

YESTERDAY ONCE MORE

The Carpenter remembers Karen and the duo's heyday. BY ROBERT SEIDENBERG

RICHARD CARPENTER agreed to let EW sit in while he listened for the first time to *If I Were a Carpenter*—a tribute to the music he made with his sister, Karen, who died in 1963. Although he hasn't been writing music, Richard keeps busy with various Carpenters projects, including a six-CD set to be released in Japan (where they are revered), and the Oct. 1 opening of the Karen and Richard Carpenter Performing Arts Center at Cal State University in Long Beach. Carpenter lives in Downey, Calif., with his wife of 10 years, Mary, who just gave birth to their fourth child, Collin Paul, on July 22. Still boyish-looking at 48, he sang along with the tribute tape, adding air piano and guitar and offering critiques of some of the new versions, as well as stories about the originals.

Sonic Youth, "Superstar": "I was told, 'You better be prepared, this is the strangest one on the project.' And yet, the form of it is pretty much my arrangement, which, I think, is one of my best. They put their own spin on it. It's Beatlesque—I can picture it being from the White Album. But I love it. From the heart. It's quite haunting.

"The first time I heard Bette Midler sing 'Superstar,' I loved it. But we were worried [about covering it]. I was thinking, my Lord, here we are, the young, well-scrubbed duo. Should we be singing, 'I can hardly wait to sleep with you again'? So we made it *be*."

Shonen Knife, "Top of the World": "That old-record-sound surface noise is clever. And I like the energy. But they've left out a couple of chord changes, which I miss.... We thought this was nothing more than a pleasant little album cut. But when Karen and I announced it at live shows, a roar came up from the audience. And we had quiet fans. They were staunch, but not unruly."

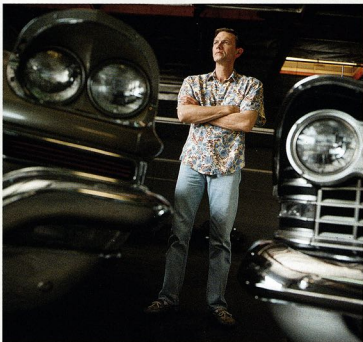
Dishwalla, "It's Going to Take Some Time": "I like this version more than ours. For us, it just wasn't as strong as our other songs. As soon

as I heard it on the radio, I thought, 'Nope, this isn't going to do it.' It did all right, but it broke our string of six million-selling singles in a row."

The Cranberries, "(They Long to Be) Close to You": "They have a pleasant sound, but I think our version is almost a perfect recording. There were a couple of soft things out at the time—'Make It With You' and 'Bridge Over Troubled Water'—but this was softer still. I figured it would go to No. 1 or stiff, and it was our first hit. Then, of course, it's how do you follow it?"

Cracker, "Rainy Days and Mondays": "Every now and again something jumps out as being atonal, and that, for me, would take a little getting used to. But the treatment seems from the heart. And I like the old-fashioned string section."

Sheryl Crow, "Solitaire": "I like her voice. Love the steel guitar. The only thing I miss is, she doesn't sing the low note at the end of the chorus. It's too range-y. But, boy, Karen just knocked this out. She never had any trouble with range or breathing. Never sang out of tune. Karen was absolutely scary, how good she was." ♦



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