

## CARPENTERS

Carpenters  
A & M SP 3502

The Carpenters make good singles. "Close to You" was Bacharach and David music at its best. Karen Carpenter's lead vocal bordered on soulfulness, while the arrangement was exceptionally sharp middle-of-the-road (MOR) music. The record sold well over two million copies in the United States alone.

The follow-ups, included on *Carpenters*, have been phenome-

nally successful too, if not quite the equal of the initial hit aesthetically. "We've Only Just Begun," written by Paul Williams and Roger Nichols, has a fine tune but the lyrics and arrangement are ultimately too sacharine, even for a song as sweet as this. However, "Rainy Days and Mondays," written by the same team is a superb example of the craft of MOR music. The melody is more than catchy: it is downright memorable.

Richard Carpenter's arrangement uses woodwinds as the perfect counterpoint to his own, sensitive electric piano playing. And once again, Karen Carpenter's vocal is central to the record's success. While she has all the qualities of a good pop singer, she also uses a slightly excessive tremolo to give herself a vaguely rock sounding quality, while she phrases with subtlety and ease. With all this going for it, it is a shame that what was a good lyric idea was not developed particularly well.

With one excellent single and one acceptable one giving it a head start I was hoping that *Carpenters* would be an unexpected delight. Unfortunately, the album shows that the Carpenters are as depressingly ordinary as you all knew they were in the first place. I don't know what it is they do different when they are making album cuts instead of singles, but whatever it is, they should stop it instantly.

On *Carpenters*, Richard Carpenter tries his hand at song-writing. Richard can arrange, play the piano, and sing pretty in the background but his three songs are so horrifyingly Fifties cutesy-pie vulgar that I am amazed their producer allowed them to be released. Particularly outrageous was his idea of following Karen's more than respectable reading of Leon Russell and Bonnie Bramlett's "Superstar" with a ditty of his own about groupies called "Druscilla Penny."

Another Williams-Nichols song "Let Me Be the One," is fine. Randy Sparks "Hideaway" is adequate and a five and a half minute Bacharach-David medley is more nightclub material than recording material. On this last, Karen sings and Richard plays piano extremely well, but because we never hear more than bits and fragments of any one song it is impossible to really get involved with it. I would have like to hear Karen sing "Do You Know the Way to San Jose" all the way through—the bit she does here is mighty tasty. A closing piece, "Sometimes," is embarrassingly hokey.

Ultimately the Carpenters have more going for them than against. There is no question that they have contributed mightily to the inherently limited genre of MOR music, that they bring a little light soul and sensitivity to a music that is by definition (almost) emotionally dehydrated. They have a WASPish charm that is pleasant to admire from a distance. And they do make fine singles. Period.

—JON LANDAU