



Burt Bacharach
(Photo: Mark Hanauer)

STEREO REVIEW'S SELECTION OF RECORDINGS OF SPECIAL MERIT BEST OF THE MONTH



Burt Bacharach Demonstrates How It Should Be Done

BURT BACHARACH's new "Woman" on A&M is, like Alice B. Toklas' famed hashish fudge, an altogether different kind of candy. It will, I think, satisfy your musical sweet tooth immediately (and be assured that I do not take that simple function lightly), but it also packs a residual wallop or two that you might not have expected. It's a happy change for Bacharach, whose albums for the last several years have been saccharine-dipped, flavorless bonbons of interest mainly to those beady-eyed, sweaty-palmed adolescents who pester *Playboy* for make-out advice.

It has, in short, been pretty gooeey going lately for a man of Bacharach's usually dependable creative gifts and invariably polished craft. "Woman," however, restores him to the place he earned several years ago with his unforgettably kinetic, high-velocity score for Broadway's *Promises, Promises* (from which several enduring pop standards have already emerged) and such instant pop classics as *Raindrops Keep Fallin' on My Head*. That place is a kind of pop Parnassus, the veritable hilltop of the mainstream musical Establishment. And "Woman" finds Bacharach keeping appropriately celestial company there—the Houston Symphony, singers Libby Titus and Carly Simon, plus a whole retinue of first-string instrumentalists. Not surprisingly, he makes the most of it.

Bacharach's big instrumental numbers here—*New York Lady*, *Summer of '77*, *Woman*, and *Magdalena*—are all large-scale, unabashedly emotional, romantic compositions in the symphonic-pop mode. When they work, they do so with the openhearted, unselfconscious generosity of a wide-screen, Technicolor sunset. And this kind of opulent scoring is no mere lily gilding; it takes *real music* to make the effect properly; think of the many dazzling

symphonic arrangements of Gershwin—and check out your pulse rate during the opening sequences of Woody Allen's otherwise dour little comedy *Manhattan* for a recent brilliant example.

That same rush of elation ran through me as I listened to this album. Bacharach's work, the intrinsic quality of the music itself quite aside, simply gleams with confident, authoritative professionalism—the manner, the handling, the execution of absolutely every part under perfect control, the whole proudly signed with the flourish of a

master craftsman. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the instrumentals of this unflaggingly glamorous album. It isn't the bombastic kind of glamour you get from a *Star Wars* soundtrack, or the sentimental, teary-eyed kind found in an oldie such as Gordon Jenkins' *Manhattan Tower*. This is as fresh, crisp, and contemporary, as pleasantly startling as unexpectedly running into, say, Faye Dunaway as she makes a striding, head-up entrance into the lobby of the Plaza.

And while we're on the subject of Good Looking Entrances, Libby Titus makes one here to take a lazy, sinuous trip on her *Riverboat* (she wrote it with Bacharach), and she sounds just about perfectly at home. But it is Carly Simon, with her performance of *I Live in the Woods* (which *she* wrote with Titus and Bacharach), who nearly walks away with the whole shining album. It is one of those songs that simply nail you to your seat, so gorgeously done that you recognize it immediately as state-of-the-art mainstream pop both in the writing and in the performance, the kind of nobody-else-can-do-it musical proficiency that this country used to be rightly famous for.

Have we finally gotten over our taste for fast-food music, for the clumsy, half-finished ineptitude we have for close to two decades put up with in the name of "sincerity"? I don't know about you, but this member of the audience wants no more do-it-yourself song kits that I have to sort out and assemble myself. Give me more of the taste and the high-polish skills that have been lavished on this album from the first groove onward. Let's rescue Burt Bacharach from those mark-time TV vermouth commercials and put him back to work at his big-time song smithy, showing the journeymen and the apprentices how it *really* should be done. —Peter Reilly



CARLY SIMON
State-of-the-art pop

BURT BACHARACH: *Woman*. Carly Simon, Libby Titus (vocals); Houston Symphony Orchestra, Burt Bacharach arr. and cond. *New York Lady*; *There Is Time*; *The Dancing Fool*; *I Live in the Woods*; *Summer of '77*; *Woman*; *Riverboat*; *Magdalena*. A&M SP 3709 \$7.98, © 8T 3709 \$7.98, © CS 3709 \$7.98.