



Once almost hooted out of Sunset Strip's Whisky for their clean-cut looks and soft sounds, the Carpenters, Karen and Richard, have since accumulated 3 Grammys, sales of \$25 million. Times photo by Kathleen Ballant

• They're Ivory Soap twins who are not to be confused with Ivory Snow model and porno movie actress Marilyn Chambers. They are (to mix metaphors) the Prince Charles and Princess Anne of pop. They're well brought up. Well behaved, squeaky clean as an Ivory baby or the buildings in Washington—way back in the days of John F. Kennedy.

They're as unruffled by politics (to switch smiles) as Mickey and Minnie Mouse, they're as interchangeable (to switch again) as Mick and Bianca Jagger.

They are the Carpenters—Karen, 24, and Richard, 27, the most celebrated brother-sister act since Felix and Fanny Mendelssohn. They have lasted as long, comparatively, in the turbulent world of pop music as have Wagner's Siegmund and Sieglinde. Five years today is five eons.

The London Sun, which is outrageously reckless with superlatives, calls them "the world's most popular vocal duo." Leaving Redford and Newman aside, the Sun may be right. The Carpenters hold three Grammys, 15 gold records and sales of \$25 million plus.

"We are not rock," Richard says in an understatement. "We're pop, but I like rock." Rip Van Winkle wouldn't know what to do with the Carpenters; they haven't had three days off in the past four years. David Carradine wouldn't know what to do with the Carpenters, their house in Downey has no broken steps or untilled soil, only Japanese gardens and AstroTurf.

My assistant, Paul Rosenfield, visited them not in Downey but at their rented house in Las Vegas, while they were performing at the Riviera Hotel. He found them "relaxed, but not sloppy; could the Carpenters be sloppy?" He found them wearing neatly pressed jeans and T-shirts. He reports "they seem anxious to make certain points, like their lack of fondness for the movie industry" and indifferent to certain questions "like reiterating their background."

Richard, he says, is both the more avid workhorse and "the gregarious one"; Karen "is pretty but broad-shouldered, has less enthusiasm and has been here before—it's just another interview." Richard is the song-seeker, sometime-composer, arranger, dominant sibling, and expert at musical trivia. "His knowledge is encyclopedic," says Karen (for the Princess, as she's cal-

JOYCE HABER

## Carpenters Nail Down a Spot in Pop Pantheon

led by detractors. "He knows every label and flipside and Top Ten record since 1955."

That makes Richard a wizard at 8. It has made both of them millionaires. The only children of a retired lithographer, they grew up in New Haven and moved to Downey in 1963. "Dad could see how serious we were about music," says Richard, "and wanted us to be where it was happening." Tin Pan Alley was dead, apparently. Downey was close to Vine St. in Hollywood.

The Carpenters were graduated from Cal State Long Beach. While there, they formed two unsuccessful groups. One was called the Carpenter Trio. It included Wes Jacobs, a tuba player now with the symphony in Detroit. The other was Spectrum, a soft-rock company of eight. Since her family couldn't afford to buy her a set of drums, Karen improvised with chopsticks and bar stools.

In 1966, the age of the Jefferson Airplane, Janis Joplin and Mothers of Invention, the Carpenter Trio managed to win the annual Battle of the Bands at the Hollywood Bowl. Through that era of psychedelic lights and freaked-out audiences, the Carpenters pounded the doors of records execs with no success. Once, they were almost hooted out of the Sunset Strip's rowdy Whisky a GoGo. The patrons didn't appreciate their clean-cut looks and soft sound.

What Papa wanted to happen happened in 1969. Karen and Richard, now a twosome, had made a demo tape in a friend's garage. Someone sent it to A & M Records' Herb Alpert. Alpert liked it enough to give a Bacharach-David song he'd refused to sing himself, because he didn't like the phrase "sprinkled moon dust." The Carpenters' version of "Close to You" reached No. 1 on the charts in six weeks. It sold 1.8 million singles and close to 4

million LPs. Since then, every Carpenter single or album has been a multimillion seller.

The uncontroversial team, predictably, caused much controversy. "Karen looks more like a finalist in a Pillsbury bake-off than what she is," sneered a garment trade paper. The Times' Robert Hilburn gave a more considered response when the Carpenters headlined at the Greek Theater in 1972. "The group's most immediately observable strength is Karen's voice—rich, emotional, even sensuous at times (but there is) an occasional amateur feel to their music. Their success just to show, I suppose, how susceptible we all are to a pretty tune."

Unlike Irving Berlins ("a pretty girl is just like a"), these pretty tunes are achieved by the use of four-part chords and over-dubbings. These give the effect of multivoices. The Carpenters claim that some of their upbeat paens to romantic love and optimism have thwarted suicides and reconciled marriages. Their hits range from "We've Only Just Begun" (it originated as a Crocker Bank commercial) to their current smash, "I Won't Last a Day Without You."

The latter-day Felix and Fanny Mendelssohn are househunting in Beverly Hills. Yes, they still plan to live together—with their own corporation, some 30 employees and an income of more than \$1 million a year. Appropriately, their idols are "The Three B's"—Bacharach, the Beatles, the Beach Boys. They'll play a concert on Sept. 6 at the Hollywood Bowl with Richard taking the piano on the Warsaw Concerto, backed by L.A.'s Philharmonic. Rip Van Winkle, and Poland, never had it so good.

You mentioned you're disillusioned with the movie industry. Why?

KAREN: We like to stay away from movie people.

RICHARD: Movie people think re-ord people . . .

KAREN: . . . Are garbage.

RICHARD: We were badly treated at the 1972 Oscars. (Haber's note: The Carpenters sang their hit, the Best Song nominee "Bless the Beasts and Children.")

KAREN: There's no way we would touch "The Way We Were," though they asked us to sing it this year.

RICHARD: We couldn't believe how badly that show is run. Fifty million people watch it. And they're so disorganized they didn't even know what kind of piano to get.

KAREN: It was an absolute insult. They had a \$100,000 set and . . .

RICHARD: . . . And a tacky whitewashed piano on rollers.

KAREN: We paid to bring in a piano ourselves, and then they wanted us to paint it silver.

RICHARD: There was no one to do makeup. I had to do my own!

KAREN: We just walked out when it was over. We never said goodbye. We were already big then, not like now, but big, and they just said "Alright let's go." Like we were slobbs off the street. Like who cares about big Mitter Movie anyhow? Herbie (Alpert, and Greg Peck had a row over how we were treated. Peck wanted Herbie for some benefit; Herbie refused because of how we were treated. Movie people probably respect Mark Spitz more than us. He won seven gold medals and his father signed him up for underwear ads. What a career?

RICHARD: We did the Virginia Graham show and got makeup.

The fan magazines have devoted much space to your romances, as with Alan Osmond of the Osmond Brothers. Does that bother you? —

KAREN: No. But contrary to what they write, Alan and I are not married. We've seen each other maybe five times. How can you date someone when you finish work at 3 a.m.? If you go to a lounge or coffee shop, people stare. So you end up sitting in cars and talking for hours. Richard can have his girl travel with him. She has no career. But what about me? Is my guy supposed to lay (sic) around all day while we're on the road? I date three or four people. One lives in England. It's no good when the chick is bigger than the guy.

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**Do you see any trends in the music business?**

**KAREN:** The trend now is to put out anything you don't think will sell.

**RICHARD:** In the '50s it was Elvis. The '60s brought the Beatles. It's past time for it to happen in the '70s. Maybe if the Beatles reunite it will happen again. But I think we're at the same point now we were in '63: no direction. I don't see another monster talent like Elvis and the Beatles. Everything goes, from oldies to glamor rock. Everything's on the Top 40: country rock and our stuff and rhythm and blues.

**What other interests have you than music?**

**RICHARD:** Nothing much. I listen to the stereo and I like drag races. I like variety in cars. I have a Ferrari, which I drive around town, a '72 Mark IV—I don't like the bumpers on the new ones—and a Corvette. I like dirt races, nothing serious.

**KAREN:** I listen to the radio wherever we go. I also like cars. And on the road I do needlepoint. I've done about 20 pillows.

Rip Van Winkle wouldn't know what to do with the Carpenters—but he'd know what to do with Karen's pillows.