made by certain record companies or certain artists for overseas promotions. There was no outlet for them in the United States. They would run things like that on their daily programming, they would run them on certain television shows, music shows, things like that.

"When you see a clip, say, of the Beach Boys, the Carpenters, the Doors, whatever, lip-synching their greatest hits, you're watching a promotional clip."

Carpenter was executive producer of the video. He hired the director. He hired the engineer. He hired the errand boys. He looked over thousands and thousands of feet of file film footage and viewed countless slides and photos of the Carpenters. He had the final say-so over just about every aspect of the video.

"We had years of material to choose from," he recalls. "Film, through the years, can start to disintegrate a bit and a couple of the actual negs (negatives) were not in the vault. We had to track them down. Sometimes we just had dupes (duplicates) and we had to track them (the originals) down.

"Then the music. ... Since this is digitally recorded, I wanted to remix some of the songs and then we re-mastered. There are a lot more little things that really aren't all that interesting to talk about."

Except the final product.

"It's doing relatively well," Carpenter said. "A&M and I are quite happy with it.

"For years, we had watched these clips in mono. With the remix, to be able to sit back and watch some fine clips and hear the excellent (stereo) audio on the video was a real treat."

For more than a decade, the Carpenters provided the treats.

They had 12 singles break into the Billboard Top 10 in the U.S. Those hits included "Close to You" at No. 1, "We've Only Just Begun" (2), "For All We Know" (3), "Rainy Days and Mondays" (2), "Superstar" (2), "Hurting Each Other" (2), "Goodbye to Love" (7), "Sing" (3), "Yesterday Once More" (2), "Top of the World" (1), "Please Mr. Postman" (1) and "Only Yesterday" (4).

The music business always has been enjoyable for Richard Carpenter.

And that was true for his sister, Karen, he said.

"Karen was the star of the duo," he said. "I performed on stage (keyboards) but my primary role was to work behind the scenes arrangement and production and all that."

"Karen was the star and that's fine with me. We considered it to be an equal partnership.

One talent complemented the other.

"Looking back... pleasing, satisfying, challenging, frustrating, rewarding all of those. I'd do it again in a New York second. And I can say the same for Karen. She loved the business." Carpenter, who turns 40 in October, has been married just over a year (no children yet). He is having a home built in Downey, Calif. where he has lived for the past 22 years since moving from New Haven, Conn. In addition to the various Carpenters' projects, Carpenter continues to perform in public, and he's working on a solo album.

"I just got back from Florida," he says. "I performed at Epcot Center at the Disney complex in Orlando in a little different capacity something I enjoyed very much. I played piano with an orchestra stuff all in the pops vein.

"We did the some pops things, the 'Warsaw Concerto' and a 15-minute medley of Carpenters' tunes.

"I started on the solo album in June. Six track are completed and I'm working on the background vocals now. The music will be in the same genre (as the Carpenters) but not exactly the same... there will be a few turns in it."

The years may come, and the years may go, but Richard Carpenter never will forget his music... the Carpenters... his sister...

"As a duo, we introduced some very nice music and always did the best that we... performed to the best of their abilities," he says.

"I don't believe people will forget us."