

# CARPENTERS





# SPEND CHRISTMAS WITH CARPENTERS



A Kind Of Hush, AMLK 64581



Horizon, AMLK 64530



A Song For You, AMLS 63511



Carpenters, AMLS 63502



Now & Then, AMLH 63519



The Singles, AMLH 63601



Close To You, AMLS 998

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# CARPENTERS



Six years is a long time in the popular music business, but even after this lengthy spell of life at the top, the Carpenters are shining brightly. Their music transcends all barriers, striking a chord in the heart of even the most cynical of music fanciers, because the Carpenters represent something which anyone can appreciate: excellence, and a refusal to compromise on their chosen path.

They first came upon us in 1970, when the air was heavy with the abundance of progressive rock music. The machine-gun bands, with Led Zeppelin leading the arms race, were building up enormous and devoted audiences with sold-out concerts and staggering record sales, and for a period it seemed that popular music in the old tradition of songs and melody, had gone for ever.

It was unfashionable, especially among young people, to talk of liking anything that didn't have an absurd decibel count, and at one point things became so hopelessly out of control in British concert halls that people were genuinely worried about causing permanent damage to hearing; ear and noise specialists were called in.

Then the Carpenters released "Close To You", and for some of us, the war was over. With that song came the realisation that anything genuinely good and wholesome and warm and melodic could break through; the single was a colossal international hit - and the Carpenters were away.

For Richard and Karen Carpenter, however, it didn't happen so simply as that. This brother-and-sister act, born in New Haven, Connecticut but now living with their parents in the Los Angeles suburb of Downey had toiled for several years awaiting that stroke of luck needed by everyone who has ever "made it" in music.

Richard studied piano at Yale University; Karen took up playing drums partly out of mischief as well as out of a genuine interest in rhythm. Around 1966, they formed a jazz trio and won a contest at the Hollywood Bowl. At this time, Karen rarely sang in public.

A couple of records were made after that contest-success, but nobody showed much interest. Then Karen started to sing, partly to provide a freshness to their own sound. And they must have secretly realised that their real direction had been opened up.

Spectrum was the name of their group which immediately preceded the Carpenters, but work was not easily achieved and this unit broke up after a year (1968). Meanwhile, Richard was becoming more confident in his ability to write and arrange, and he had an idea to project his sister's promising vocals a little more imaginatively. "Let's call ourselves the Carpenters - you sing, I'll write. Not jazz - pop!"

That decision, and a golden stroke of luck in which a "test tape" of the hit Carpenters sound found its way to Herb Alpert, is what set the brother and sister on the road to fame and fortune.

A friend of a friend played the tape to Alpert, by then co-founder of A & M Records, and he shrewdly saw in





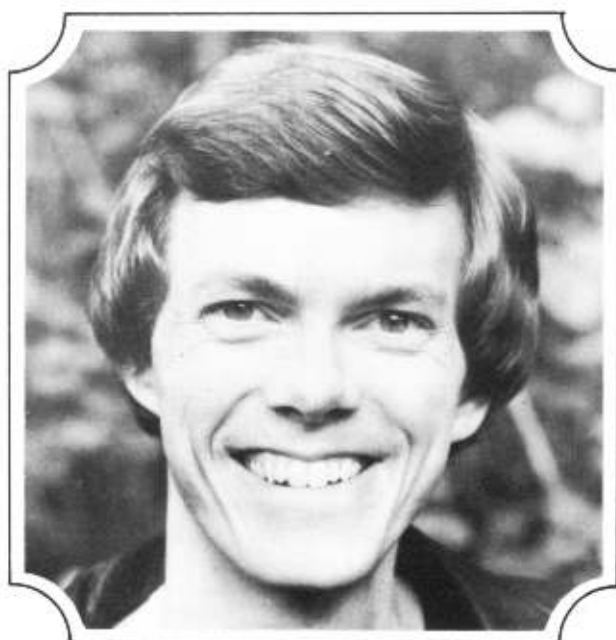
them a potential way beyond their first album for his label. Their debut LP flopped, but Alpert gave Richard and Karen what every musician needs to breathe and develop: loads of time in the studio, without pressure. Alpert, a keen lover of melody, was convinced after seeing them perform that he was investing money in a winner. The Carpenters' sound was unfashionable, and Alpert was scorned for his faith.

But it paid off. Richard, a vastly-underrated and little-credited producer and arranger with a unique flair for adding those haunting instrumental touches which you whistle, gained more and more confidence, and teamed up with his old friend, John Bettis, who wrote most of the words to Richard's tunes. Together, they developed a feeling for tailoring the kind of song which Karen's voice could best deliver: romantic, emotive, accompanied by rich, sweeping strings and containing perhaps, the sort of lyrical warmth which had been missing from popular music for ten years.

Out they poured: "We've Only Just Begun", "For All We Know", "Superstar", "Rainy Days And Mondays", "Goodbye To Love", "Top Of The World", "A Song For You", "Only Yesterday" - the collection of gems is so long, it's almost indecent to list them.

Success can bring problems, though, especially for sensitive souls like Richard and Karen Carpenter. With the realisation of how well they'd done came, in 1975, a sudden and uncharacteristic anger in them both.

They had been very busy reaching their pinnacle. Now they had time to look at how they had been "sold" to the public - and they didn't like the reflection in the mirror.



They saw themselves, on record covers, in the Press and on television, as the butt of highly personal criticism which wrote them off as what Karen describes as "Squeaky-clean, Mom's apple pie, whiter-than-white." Because their music represented, perhaps, the more passive aspects of love and romance, the Carpenters were considered by many, especially the self-appointed trendsetters, to be rather soft.

Richard becomes very heated when discussing the public image of the Carpenters:

"I was born into a middle class family, but as a kid who got hooked on pop I went through all the same things any kid went through. I'm not perfect, but I can't stand this feeling people have got of the Carpenters that maybe we stand for a certain class, represent people who wear suits, ties, and shine big toothpaste smiles. I don't want the Carpenters to represent anything to anyone, except good music."

If Richard is the outspoken one of the pair, Karen is no less irritated by any suggestion that they are holy or "precious". "We're normal, you know", she says. "Normal! Get up in the morning, shower, get dressed, make phone calls, have rows, enjoy restaurants - there's nothing I want to be considered for in terms of looking clean and tidy. I hate the impression that because our music is not loud and angry, we are especially bland."

Their non-music hobbies are few. Richard likes food and especially wine and cars; Karen enjoys needlepoint and cooking.

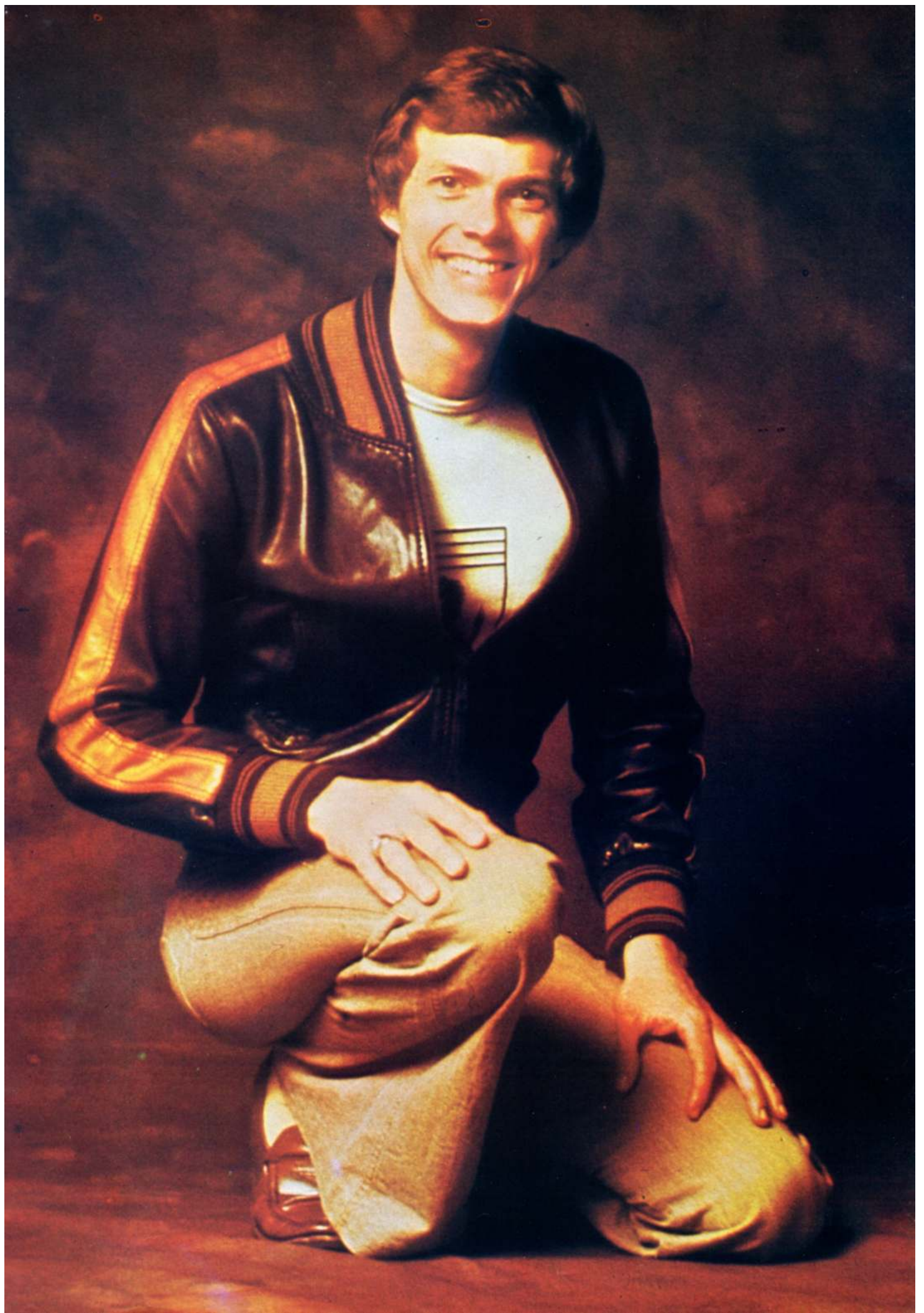
Talking to the Carpenters, one becomes aware of a supreme dedication to their work, a real affection for the public who have made them rich and famous, a refreshing lack of modesty, and a determination not to grow stale. Brother and sister they may be, but they have their personal disagreements - as one might expect during such full lives working together, touring the world to give concerts. In the recording studios, says Karen, her brother is totally in control; and while she naturally makes suggestions, he's the one who decides how the song finally sounds. So far, no questions are being asked: their record sales exceed 30 million.

Timeless in their appeal, the Carpenters will go on giving us the best in popular music, because they constantly aim for perfection and get as near to that goal as it's possible to do. With Karen's voice of pure honey, gliding through beautiful songs as effortlessly as her childhood favourite singer Jo Stafford, and Richard's restlessness allied to an arranging skill which puts him in the top league, they're something very special to those who care about lovely songs and high standards. Let no man write their musical epitaph.

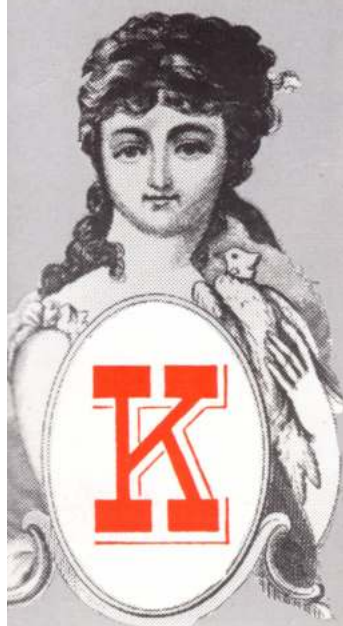
Ray Coleman,  
Editor, *Melody Maker*





















With more than 30 million singles and albums sold, three Grammy awards, 17 gold records and thousands of packed concerts throughout the world, a new phase and era for the Carpenters has begun.

"Our latest album - 'A Kind of Hush' - and our new show express our change of attitude", says Richard, the musical genius of the Carpenters. "We have a new outlook; there's a new feeling of happiness and enjoyment - we've begun a new Carpenters' era."

The Carpenters, entering their seventh year as a musical entity, look back at 1975 as a year of change. "But the issues are settled now and it's become easier to create again", explains Richard. An indication of Richard's statement is the Carpenters' eighth A & M album, which Richard produced with Karen as associate producer. As on all previous albums, Richard also did all the orchestrations and arranging. He also wrote three tunes with his long-time writing partner, John Bettis.

Richard, who penned the duo's hits, "Top Of The World", "Goodbye To Love", "Yesterday Once More" and "Only Yesterday", says that "the new tunes came easy like the aforementioned hits. I write on inspiration and I'm really pleased with the new tunes, especially 'I Need To Be In Love'."

From their first huge hit, "Close To You", to "I Need To Be In Love", Karen and Richard have assembled a body of recorded work as consistently entertaining and tasteful as that created by any of their contemporaries. They can look with pride upon their career which has combined exceptional music with phenomenal sales and growing critical acclaim.

Possibly, the name of the Carpenters' first group, Spectrum, best describes their music today.

"Our music covers quite a bit of the musical spectrum", says Richard. "We feel there is something for just about everyone, especially in the new album. Onstage, we're still recreating our record sound, but we're now communicating with the audience through talk, staging and production."

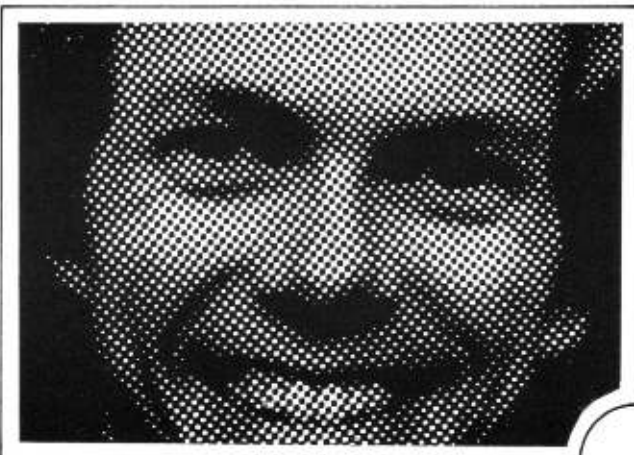
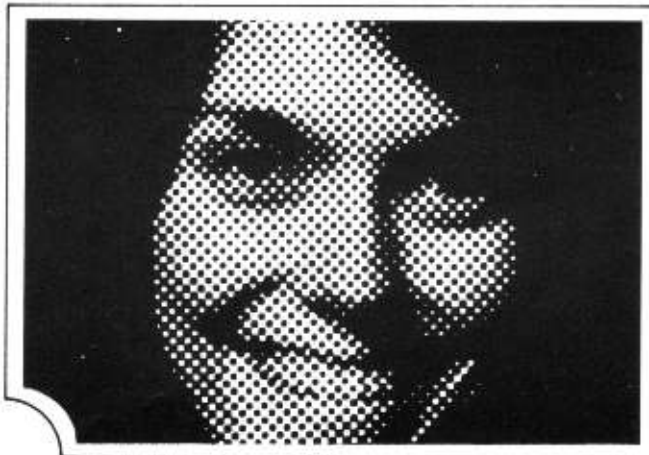
Karen (27) and Richard (30) were born in New Haven, Connecticut, where Richard began playing piano at the age 12; four years later, he was studying the instrument at Yale. In 1963, the Carpenter family moved to Downey, California and Richard continued his musical education at U.S.C. and Cal State University at Long Beach. High-schooler, Karen developed an interest in the drums, mastering the rudiments in a few weeks. She and Richard and a bass-playing friend, Wes Jacobs, formed the first of three Carpenters aggregations, a jazz instrumental trio that came first in the Hollywood Bowl "Battle of the Bands".

Richard soon disbanded the trio in favour of a group that would emphasize their mutual growing love of lush harmonies. Spectrum included four additional members, all Cal State students (including John Bettis) performing original compositions in elaborate choral arrangements.

After a year of desultory response from club-owners, record companies and hard-rock fans, Spectrum was abandoned in favour of a duo made up of just Richard and Karen, which achieved through overdubbing a harmonic blend like that of Spectrum's. Demonstration tapes of the new sound were recorded in the garage studio of a friend, the well-known session bassist, Joe Osborn.

After another year, the Carpenters were able to get their tape to Herb Alpert, co-founder of A & M Records, who immediately signed them to his label and gave them the freedom and encouragement that enabled them to realise their amazing potential.

Karen Carpenter's singing has roots in a rich American tradition of entertainers who are able to create a strong identity within a very commercial form. She descends in direct spiritual, if not stylistic, lineage from the best of the swing era's big-band vocalists, such fine '50s best-sellers as Kay Starr, and the cool, elegant Top 40 stars of the '60s like Dionne Warwick. It is the lot of such singers to be underrated by critics even as large segments of the public







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 Gary Sims, audio mixer  
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Ed Sulzor, co-ordinator of recording  
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