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CARPENTERS



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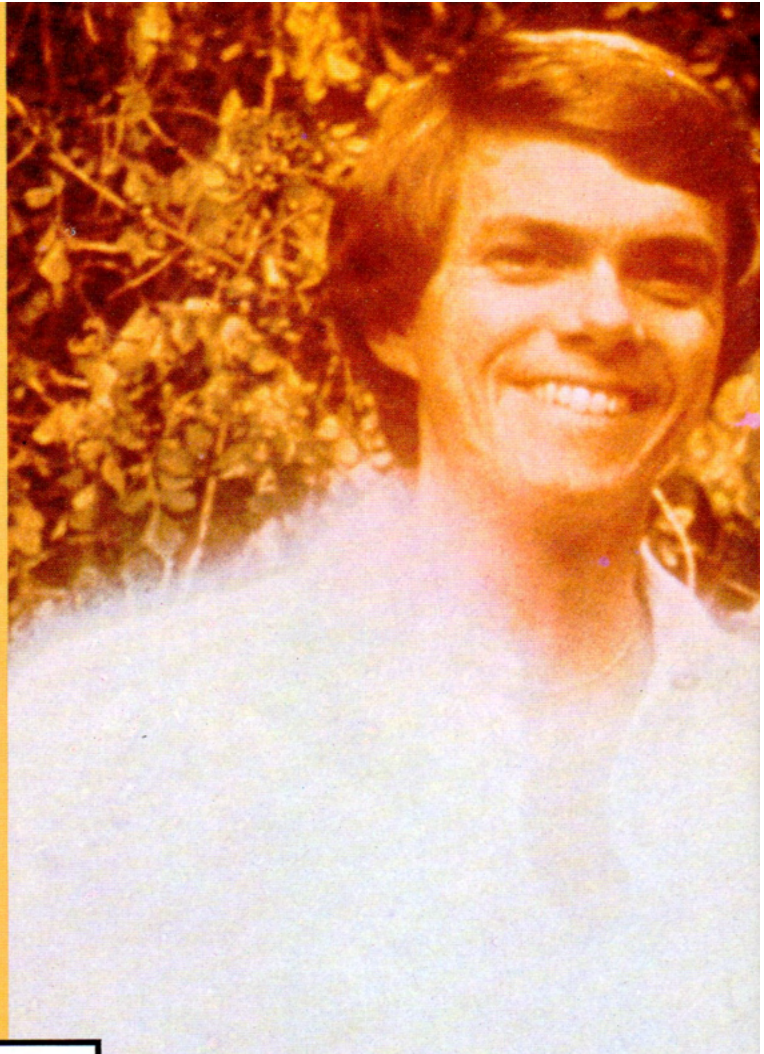
CARPENTERS

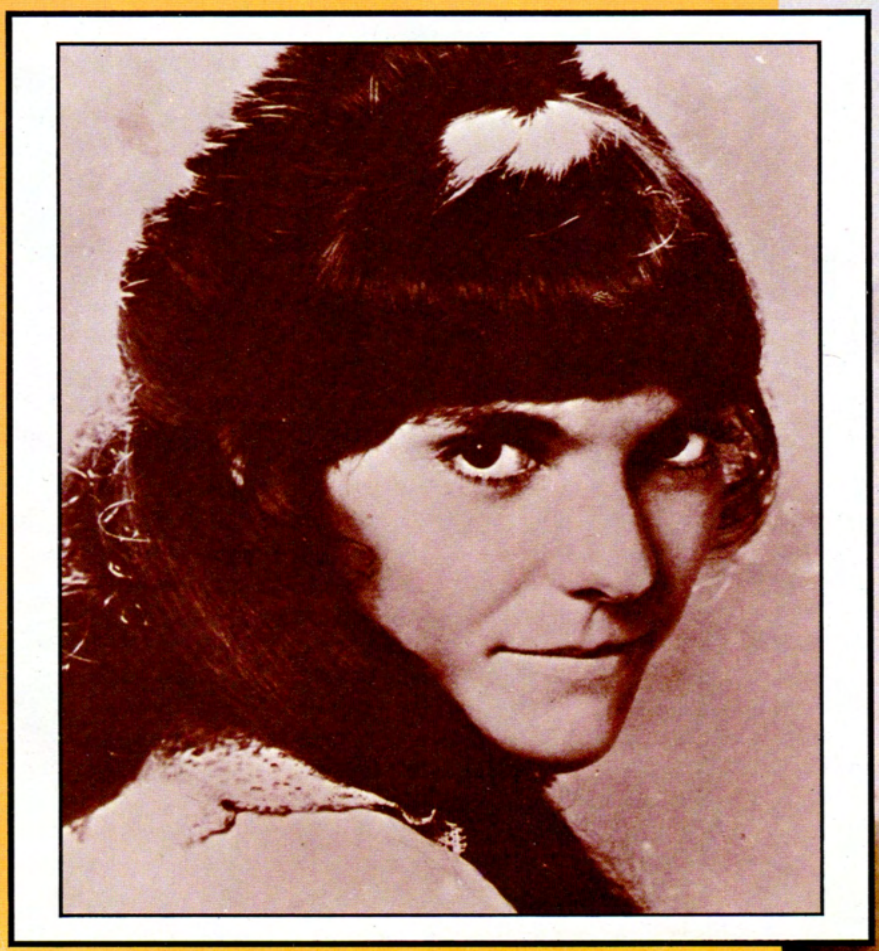
Perfection is the target of Richard and Karen. In aiming for it they have achieved a superbly smooth sound and highly polished stage act that have won them deserved acclaim the world over. This souvenir is a tribute to a unique brother and sister combination . . . The Carpenters.



CARPENTERS

SWEET SOUND OF SUCCESS





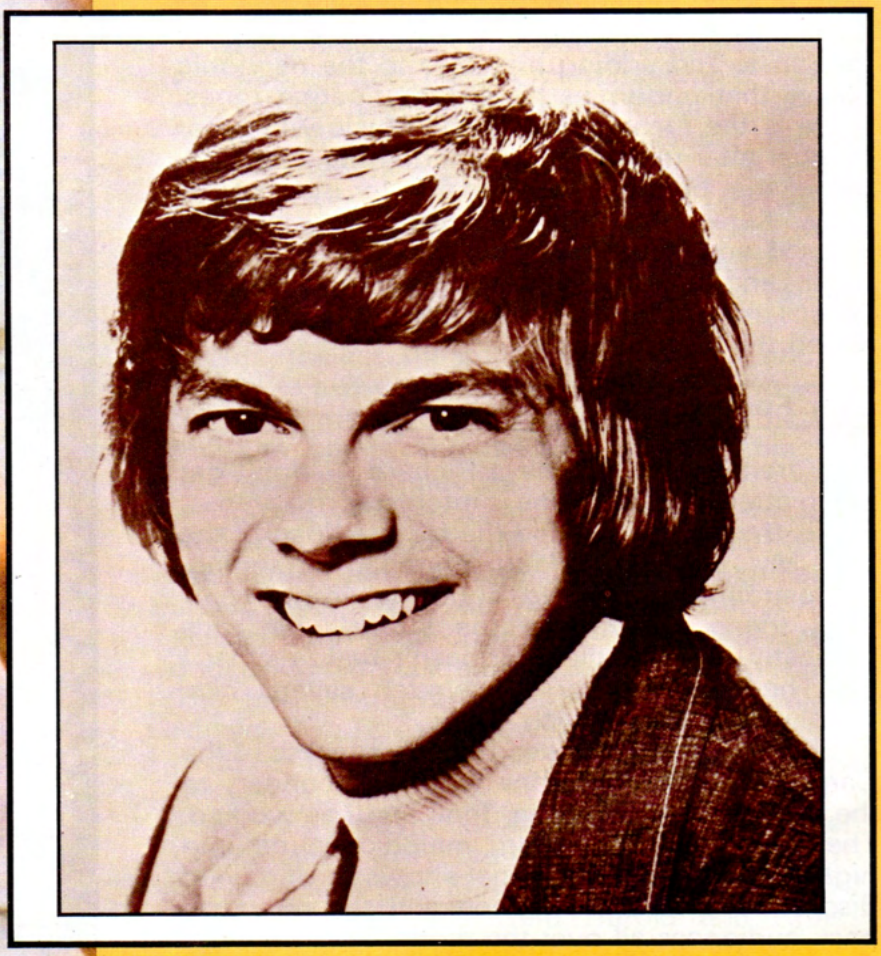


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Long ago and oh so far away . . . At the start of a typical Carpenters' show, the smooth warm voice lilts the words through the sound system and the song begins to mesh pleasurably with the vast gathering of devotees. Just behind where Karen Carpenter is singing it at the upfront mike wait her drums – silvered and sparkling in the spots.

Near them, Richard Carpenter stands at the electric keyboard – sparing a hand to conduct the music and adding his voice to the harmonic weave that underpins his sister's floating tones.

He is the mastermind of the music which for number after number is to gladden the audience. But at that opening moment and for most of the show, Karen holds the limelight. Pretty, brightly dressed and blessed with a voice which blends youth and maturity, she is *the* bringer of that special magic which has made the Carpenters famed the world over.

Star Focus

"Karen is the star," says Richard. "I don't get much attention. Everyone is interested in Karen. . . She is the lead singer and the featured part of the act. My end is picking material, arranging, orchestrating, producing, choosing group members, trying to improve the show." He adds modestly, "The audience doesn't realize what I do. They don't know I've written several hits. It's always Karen. Which is fine."

When a duo has reaped the rich success of the Carpenters, who has done what is secondary to the fact of *what* has been done and has worked. The Carpenters' soothing, melodic sound and highly polished, professional shows have gained disc sales of over 25 million and the power to pack audiences all over the world.





It was only in 1970 that they broke through with "Close To You". Their success has grown triumphantly in that time. Today they are at a peak. There are probably higher ones ahead.

Karen and Richard have won through by being themselves. In days when hard rock has ruled, they have pressed on with their soft, disarming, romantic pop. In their personal lives, they have left others to loll scruffily around and hassle obsessively with the establishment. They have been unfailingly clean-cut in both appearance and behaviour. It comes naturally to them. In fact, so much has been made of their "wholesomeness," the duo have protested that writers have gone too far in presenting them as whiter-than-white,

Golden Appeal

"It is immediately understood," Richard once declared, "that the Carpenters don't smoke, don't drink, never swear, never listen to rock . . . It's like we're Pat Boone, only cleaner. It's not that we're totally opposite to that . . . But there's an in-between . . . I don't drink a hell of a lot. But I have wine with dinner. I voted to make marijuana legal. I believe in premarital sex." Added Karen pithily, "The image we have, Mickey Mouse couldn't maintain."

Nonetheless, the image *and* the music *and* the appeal to a wide range of age groups have given the Carpenters golden years – with predictably more to come. The breadth of their appeal is linked to the admirable breadth of their interest in music. And that may be traced back to Richard's boyhood. "My dad," he says, "had 78s which ranged from classics to big bands, show music and Dixie. When I was four or five I started picking up on it by listening to the radio and asking my parents to buy certain records. The first I bought myself was 'Music, Music, Music' by Teresa Brewer. My interests then evolved into rock, which I have been into since the start."

Richard's boyhood was spent in New Haven, Connecticut, where he was born on October 15, 1946, and where Karen followed on March 2, 1950. Their parents were Harold and Agnes. Harold Carpenter worked for a print firm and did



Below: Karen, a bespectacled Richard and bassist Wes Jacobs as the Carpenter Trio in 1967 – the first in a series of try-out line-ups.



various part-time jobs to make family life as comfortable as possible. "Dad's disc collection was big and varied," Richard recalls. Liberace was one of his favourites. Others were guitar star Les Paul and his wife Mary Ford, jazzman Red Nichols and Spike Jones, who made comedy discs with his City Slickers. From listening to dad's discs and to the radio, I soon became keen to make music myself.

Accordion Capers

"For some reason none of us can remember, my parents decided I ought to learn accordion. They bought me one when I was eight and paid for my lessons. But I didn't get on with the instrument. Maybe it was just too big and awkward for me at that age; anyway, after about a year, my parents let me switch to piano, which I loved. Years later, when I went to make my debut with my high school orchestra at a big party, I found there wasn't a piano. Someone lent me an accordion and I made do with that but I've never touched one since.

"I knew by the time I was 14 that I wanted to go into music professionally. But I could never have guessed things would work out as they have, because Karen at the time wasn't a bit interested in music. I just thought I'd end up in a band of some kind playing piano."

While at high school in New Haven, Richard took part-time tuition on classical piano at Yale University. His piano teacher, knowing he was interested in pop, had taught him a few chords. Thus armed and only 16, he teamed with two friends in their 20s, but he had to pass himself off as 20 to get round club regulations.

"The trio got a job in a New Haven pizza dive," he remembers. "We were horrible. The drummer just slammed away and the bass player didn't know any notes. I played the basic changes to most tunes and threw in arpeggios because of my technique. We played five hours for $10 each and $25 on New Year's Eve. I know we were horrible, because I still have a tape we made one night."

In 1963 the family moved to Downey – a suburb of Los Angeles. Harold Carpenter had landed a better job there and Richard became a senior at Downey High School before going as a piano student to the University of Southern California. He also joined a rock group which played surf music. But he still wasn't singing, he just banged out standards and chart hits for hour after hour. However, the clubs they played in gradually got better.

Piano Projects

His zeal for music was such that he decided to try and join the college marching band – even though this would mean missing gym classes, which he enjoyed. "Even though you don't have a piano in a marching band," says Richard, "I decided to apply anyway. The director explained very kindly he didn't need a pianist. I went home and dug out a trumpet I had bought two years

before at an auction for $4. I tried blowing it and I sounded terrible. But next day I went back to the director with the trumpet and said I could play it. He said OK, he could use a trumpeter. Luckily he didn't audition me.

"He had to sign a card showing I was in the orchestra. While he was seeing to this, I sat at the piano and played a bit. He was instantly interested. He said he was planning a class project – a concert performance of 'Rhapsody In Blue' and he would like me to play piano. I worked on the project for eight months. The director, Bruce Gifford, also ran a small band outside the college and I was its pianist for a time – playing at dances, weddings, clubs and so on."

Hollywood Debut

It was the drummer in the college band who sparked off Karen's zeal for music. Till then, she had tried playing various instruments – only to find her interest quickly waning. But the drummer was so good, she decided to prove that a girl could also drum well.

"Karen came home from the show," Richard recalls, "and got out some chopsticks. She arranged some bar stools together and started playing along with records. She soon showed she could cope with all sorts of rhythms. Dad bought her a good drum set and she was able to play it right away."

After hours of practising together at home, Karen and Richard formed a jazz instrumental trio with a friend Wes Jacobs, who played bass. Things weren't easy for them in those days. As Richard recalls, "When we were trying to make a go of our music, our parents bought all they could afford for us. We had a drum set, a good piano and other things. But we couldn't afford amplifiers, an electric piano or even mike stands. We needed a tape recorder to make demos of our first group. Dad wanted to get one for us but it just couldn't be managed. It took us months to save enough even to make a down payment on a little Sony."

After a few club dates, the Carpenter Trio (as they called themselves) entered the 1966 Battle of the Bands at the Hollywood Bowl, which





was open to all non-professionals under 21. Despite competition from hundreds of groups, the Carpenter Trio came away with three awards. This led to a contract with RCA Records for whom the trio cut tracks over the next few months, but their hopes were dashed when the company decided none of them were commercial enough to release. At this point Wes Jacobs quit to go into classical music.

Key Team-Up

"Buddy . . . You need a pianist!"

Richard remembers blurting out the words at a college choir rehearsal in the spring of 1967. On the platform was a fellow chorister – John Bettis. For weeks the choir director had been trying to get him to sing solo. John had done this in the local folk clubs but he felt shy about following suit in front of his college mates – especially as their sort of music was far removed from folk.

John had therefore stalled, saying he would prefer to delay his solo till he'd had a chance to write a song for it. Now the time had come when he couldn't stall any more. With his guitar, he had come in front of the assembly and announced he would sing his composition "Acapella". It was quickly evident it was a droll send-up of a typical college choir song. But halfway through – with his fellow choristers laughing loudly – John dried up. He was embarrassed in case his send-up had gone too far for the director's liking.

That was when Richard came to the rescue by suggesting John needed a pianist. The offer was readily accepted – and it worked. Quickly picking up the melody, Richard lent his aid to John as the latter carried on with "Acapella". It was a teaming which was to prove vital in the future.

At the time of his link with John Bettis, Richard was in the eighth grade at California State High School. Both soon realized their impromptu partnership was the start of something. As John recalls, "It was real weird, that evening in front of the choir. But what was important was that Richard could see something in my writing and said he wanted to work with me. A few days later I went to the Carpenters' home and started sampling their fantastic record collection. They had just about everything – from Spike Jones through to Elvis and the Beatles. It really aroused my interest in styles of music outside folk."

"John was basically a folk singer and knew little about music theory," says Richard, "I offered to teach him what I knew. He eagerly accepted. For us to start writing stuff together was the most natural thing in the world."

In the summer of 1967, Richard and John landed a job at Coke Corner in Disneyland. They had to perform a lot of 1890's music and John had to learn six-string banjo. "Richard played hit butt off at Coke Corner," says John. "I just tagged along." But he and Richard were fired after a few weeks. "We weren't company-orientated," explains the latter somewhat vaguely.

Another important person in the story of the Carpenters is the choir director – Frank Pooler. Later, he was to feature in their career as a writer and music director. His crucial role in the early days was to encourage Richard and Karen in their singing. He described Richard's emergence as a singer as follows: "One day during choir practice I heard this big, booming baritone – and realized it was coming from Richard Carpenter. I told him he sounded fine and that he should develop his singing. He was surprised and delighted."

Vocal Ventures

Undismayed by their Disneyland experience, Richard and John started a new venture in the autumn of 1967. With confidence in their own singing, and with Karen's rich talent ready to hand, they decided to form a vocal group. Richard had a built-in zeal for it as he had always enjoyed great vocal groups – notably the Four Freshmen, Hi-Lo's and Beach Boys. "I was vastly encouraged," he says, "when Frank Pooler taught me vocal technique. How to blend and release . . . how to attack a note. These and other fundamentals of proper singing."

The new vocal group was called Spectrum and the other members were Leslie Johnston, Danny Woodhams and Gary Sims. After school hours, the line-up – at first minus Karen – went



to Frank Pooler's choir class. This was in addition to their own rehearsals. "Richard was always the thrust behind the group," Pooler said later. "For two years he and John Bettis wrote for the choir. They produced lots of humour and were the hit of our annual shows. Karen was still at high school when Richard started bringing her for voice lessons on Saturday mornings. After high school, she joined my regular classes.

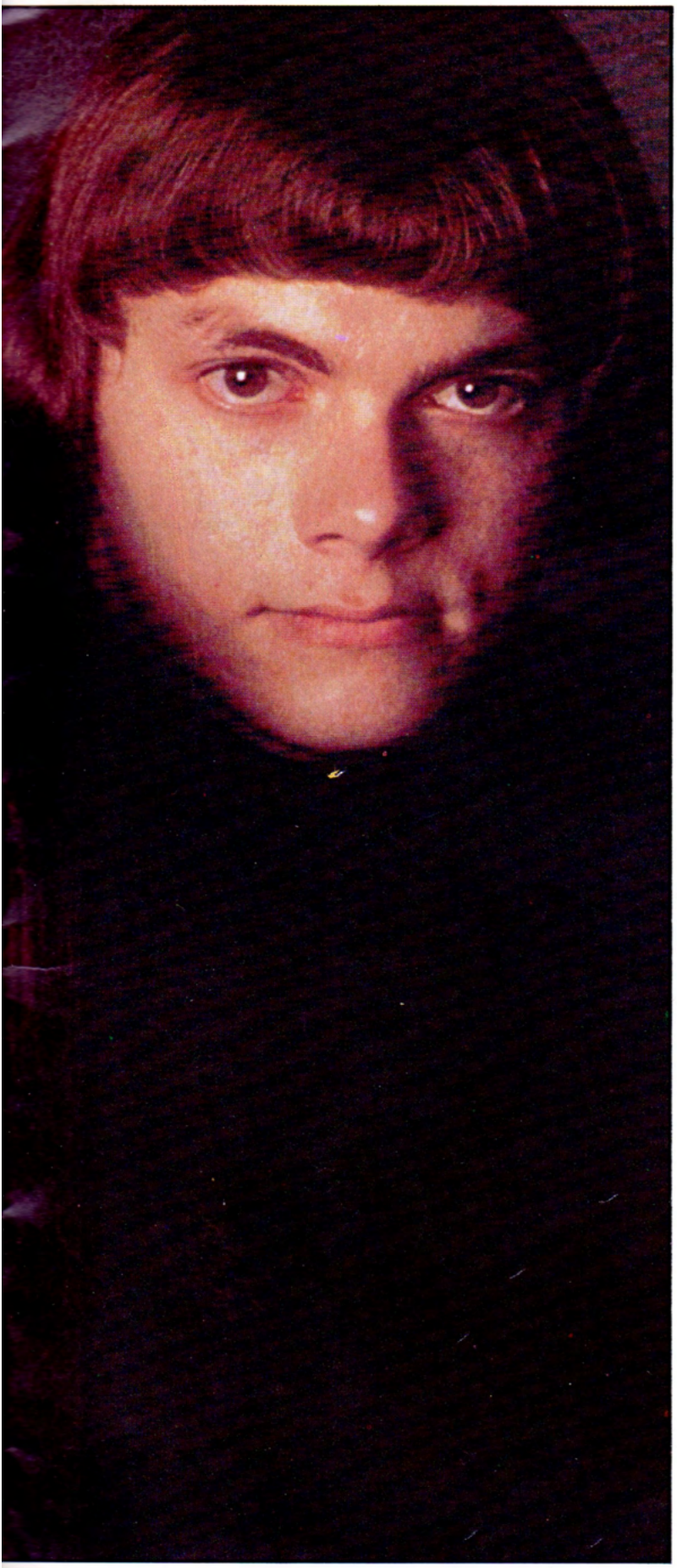
Enthusiasm And Drive

"It was clear from the start that she had a good voice. She was a natural singer who needed little or no vocal instruction. She and Richard had drive and initiative to go with their musical talents. I felt sure they would press on despite hard knocks and turn-downs. They would get discouraged every so often. They were mavericks and had to expect it. But their natural enthusiasm and drive would soon take over again. I knew in the end they would achieve what they wanted."

Spectrum lasted about a year. It overlapped with the hard rock wave and suffered accordingly. The group performed at Los Angeles clubs but seemed to be out of their proper era. One early date was the Whisky A-Go-Go, and Karen recalls, "At the Whisky, the customers sat and listened to us. That wasn't what the club wanted. If you sit, you don't dance. If you don't dance, you don't get thirsty. In that case, you don't spend. So we were kicked out. Once we opened a Steppenwolf show at the Blue Law, which was a big warehouse. At first, the audience was so restive, we thought we were going to get killed. But we kept going and they shut up and listened."

With the ill-fated RCA venture still strong in their minds, Richard and Karen tried to get Spectrum on disc – only to meet more disappointments. "We took tapes we had made to Columbia," Richard recalls. "At the time, they had a hit with 'Young Girl' by Gary Puckett. The producer asked if we could sing like him. We said we didn't want to. They also had Bobbie Gentry's 'Ode to Billie Joe'. They asked if we could sound like Bobbie and we also turned





down that idea, too. Warners were having a mild success with Harpers Bizarre and we had to say thank you, but we didn't want to try and reproduce their sound.

"What was ironic, in view of what was to happen later, was that we got nowhere at A & M. The guy at the front entrance wouldn't even let us in to try and get someone to listen to our tapes."

Spectrum did get a couple of offers from record companies. But the group wasn't satisfied with either and finally split. Karen and Richard – plus the writing gifts of John Bettis – had to start all over again.

Back in their Disneyland days, Richard and John had begun piling up songs. They had continued during the Spectrum period. Now, more than ever, they needed good tapes of these songs. Without them, they stood little chance of getting a record contract – and without that, there would be no hit disc to put them in orbit. But buying studio time would cost more than they could afford.

Timely help came from a friend named Joe Osborn, who played electric bass. In his garage he had rigged up a sound studio with modern gear. He told the Carpenters to spend all the time they wished in it. "Joe was a friend in need," says Karen. "As often as possible, he worked the studio controls for us to get the right sound. We started with two-part harmonies. Then we went to four-part and eight-part by over-dubbing. Then we dubbed on instruments and the sound we wanted began to take shape." Once more the Carpenters did the round of the record companies. Once more they found no takers.

Young Hopefuls

Meantime, they tried their best to get performing experience. One venue was the Troubadour in LA. They had an old stationwagon at the time and would drive to the Troubadour around four in the afternoon. Karen would drop off to queue with other hopeful performers while Richard went to Joe Osborn's garage to collect the amps and instruments. Some of the waiting performers would be given a 15-minute spot at

A moment in pop history – Richard and Karen signing their A&M recording contract; Herb Alpert welcomed them to his co-owned label.

the Troubadour that night. "When we made it on the show," says Karen, "the audiences loved us. We had standing ovations. But we still needed a disc contract."

The man who finally paved the way for the Carpenters' recording career was a disc producer named Jack Daugherty. He heard the duo and liked them. *And* he knew Herb Alpert – famed for his Tijuana Brass and owner (with Jerry Moss) of A & M Records. Daugherty took the Carpenters' tapes to Alpert in April, 1969. Alpert thought they were great and asked to see the duo. Next day they arrived at the A & M Hollywood headquarters.

Debut Album

When they entered his imposing office, Alpert could see at once that they had looks to go with their sound. They were given a contract and Alpert made plans for the release of a single and album and Jack Daugherty was signed to produce them.

In Richard's view, their debut album "Ticket To Ride" (originally "Offering") was out of date even before its release in the summer of 1969. But it expressed ideas he had been assembling for some time past. They just had to come out. "I had in my mind finished that first album a long time before we signed with A & M. That wasn't where I was at musically at the time we signed. Some of it could have been a lot better but you can hear that the ideas were there.

"There are things we don't do now. I should have just forgotten it all and concentrated on where I was at the moment. But it was like I had to do that album. Even if we hadn't signed with a record company till 1980, that was what our first album would have been like. That is why there is such a big difference between 'Ticket To Ride' and our second album 'Close To You'."

However, the Beatles-written title track of the former album – released as a single – gave the Carpenters their first, modest chart success. It was in the US Top 100 for three weeks – reaching 54th position.The follow-up was "Cinderella Rockafella". It was a hit for the Israeli duo, the Ofarims, but not, sadly, for the Carpenters.

A key figure in the breakthrough of the Carpenters was Burt Bacharach – composer, pianist and singer. Richard, who has an encyclopedic knowledge of discs, had been following Bacharach through his record releases since 1960. Now they were both A & M artists. One day Richard went to Bacharach at the company's studios and introduced himself. The latter said he had heard "Ticket To Ride" on the radio, had liked it but hadn't realized it was a Carpenters' disc. He repeated the compliment a few days later when he ran into Richard and Karen at the studios.

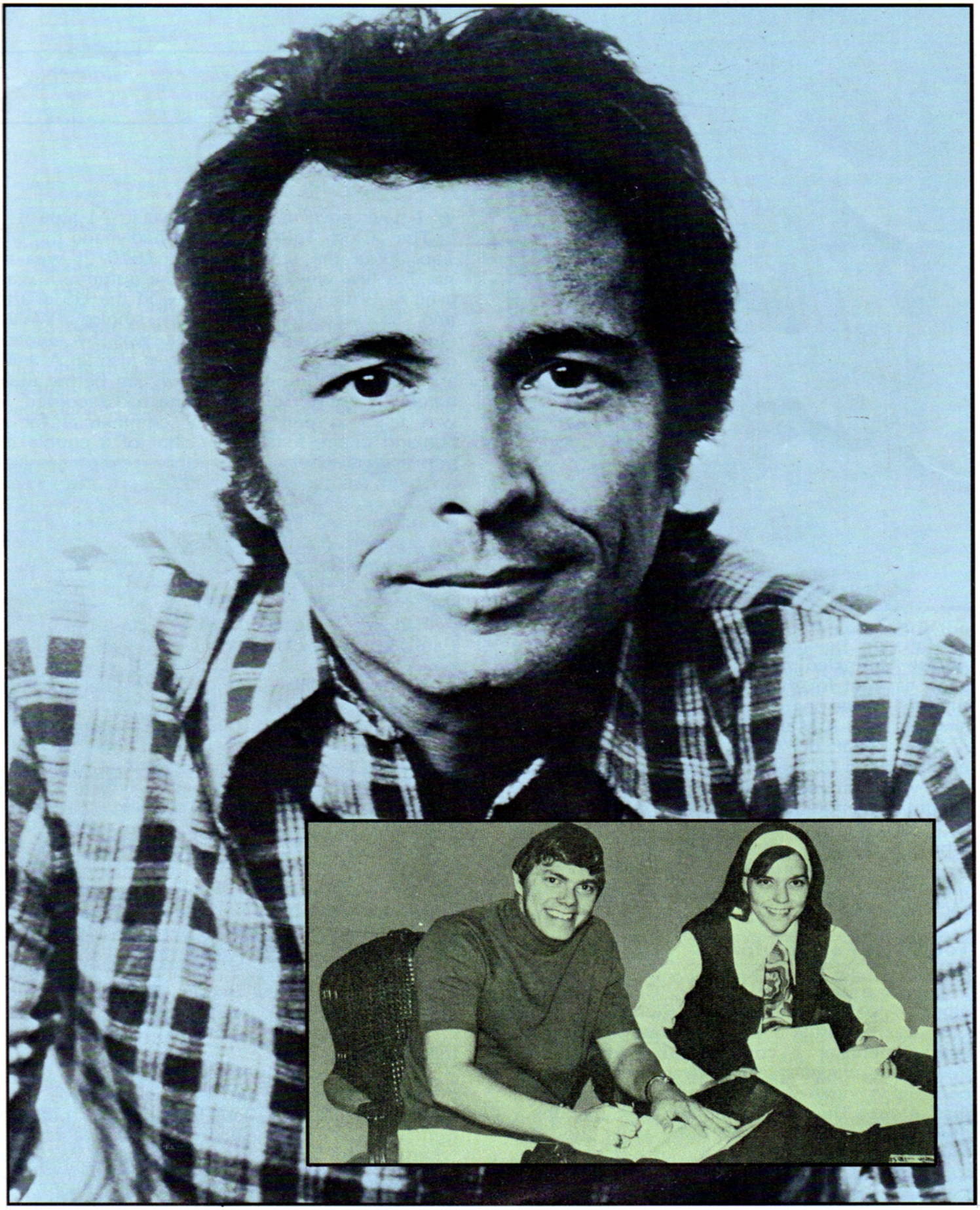
Meantime, A & M were naturally promoting the duo with every resource – helping them to perform in the right places and seeing they had the right back-up musicians. One important date was a charity show after the Hollywood première of *Hello, Dolly!* It was in February, 1970. Of the show, Richard said later, "We had an arrangement of the Bacharach song, 'I'll Never Fall In Love Again'. It's a good opener and that was how we used it.

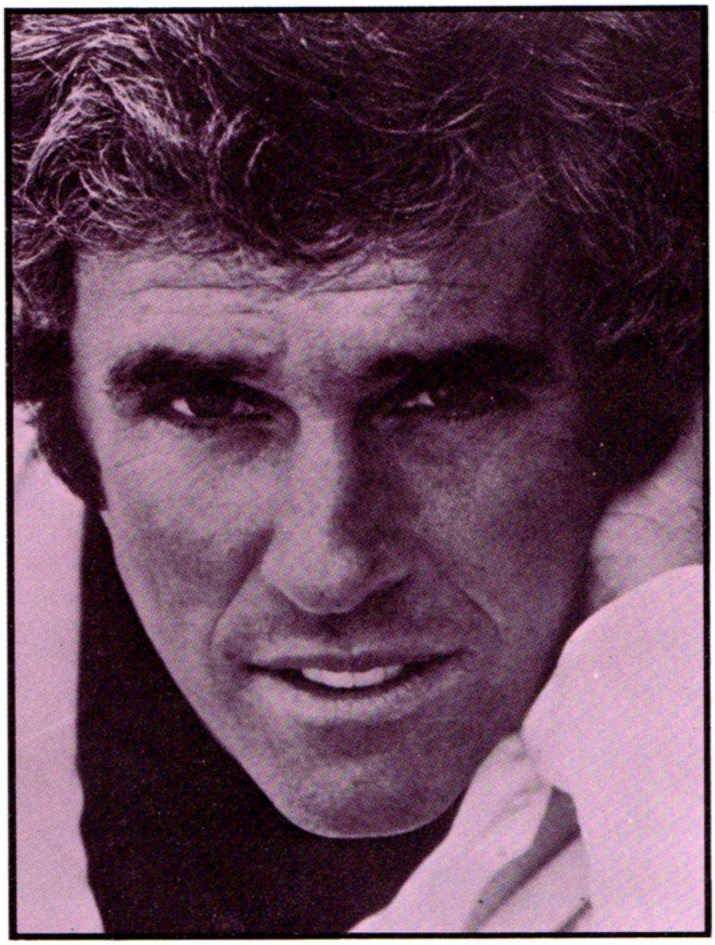
"We didn't know Burt was there. But right after we came off, we found him standing right by us back stage. Next day he called Jerry Moss and said he'd like us to appear with him in a charity show at the Century-Plaza Hotel in LA. We were pleased to do it, of course. After it, he praised our performance and asked us to appear on another benefit with him – singing a medley of his songs."

The Big Breakthrough

The medley caused a slight hitch. Richard got busy arranging and orchestrating it. But when Bacharach heard it the day before the show, he asked for drastic changes. They caused the group to work frantically through the night. But if they were irked by this, it couldn't have been for long. Bacharach had them appear in more important shows with him. It was also one of his songs which gave them their breakthrough.

The song was "Close To You". He had written it six years before and it had been on Dionne Warwicke's first album. Now he mentioned the song to Herb Alpert as a possible Tijuana Brass recording. Alpert didn't buy this –





Left: Burt Bacharach, who was instrumental in the early successes of Karen and Richard.

one reason being he didn't want to sing the phrase "sprinkled moondust." But he did see the song as right for the Carpenters. He gave them the lead sheet one day when they were rehearsing on an A & M soundstage.

"The sheet of 'Close To You' lay on my electric piano for weeks," says Richard. "I would play what proved to be the first verse of the eventual arrangement, then put it aside. But the song was growing on me. One day I finished the whole arrangement and Karen and I went into the studio and recorded it. A & M released it and the ballad became a smash amid all the hard rock around it."

Too Close For Comfort

To get a cover pic for the "Close To You" album, A & M had Karen and Richard – clad in new, costly outfits – clamber down a 200-foot embankment at a coastal spot named Palos Verdes. Icy waves splashed over them – causing concern in view of the fact they had to record that night. The photographer captured them during this scramble and then while they sat together on a rock. Of the resultant cover, Richard said later, "When they brought it in, I told them I didn't like it. They said, 'Learn to love it.' I have never learned to love it – I hate it!"

The "Close To You" single had made the US Top 30 at the start of July, 1970. It was at no. 1 a few weeks later. By the autumn, it was a hit in Britain, the album was in the US charts and so was the follow-up single, "We've Only Just Begun". This last was by singer/composer Paul Williams. He was also an A & M artist and the Carpenters knew him before they heard the song. Before anyone had recorded, it was used in part in a TV commercial for a banking chain, featuring a shot of a couple of newly-weds being told the advantages of opening an account. Richard happened to see the commercial while lounging at home alone – his parents and Karen having gone to the shops. He recognized Williams's voice singing a snatch of the song.

"I realized Paul had probably written the song. I was so taken with the bit of it I had heard, I rushed out, jumped into the car and shot off to Paul's house. Luckily he was in. 'Let's get the bad news over with,' I said with a grin. 'How many people have "We've Only Just Begun" nicely recorded and ready for release?' Paul grinned back at me. 'So far as I know,' he said, 'none at all.' I couldn't believe our luck. I told Paul that Karen and I were very interested. Paul went over the whole song for me there and then. By the time he had finished, I knew we had a big hit on our hands."

The disc, in fact, sold a million. But while it was climbing the charts, the Carpenters were in a position known to most new chart stars. They were famous – but had little ready money. As Richard recalls, "You don't get a royalty cheque for six months. In that time we had three gold records: for the 'Close To You' single and album and 'We've Only Just Begun'. But we were still at our old house.

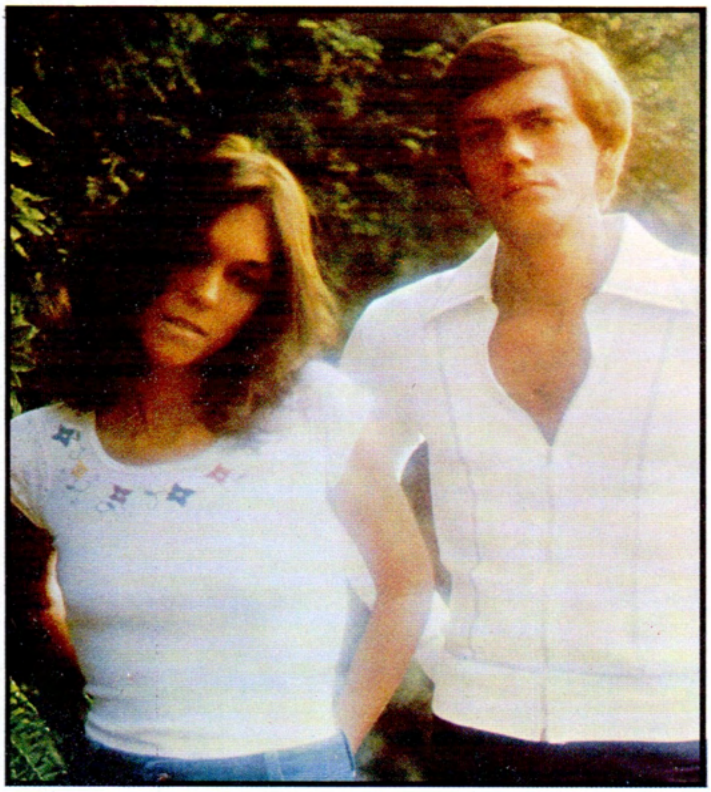
"Then we decided to move to the other side of the tracks.

"There are actually tracks in Downey to be on the wrong side of. That had been our side. But around the fall of 1970 we bought a place on the *right* side. We moved into it in December, when 'For All We Know' was released. We were scared, because although you *know* royalties will come, you still haven't seen them. We kept

wondering if we should have spent so much on a home."

The first royalty cheque had been signed by Herb Alpert. He had written "hello" all over it and done little drawings. It was for $50,000.

"I'd never seen anything like that cheque in my life," Karen recalls. "We stared at it all through dinner. That is when you start noticing a change. You feel the same inside. You're the same person. But when you've been through the



sort of financial situation we grew up with and then you realize you have an awful lot of money . . ."

The new family home was a luxury bungalow which originally had been two separate ones with Japanese gardens complete with artificial waterfall and little bridges across a stream and (of course) a swimming pool. By the time they moved in, Richard and Karen had talked their father into giving up his work. He now took charge of replying to the thousands of letters which were reaching the Carpenters from all over the world.

Richard and Karen won two Grammy awards in 1970 as best new performers of the year and best contemporary vocal duo, group or chorus for "Close To You". Before the end of 1970 they were the subject of *This Is Your Life* in America. They were so new to that side of the business, they had never heard of presenter Ralph Edwards and hadn't even known the show was back on the air!

By now, the Carpenters were realizing the advantages and disadvantages of fame and fortune. They seemed assured of a vast income for years to come. Their house was being luxuriously furnished and extended to include a music room, a recreation room with billiards table and a wine cellar. Richard had a red Maserati and three other cars. Karen had a Barracuda and Mr. and Mrs. Carpenter a Lincoln Continental. But the fans had been quick to recognize the house. Many would draw up outside it in cars. Some would even call at the front door – hoping for a word with the pop world's most famous brother and sister.

Security Conscious

"We just had to stop answering the phone," Karen said not long after they had moved in. "It's hard. Your first instinct when you hear the phone ring, is to answer it. We've added two private lines. But we've only been able to keep one of them really private." Later a TV camera was sited discreetly above the porch, in order to check on visitors.

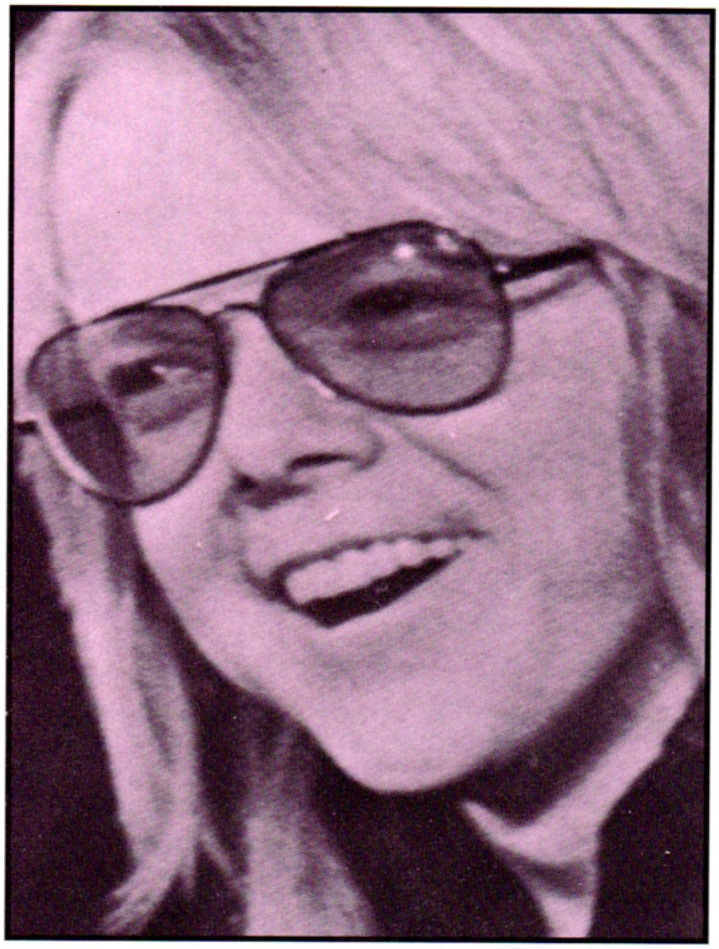
A disadvantage which Richard felt particularly was that often he would be unable to watch a favourite performer because he and Karen had commitments that night. For example, he was a very strong Frank Zappa fan. They had never met but Richard had all Zappa's albums, knew all about his life and his band, the Mothers Of Invention. "We always just miss Frank and the Mothers," said Richard soon after the Carpenters had shot to fame. "Recently, for example, we played Seattle and Frank was due there next night. However we were booked elsewhere and







Right: A&M singer/composer Paul Williams, several of whose songs the Carpenters successfully recorded.



couldn't stay on to see him."

The back-up group formed for the Carpenters included two former members of Spectrum: Dan Woodhams (bass and vocals) and Gary Sims (guitar, bass and vocals). With them were Douglas Strawn (clarinet and vocals) and multi-instrumentalist Robert Messenger. They were with the Carpenters for their important, successful Hollywood Bowl concert in the early summer of 1971 and the following whirlwind tour of the States – which covered 31 venues ranging from college gyms to New York's Carnegie Hall.

Academy Award

Meantime the duo had chalked up another super-hit with "For All We Know". They had gone – on the recommendation of their manager Sherwin Bash – to see the movie *Lovers And Other Strangers*. The song had been written for a wedding scene in it and the Carpenters were quick to realize its potential for the disc market. The song went on to win an Academy Award. The Carpenters would have loved to sing it at the Awards presentations in Hollywood. That they were not invited to do so was presumably because they hadn't appeared in the movie.

One fact in the Carpenters' "wholesome" image was that neither smoked. Karen was asked, when this was realized, to become youth chairman of the American Cancer Prevention Society. She gladly accepted and she and Richard agreed to help the society during what little spare time they had available.

Support for the Carpenters was so strong in Europe, it was more or less inevitable that a 1971 visit had to be fitted in somehow. In fact, Karen and Richard had a special reason for wanting to go to Britain. Their father had been born there – going to America on holiday with his mother at the age of 14 and staying on when his mother suddenly died.

Their wish was granted when they arrived in London from Paris on September 21, 1971. They had by then sold over four million discs. Their fourth smash hit had been "Rainy Days And Mondays". It was another Paul Williams song. Richard had simply picked it from the hundreds of demo discs submitted to Richard and Karen.

Moreover, at the time of their arrival they were in the US Top 10 and Britain's Top 50 with "Superstar". It was by Leon Russell and Bonnie Bramlett – and the exuberant Bette Midler had been responsible for the Carpenters recording it. Bette (whose impersonation of Karen has since become well-known – and much appreciated by Karen) had sung the number on TV. The Carpenters had decided on a totally different musical conception from that used by Bette. Karen's first take in the studio was so great, it was the one heard on disc. "Superstar" later became the Carpenters' fifth gold single.

Carpenters dates for the 1971 visit included *Top of the Pops, The Harry Secombe Show* and a Special for BBC TV. On the day of their arrival they did interviews for BBC Radio before attending a press reception at the luxury West End hotel, Inn On The Park. Much of the talk involved the Carpenters in going over the basic facts of their lives and career. But other little items emerged. Karen, for example, explained that while she liked to see to her own hair while at home, she didn't have time to do so on tour and thus travelled with her personal hairdresser – a very pretty girl whom she introduced.

"We do most of our touring by 'plane," said Karen. "There are usually 14 people in our party plus all the wardrobe, instruments, equipment and so on. This costs a fortune and the air firms love us! I adore the travelling. The one disappointment I have is that we spend so little time in the places we visit. By the time we've left the airport and checked in at our hotel, there's little chance to do anything before we go to the hall to check things over and prepare for the show. We may have a quick meal before the show and a big one after it. Then usually we snatch a few hours' sleep before heading back to the airport for a 'plane to our next date. For a woman, it is specially frustrating to flash past wonderful shops in a car – knowing there's no way you can stop and look around them!"

Then Karen let slip something much more personal. Asked what she thought of the hot-pants then in vogue, she replied, "I don't like hot pants. Simply because I don't look good in them. They make some chicks look sensational. But I've seen a lot of girls wearing them who just don't have the right legs and figure – and I'm not making the same mistake!"

Romance And Finance

Speaking of boyfriends, she declared: "There's little chance to develop a romance. We are away from home such a lot. When I get ready to settle down, I want to have both money and the time to do something with it. Also, I think I would need to have accomplished something career-wise first."

Richard's attitude to money is simple: "Naturally, we get pleasure from being able to afford nice things, but our main satisfaction is that our parents can now relax and enjoy themselves. They thoroughly deserve this. They have always worked hard."

Happily, the Carpenters were able to make their live debut before British fans during their visit – starring at London's Royal Albert Hall in a concert in aid of the Royal National Institute For The Deaf. Before a packed and delighted audience, they (naturally) performed their hits. Of special interest to the musically-minded was their version of "Ticket To Ride". Richard used it to explain how, with over-dubbing, the Carpenters' sound was built up.

An important aspect of the Carpenters' career has, in fact, been their ability to do justice to their disc sound on stage. "Fortunately," Richard once said, "our type of chord voicings are fairly easy to reproduce accurately in live concert performances."

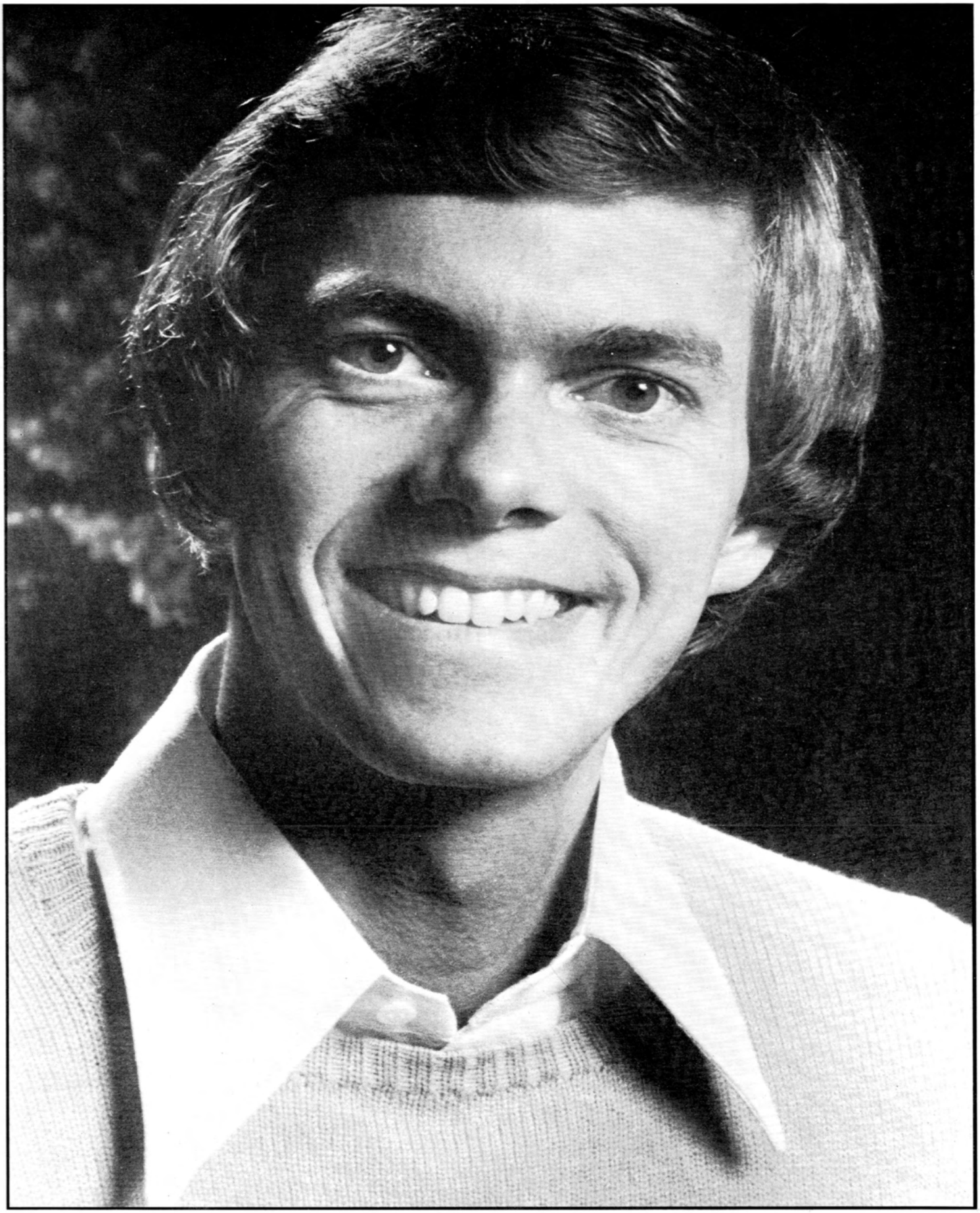
Third Grammy Award

Other features of the Albert Hall show included their Bacharach and David medley and the title song from the Stanley Kramer film, *Bless The Beasts And The Children*. Karen and Richard had recently recorded this number and it was later on their album "A Song For You".

In 1971, the Carpenters won their third Grammy – for best vocal duo. By the end of the year, their disc sales total had reached five million. A bonus for British fans in December was a maxi-single in a presentation sleeve in the form of a Christmas card. Its numbers were "Merry Christmas Darling", "Ticket To Ride", and "Saturday". The first one had been written by Richard in partnership with his respected choir director from the formative days – Frank Pooler.

In the album field, the duo had followed "Close To You" with "The Carpenters", which included "For All We Know", "Superstar", "Rainy Days And Mondays" and their medley of songs by Burt Bacharach and Hal David. Then, early in 1972, Richard started work on an album with a difference, one rich in enterprise and zeal, a veritable labour of love . . . It was born of his enduringly wide interest in popular music.

"I had the initial idea," he later recalled, "just before we left for a tour of Japan and Australia. I was so caught up with it, I couldn't wait to get back and start work on it. As a basic guide, I got a chart display which showed every tune which had made the US Top 100 since 1955. I wanted to pick out the very best tunes from that period, irrespective of how old they might be – and then narrow those down to the ones which best suited our style. Naturally, this took a long time. But I wanted to pick just the right songs – both for an album and our stage act. Karen and I couldn't tell for sure which were the



best oldies for us till we had tried them on stage. The medley of old songs we do in concert now is different from the one we finally used on the album, and the one we use on stage has changed a few times.

"The medley is also more effective on stage than on the album. We have put louder songs into the act, such as 'Johnny B. Goode'. I love the music from that period, I have lots of original discs from it and Karen and I are playing them still. I aimed to make the album easier listening than our stage presentation. For example, we wouldn't do 'One Fine Day' on stage – though it's on the album. And on stage we substituted 'Leader Of The Pack' for the track 'Dead Man's Curve'." It took over a year for Richard's project to reach the disc shops – in the form of the splendid album "Now And Then".

Natural Buoyancy

If the Carpenters were saddled with a whiter-than-white image, they were hardly without responsibility for it. Here are quotes from a 1972 hype issued for them: "Richard and Karen know 'what's happening'. But, unlike many of their musical peers, they don't feel the need to be negative about it, to rebel, or to flout convention by outlandish dress, stage manners and hairstyles. They don't put people on. They don't put people down. They are *sincere*. For the Carpenters, being 'high' means a natural, spirited buoyancy that needs no aid from chemical preparation. And this comes through a plenty in their music.

"Loyal and sincere as two kids can be, the Carpenters have roundly resisted the pitfalls and pressures of superstardom. Both still live with their Mom and Dad in the beautiful Downey home they built. A smashing new recreation wing was recently added and the kids – far and away Downey's most famous citizens – have just built two apartment complexes (aptly named 'Only Just Begun' and 'Close To You') with two shopping centres and plans for a music school in the works.

"When not on the road, Richard and Karen do what any other young Southern Californian kids do. They listen to records, go out for pizzas and tacos, Karen delights in cooking dinner for the family and Richard races around in one of his several cars. It takes a lot of self-knowledge and a deeply-ingrained sense of values NOT to 'go Hollywood' or 'play superstar' when you've made it as big as the Carpenters have. They are sincere, wholesome, unpretentious – living proof that these virtues can survive and, more important, can be lauded and identified with by American Youth."

A hobby Richard had dropped was motorcycling. He had been thrown from his bike while travelling at speed on the outskirts of Los Angeles. Though badly scratched, bruised and shaken, he had emerged without lasting injury, but understandably he had decided to stick to cars from then on.

Whatever their image, there was little doubt the Carpenters were sustaining their fame by admirably professional thoroughness and hard physical slog. And, of course, they were coping with both the stresses of gigging and the usual pop world fretting about the next hit. As Richard declared: "We haven't had three days off in all these years. It's not like being a doctor, where you work hard for so many years and then at last you have your practice, your office, your regular routine. In the record business you can have money piled to the ceiling. You can say, 'I could retire tomorrow'. But you don't *wanna* retire. So you always have to worry about that next hit.

Success Fears

"It got to me. I had like an anxiety thing. It was November of '72. We were out for six weeks of one-nighters. We didn't have a single to release. It was between 'Goodbye To Love' and 'Sing'. There's always that nagging thought, 'Will we *find* another single?' One night on stage, I felt I was losing control. You just get scared. You don't wanna do this show. I was so afraid, I didn't know what was going to happen. I felt I was really going to lose it, but part of my mind was telling me, 'You can't just walk off. You have to finish the show'. I mean, all those people there . . ."

Despite such fears, the duo's successes





continued. What was claimed as the Carpenters' fastest-selling disc to date was "Hurting Each Other". It was a revival of the old hit by Ruby and the Romantics – Richard having slowed the beat "to bring out the song's dramatic potential."

"It's Gonna Take Some Time" had come to the Carpenters' notice by accident. A new quad sound system had been installed at their home and the engineer happened to test it with this track from Carole King's album, "Music". These two discs were hits in the US singles charts in the first half of 1972, but during the same period, the Carpenters' disc sales were disappointing. However, they came right back into the reckoning when "Goodbye To Love" repeated its American success in Britain and shot up the charts.

International Smash

The song was the first big singles success for the writing team of Richard and his old friend John Bettis. It had been triggered off one night when Richard was watching a late movie on TV: Bing Crosby's *Rhythm On The River*, in which he played a struggling songwriter. The story was that his most famous song was "Goodbye To Love" – even though no such hit existed in reality. The title appealed to Richard and he and Bettis went ahead and wrote a song to fit. With "A Song For You" in the album charts, the Carpenters were once more well in the British disc picture by the end of 1972.

"Sing" – a hit single for the Carpenters in the spring of 1973 – was a tune from *Sesame Street*. It had been done by them on a TV Special more or less on the spur of the moment – Richard doing an on-the-spot arrangement in the studio. The number was to feature frequently in the duo's stage shows, with backing from children's choirs recruited locally.

The Carpenters' two major disc successes during 1973 were to be the single "Yesterday Once More" and Richard's carefully-created album "Now And Then". The former had been written during an 'oldies' revival in America. Richard noticed no one had written a song which adequately commented on it – and decided to fill the gap. "Yesterday Once More"



was a vast hit in Britain and the US – the biggest international hit the Carpenters had so far had, in fact. It was included on the album, which also featured evergreens of the '50s and '60s such as "Da Do Ron Ron", "Our Day Will Come" and "The Night Has A Thousand Eyes".

New Link

The album enjoyed the colossal transatlantic success it so richly deserved. It was also notable for an absence – and an inclusion. The absence was that of disc producer Jack Daugherty – production of the album being done by Richard and Karen. Richard was later to be quoted as acknowledging Daugherty's help in introducing them to Herb Alpert, but minimizing his subsequent role in their music. The inclusion was that of Tony Peluso, whose part in the Carpenters' sound is not to be overlooked. On "Now And Then", his was the fast-talking DJ voice which linked the tracks. But this was decidedly incidental to his guitar playing.

Peluso (his mother was an opera soprano, his father a music director) had started professionally with US pop star Bobby Sherman. After a year, he joined lead singer Mark Lindsay, who for a spell had quit Paul Revere and the Raiders to form his own group, who were on the Carpenters' first big tour of the States. "On the last date of the tour," says Peluso, "Karen told me, 'I think you're really good. Do you do any session work in the Hollywood studios?' I said sure and she told me they'd call me. Then Mark rejoined the Raiders and I went with him. As it happened, things didn't go too well with the Raiders and I was specially glad when the Carpenters *did* make contact – a year after the idea first came up.

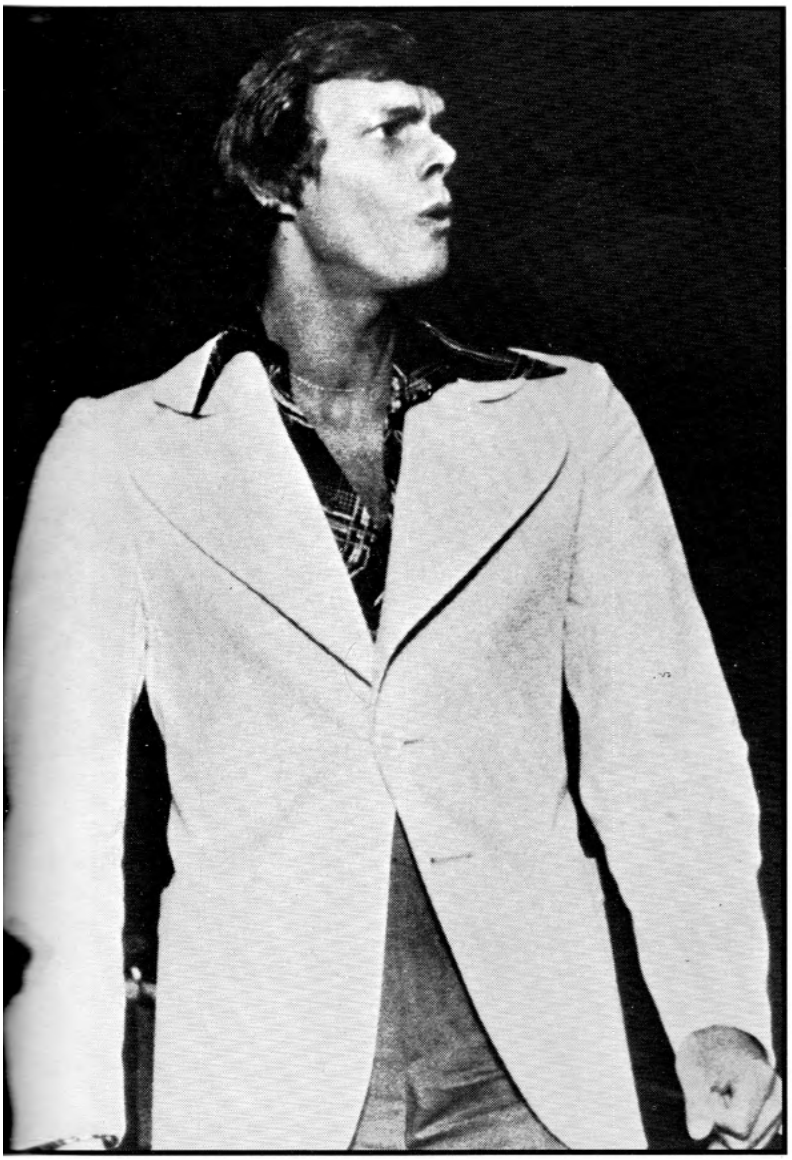
"I had always liked the Carpenters' sound and they were getting bigger and bigger. Richard now incorporated my playing into a lot of their stuff. Funny, he hadn't liked guitar previously, but he must have changed his mind. Otherwise he wouldn't have put me on those records. Karen loves guitar, and she and Richard respect each other's opinions. I've never known them say to us do this or do that without a mutual



consent. Of course, Richard is the leader, the arranger, the orchestrator and all that, but he's very keen on her ideas. He gives us a skeleton arrangement, says 'Here's where we're going in the song'; and we play within his framework. He more or less leaves it to me what I play. If it isn't what he has in mind, we work on it a little.

Cause For Concern

"The Carpenters take an awful lot of trouble to get things right," stressed Peluso, "Richard is a perfectionist. He's not one of those guys who says, 'That'll do. That's good enough. They'll never notice that mistake'. He'll never settle for what he thinks is second-best. I played on one track for a song called 'Why Don't They Understand?' – a record that was never released. We did 48 takes. We were in the studio all night for a three-minute song."



In the summer of 1973, the Carpenters brought in another drummer: Cubby O'Brien. He was introduced at the Universal Amphitheater in Los Angeles, where the Carpenters were breaking attendance records previously set by Roberta Flack and Tom Jones. "At one stage during our early days," said Karen, "we realized somebody had to go out front and everyone was looking at me. So we recently hired another drummer to play when I'm doing lead vocals. Two drums is OK, but not when we're doing different breaks at the same time. So we worked out arrangements for two drummers."

That summer, the Carpenters also formed a baseball team to play local DJs to raise money for cancer research. From their sales of posters and programmes, over $100,000 had been given to the same cause. At about the same time, there came rumours of romance for Karen – with Alan Osmond. Karen had been quoted on what she would look for in the man she might eventually marry: "He must be in the music business – arranger, promoter, musician, or whatever. Otherwise he could never understand and share the importance of music in my life. I can have respect only for people who know what they are doing and are good at it. My man would also have to understand that I couldn't give up my career. Marriage would never cause a break-up of the Carpenters."

Bridging The Gaps

Alan Osmond was said to be *the* man in Karen's life. Certainly he tallied with Karen's requirements. "Alan and I have been secretly dating for two years," Karen revealed late in 1973. "But we're always off on tours in different parts of the world and often the only chance we have to meet is after our late-night shows. But Alan is such a genuine fellow, he has a sense of humour and also has the right amount of self-assurance. We are both used to having money and success so it would be no problem to us if we were married. The problems start when one half of a partnership is successful and the other half is still searching for what to do in life."

Certainly Karen wasn't searching for what to do. She and Richard were building their career formidably – and without frantic resort to way-out behaviour. As Richard rightly declared: "Rock has made so many people's thinking so freaky. But we came along as average people. Because we don't paint our faces, and because we dress up smartly for a show, we're not hip. We emerged in 1969 right in the middle of acid rock when performers had this take-me-as-I-am attitude and didn't care about their stage appearance. Then we walked out – just normally clean. I mean, most people shower – right? We Carpenters have built a large following because people understood us and most of the critics didn't.

"I love rock. I enjoy Zappa and the Beatles and dozens more. I know we're not rock. We're pop. But we're not the bland, unimaginative pop so often associated with the term 'easy listening'. Everyone claims there has to be a new Beatles or a new leader of some kind – or that glitter

rock has to be the new trendsetter. But you can't manipulate success and tell the public that here's your new leader. When glitter rock came, the know-alls claimed it was the force of the '70s. But it obviously isn't to the '70s what the Beatles were to the '60s. What these people don't realize is that Sinatra, Elvis and the Beatles still have the same magnitude today. They haven't faded."

Ideal Ambitions

In August, 1973, it was announced that the Carpenters would tour Britain the following February. At the time, it was said, sales of "Yesterday Once More" had topped 300,000 in the UK. Meantime, in the closing months of 1973, the duo's "Top Of The World" was a massive hit both sides of the Atlantic. Written by the Carpenters, it had been a track on the album "A Song For You". Then, released as a single, it had gone to no. 1 in Australia and Japan. This had prompted the Carpenters to re-record it and issue it as a single in Britain and the US.

In November, A & M Records in Britain declared that the Carpenters had dedicated their hit to Marjorie Wallace – crowned Miss World in London that month. "Celebration Carpenters Packages" were presented to her and runner-up beauty contestants. From the States (where the Carpenters were on tour) came an appreciative message from Richard: "My ideal girl has to have a slim figure, long hair and a friendly personality. Karen and I watched the *Miss World* TV show just before a gig in Savannah. It seemed Miss America measured up to my specifications. I sure hope she's in Britain during our visit next February."

Meantime, there had been a delay in the British release of what was to prove (even by Carpenters standards) a fantastically successful album: "The Singles – 1969–73". It had been set for the Christmas market. "But," said an A & M spokesman, "it is increasingly clear, because of capacity problems in the disc industry, that even if initial orders were shipped, we could not guarantee supplies during the Christmas period. This would worsen an already difficult situation." The new release date was





January 18, 1974. It included 11 of the Carpenters' international hits. Of it, Richard declared: "I don't like the term 'Greatest Hits'. It is so over-used. Individuals and groups with two or three hits all of a sudden put them on one album, use fillers for the rest and announce, 'Here are our greatest hits, folks!' Our album contains 11 true hits. It was not slapped together. We remixed, recut, joined others together. It's simply something I feel we owe our audience and ourselves." By the time the Carpenters reached Britain, the album was at no. 1. A & M had also released the single "Jambalaya", a Hank Williams evergreen from the album "Now And Then".

As part of the pre-tour hype, A & M had declared: "Fan mail for Richard and Karen has swollen to bopper proportions. A huge amount of the flood of requests for photos, posters and info is aimed directly at Richard – fast becoming the heart-throb of the late teens/early twenties age group. Richard is therefore preparing for a hysteria-type welcome. His wholesome, clean-cut, boy-next-door looks have already won an army of female admirers among high school and college girls in America. The in-person appearances in the UK will cement his rocketing popularity here.

Playboy of the Western World

"Richard's off-the-record preferences among females? He is frank. He pulls no punches. 'First, she has to be a knock-out to look at. A super, good-looking girl with natural beauty. I hate lots of make-up. She also has to have a great figure. Very slim. I usually go for girls with long hair and am kinda partial to blondes.' Richard also lists a definite personality: talkative, sharp, friendly and with a great sense of humour . . . 'Someone who is alive. Who enjoys life. I get bored with girls who can't initiate a conversation, who just give one-word answers'. Mini skirts, hotpants, even floor-sweeping maxis ('they're so feminine') are also a must. But gear from antique thrift shops and old attic trunks produces a groan. ('They're so draggy, dreary and faded'.)

"But Richard's not in the market for marriage

yet. 'I won't be ready for a while. We're so incredibly busy. We are recording, rehearsing or performing every day. It wouldn't be fair on the girl'. Oh yes! The future Mrs. Carpenter must also share Richard's passion for cars. (A fire-engine red Ferrari and Barracuda Dragster are among his current four cars.) This, then, is Richard Carpenter. New-found young woman's hero of the Western world."

Surefire Sell-Out

That the British shows would be sell-outs had become clear from box-office reports weeks beforehand. The Carpenters' visit was part of a world tour which had started in Japan in September. By the time they reached Britain, their disc sales were claimed to be over 20 million – with six gold albums and 14 gold singles. A & M stated that the duo had been insured for $100 million, no less, during their European visit. Said tour organizer Brian Osborn: "The Carpenters are a multi-million dollar business in America. Their management wanted the fullest aviation insurance we could arrange for them in Europe." It was added that the premium would cost the Carpenters £1000.

The duo arrived at London's Heathrow Airport with an entourage of 30. Their London reception this visit was at the plush Les Ambassadeurs Club near Hyde Park Corner. The date was February 8, 1974. Karen and Richard – both tanned and obviously fit – talked about their lives, their music, their colleagues and other things. Asked about his musical tastes, Richard replied: "They embrace quite a lot. I love the classics. Everything from the Renaissance period to the baroque period. Classical, romantic, impressionistic. I love jazz – not too progressive. My favourite pianist is Oscar Peterson. I dig Brubeck, too. I like all kinds of rock."

"And you like Dixieland," Karen reminded him. Karen declared that she had been reluctant to move from her drums to sing centrestage. "You can't fool around with drums," she said. "Either you play 'em or you don't. You need power to get across to 15,000 people in an auditorium. But I have the strength in my wrists, which is just where you need it for any sort of technique. Ginger Baker is just solid strength. Lots of drummers are just plain loud and can't play their way out of a paper bag. Joe Morrello is light but he's so damned fast, you can't get close to him. Buddy Rich is the same. He's a powerhouse. But in a small group situation, Morrello can run rings round Rich. Buddy can't soften. He never calms down. He's definitely a big band drummer. There are drummers that can go both ways, but not too many. You have to be just strength to get across with some rock groups. You have to be just one big muscle."

Karen added that she used a standard drum kit for live dates. For the studio, she had a specially made fibreglass kit with seven concert tom-toms. It was a beautiful kit, she said, with big iron stands, padded lugs and padded bolts. It was made by a craftsman in Los Angeles. Only two other drummers owned such a kit and one was Ringo. But on stage it would hide her from the audience.

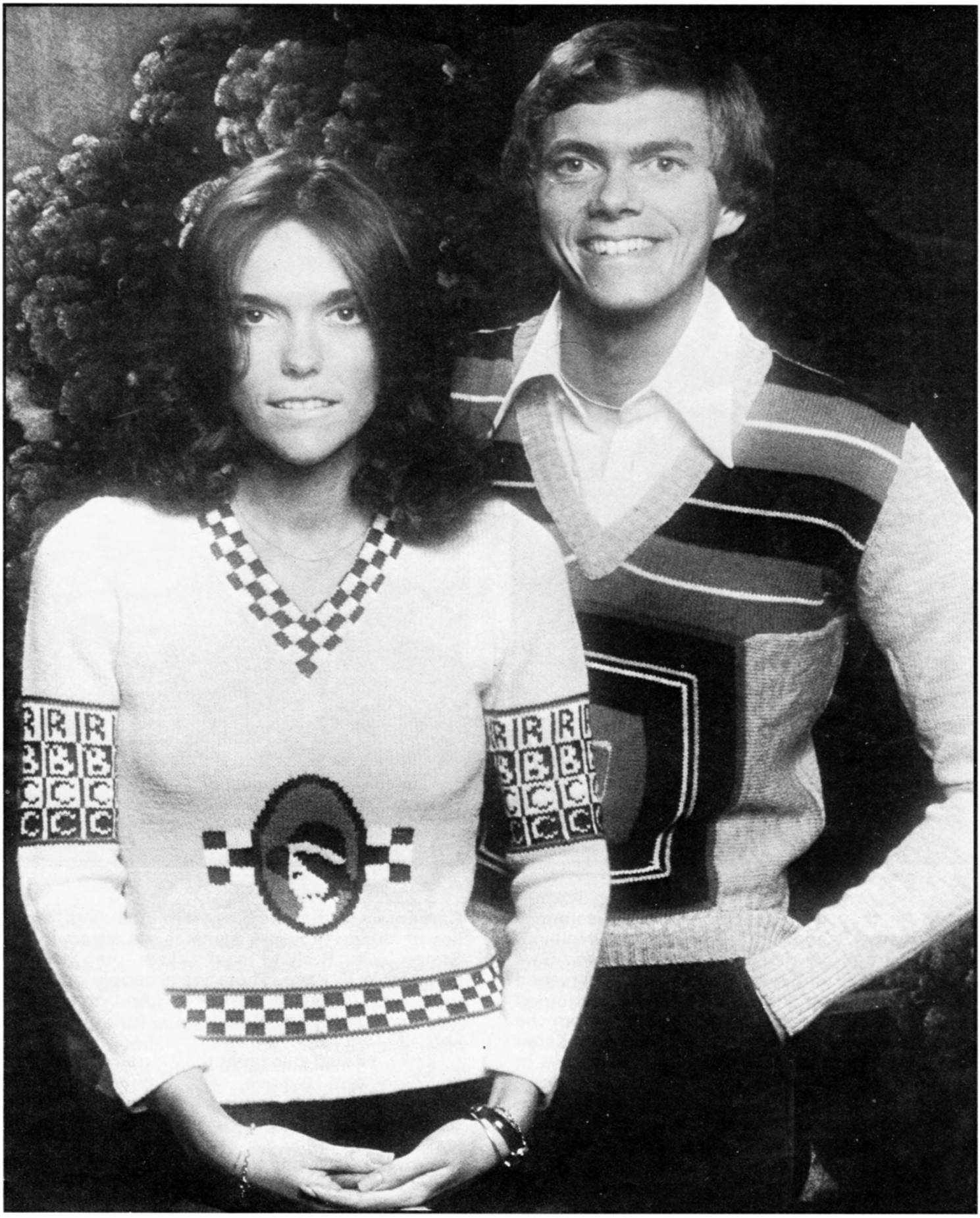
Clearly, the Carpenters weren't into glam rock. Richard said Bowie was new and original but that he wouldn't buy his albums, nor Alice Cooper's. The New York Dolls were "a bunch of amateurs." Karen said that the most amateurish group *she* had seen was Mott The Hoople. Added Richard: "They seemed to be trying to outdo each other in who looked the weirdest. They're a joke. Let's get back to the music."

In terms of music, Karen said: "Elton John was probably the first to get into theatrics. He is just *incredible* as a musician. I buy all his records and have a lot of respect for his work because he has the musicianship to back his theatrics."

Unrequited Love

Keeping Richard company at the Press Conference was Randy, pretty daughter of the Carpenters' manager. Richard told the Press they had known each other four-and-a-half years but had been dating for only six weeks. "I had always wanted to get closer to Randy," he said. "But one or both of us would be involved with someone else. But recently relationships we'd both had ended at the same time and we got together."

Before their British dates, the Carpenters had





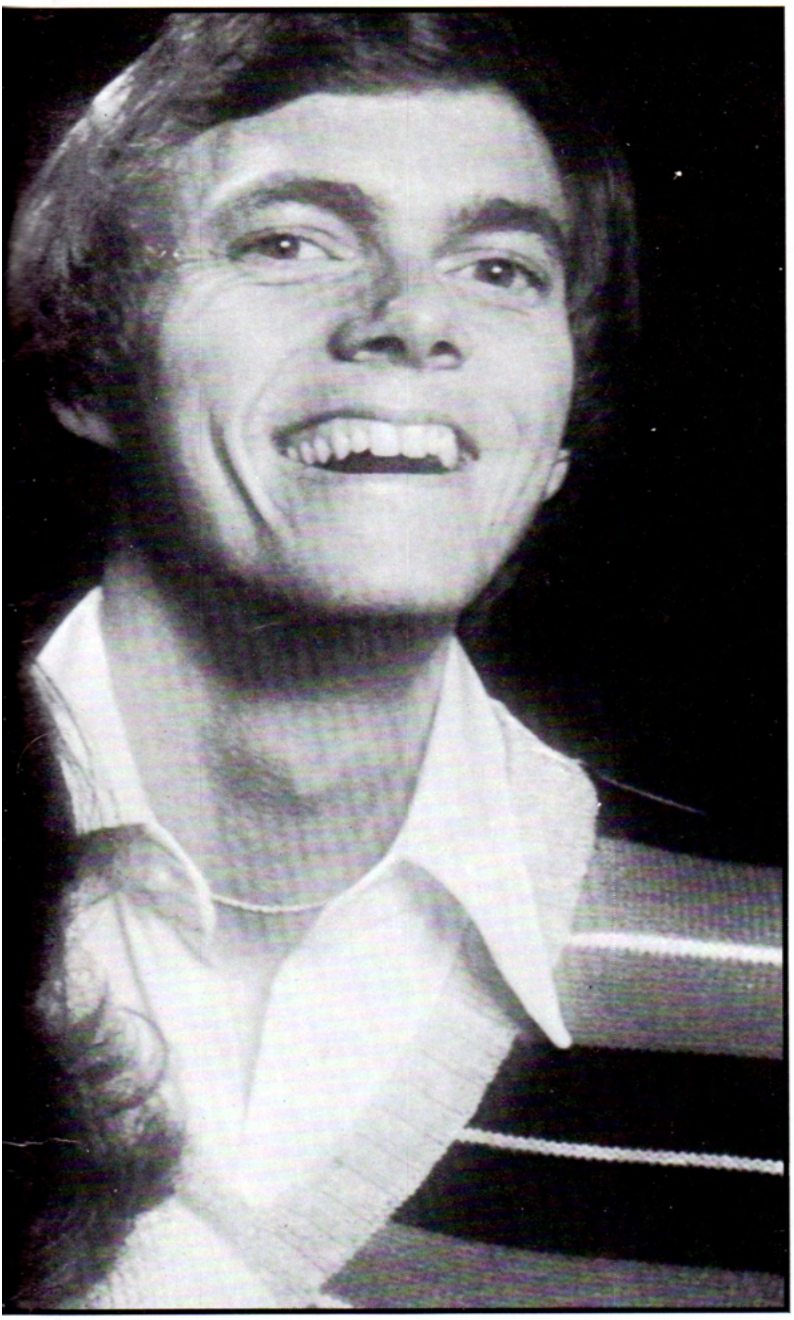


to fly (in their own charter jet) to appearances in Germany, Scandinavia, Belgium and Holland. in the last country they starred in the *Grand Gala Du Disque* TV show in Amsterdam – screened all over Europe. In Amsterdam they were joined by their parents, who had flown direct from the States and were to go with Richard and Karen when they returned to Britain for their shows in London and the provinces. "Our parents don't usually come on the road with us," said Karen. "They are with us now because they haven't been to Europe before – except for dad when he was a boy."

Back in England, in Manchester, clearly pleased with the way the tour was going, the Carpenters said audiences were including "families of all age groups – same as we attract in the States." As Richard said, "Like our last US concert, in El Paso. There were people out front who had to be in their 70s. And they were listening to 'Johnny B. Goode' – fuzz guitar solo and all – and enjoying it."

Karen named her favourite Carpenters release as "Goodbye To Love". But Richard opted for "We've Only Just Begun". "It is a combination of everything," he said. "Very powerful melody and lyrics. It suited Karen perfectly."

When it was put to them that "Superstar" – about a groupie's unrequited love – had been the disc most contrary to the Carpenters' image,





Richard replied that he and Karen usually looked for a lyric line which was different, and "Superstar" had certainly been a change from their previous discs. "We liked 'Superstar' and weren't offended by the lyrics," he said. "The line 'I can hardly wait to sleep with you' is all right today, because anything goes. But at the time, the line would have stopped us getting air play. So we changed it to 'be with you'. The publishers were glad, because the line had been holding people up from doing the song. Maybe it didn't fit our image but it didn't offend anyone. In fact, it was one of our biggest hits – even surpassing 'Rainy Days'."

Of "Jambalaya" which became a hit in Britain, Richard said: "We did it on stage in the States but didn't plan to record it. We did so because so many people asked us for it. Jo Stafford's version of the song is one I like very much."

Richard went on to stress the amount of work he and Karen put into recording. "An average Carpenters album," he said, "takes an average of three months to make and costs around $50,000. The master tape is sometimes completely taken apart and remixed all over again."

Of Karen's singing, he said: "She has two voices. She has a lead with a range of about an octave and a fifth. She also has a falsetto, almost soprano, sound. This is great for harmony but is

nothing like the big round sound she uses on lead."

Back in the States, the Carpenters soon found their single, another Paul Williams song called "I Won't Last A Day Without You", soaring towards the Top 10. In Britain, sales of the single were below Carpenters' standards, but the "Singles" album was selling profusely week after week.

In November came a new, long-awaited single for Britain: a revival of the old Marvelettes hit "Please, Mr. Postman". Tony Peluso, who had featured an ear-catching bit of guitar work on "Goodbye To Love", did likewise on this. It was a no. 1 in Britain and the States. The follow-up, Richard's composition "Only Yesterday", was also a transatlantic smash.

Both the above songs had been earmarked for the Carpenters' next album, "Horizon". Others on it included Neil Sedaka's "Solitaire", "Desperado" by Don Henley and Glenn Frey, and what John Bettis rated as the best song he and Richard had written: "Caught Between Goodbye And I Love You". The May of 1975 found Richard putting the finishing touches to the months of work dedicated to the album. Talking about it in March, he stressed they were spending a lot of time on it – even by their standards.

Stereo Effects

"We are getting into a lot more stereo effects than on previous albums," he explained. "Not gimmicky things – but things which have been happening lately in recordings, like studio drums. Previously we recorded them on two tracks: one for the kick drum, one for the rest of the set. Now we use four tracks: one for the kick, one for the snare, one for the left tom-toms, another for the right tom-toms. We spend hours with the drums. We try them in a certain place, use a certain mike, listen to it, get another mike, bring it in, try it out. It's the same with the piano."

Of the extra time spent on choosing songs, Richard said: "I wanted every song on 'Horizon' to be strong enough to be a single. 'Solitaire' is a single. So is 'Goodbye And I Love You'. And I think 'Happy' is strong enough to be a single – though we didn't think so until it was finished. There are six or seven songs which could be singles. They aren't all going to be, but it makes for a damn good album."

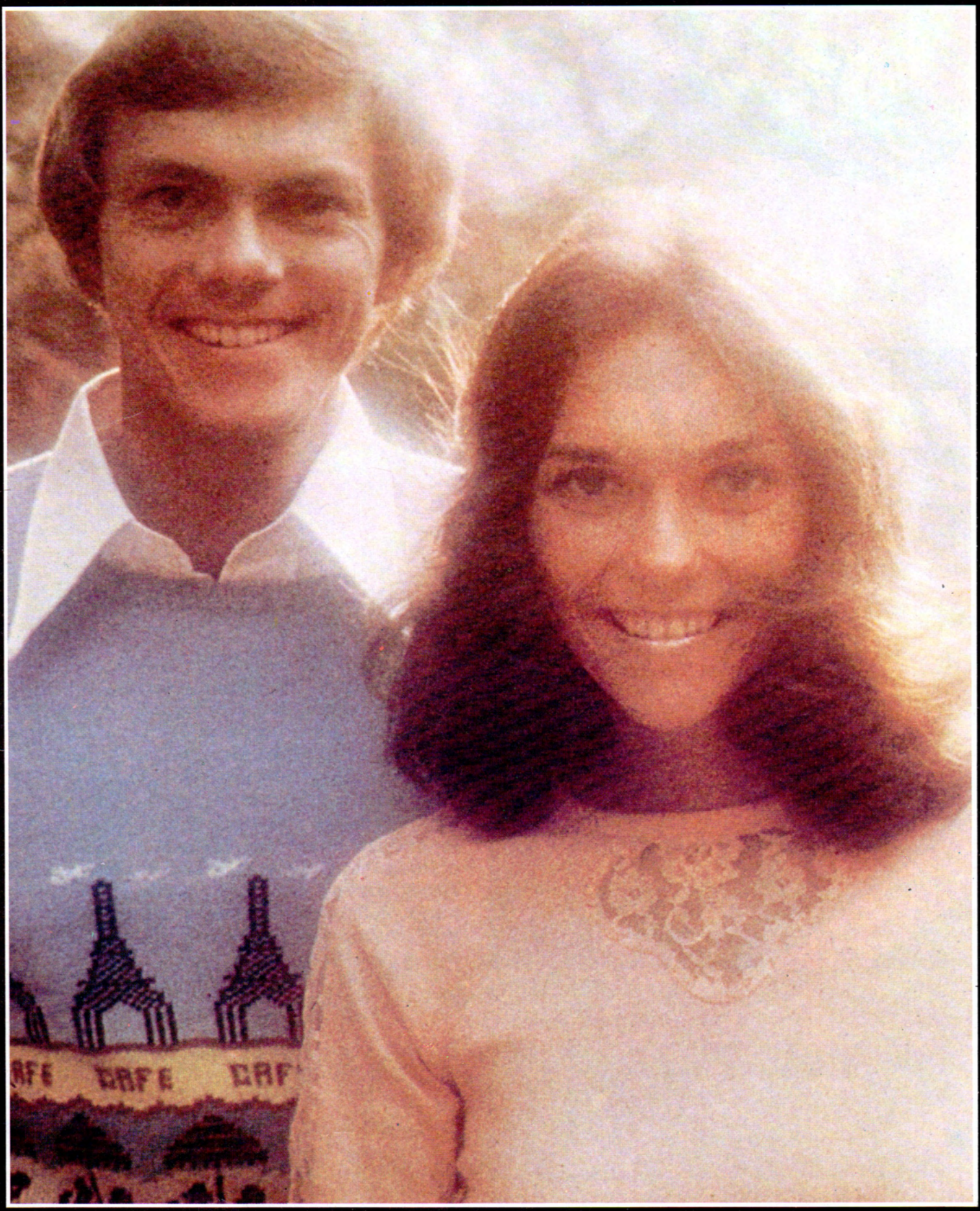
"Horizon" went quickly into both the British and American charts and enjoyed a long stay in each. "Solitaire" became a new singles hit for the Carpenters. At the same time came the announcement that "The Singles – 1969–73" had been awarded a platinum disc for British sales of one million.

Soul Attraction

Meantime, ticket demand for the Carpenters' November tour of Britain was so fantastic that six shows were added to it four months ahead of its start! Declared Harold Landey, of the Carpenters' London office: "The tour is selling out as fast as tickets become available. Richard and Karen are the hottest attraction in this country at the moment."

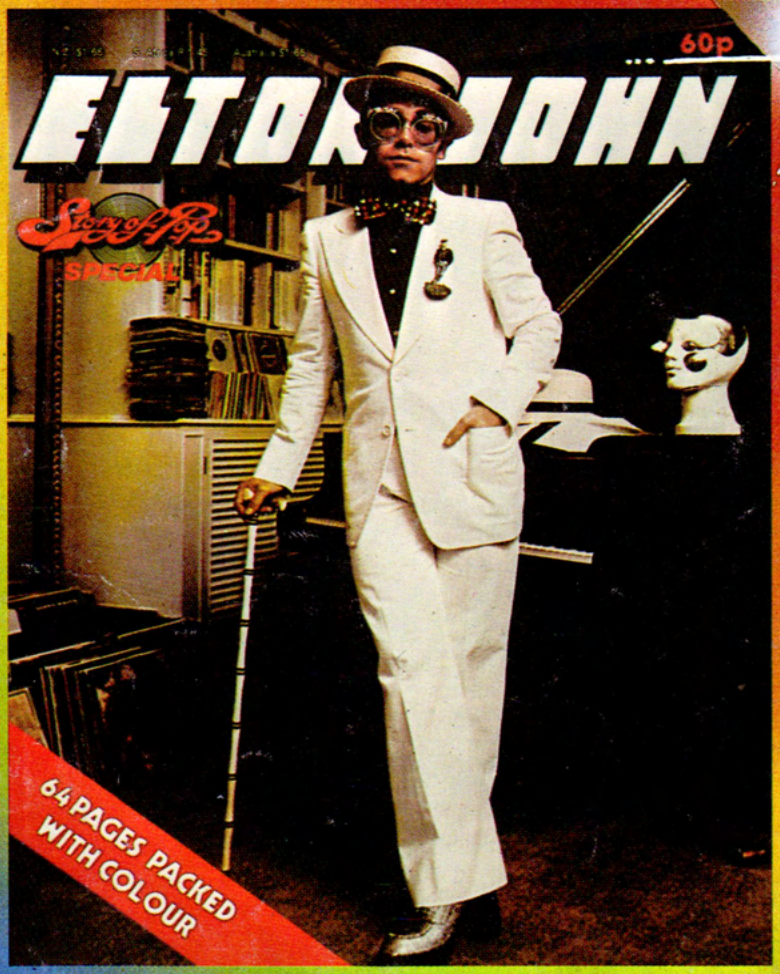
The Karen of 1975 is slim and lovely. When she came to fame, her looks were, at best average. But in recent times she has stuck to a strict diet. This – plus a changed hairstyle and no doubt various other feminine beauty aids – have made her delightfully attractive. It is said love could be a reason. For months now her name has been linked with Terry Ellis, co-owner of Britain's Chrysalis record company whose work takes him to the States frequently.

Richard will no doubt be speaking up once more not just for the Carpenters' commercial success, but for their musical worth. We can hardly finish better than with this telling quote from him: "To me, soul is a word that can be applied to all forms of music. Soul is feeling. And soul doesn't necessarily have to mean black feeling. Joan Sutherland has soul when she sings opera. Tchaikovsky had soul. So did Rachmaninoff or Fats Waller, or it can go on into a hell of a lot of different directions. And our music, in its own way, has as much soul as Gladys Knight or Stevie Wonder. It's just not the same type. Soul isn't just something black. To me, Cole Porter, Irving Berlin, Burt Bacharach, Paul Simon have plenty of soul. There's soul in the music we've brought up. Not black soul, but it's soul. It's right there."


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