

He was also consistently supportive of and enamored with Richard's musical achievements, so much so that in 1966, he asked him to pen the music for "Merry Christmas Darling's" romantic lyrics, words that had been sitting around without a satisfactory setting since the Second World



*Karen, Frank Pooler and Richard in Sydney, Australia (1972)*

War. "In 1966, Frank Pooler asked me to set music to a lyric that he had written twenty years earlier," remembers Richard in the 1991 liner notes for *Carpenters — From The Top*. "We were all pleased with the result, and for the next several years Karen and I would perform the song at different Christmas parties for which we were hired."

Right before the decade closed, with the Vietnam War violently raging, the smooth-sounding Carpenters were signed to A&M Records, and the sweet innocence of their majestic choral harmonies provided a soothing balm for a country broken in half.

The following year, on November 16, 1970, four months after they landed their first number-one record with "Close To You," they completed the final mixdown of "Merry Christmas Darling," and it was officially released as a single four days later with the non-holiday "Mr. Guder" as its B-side.

Production credit for Richard and Karen's holiday classic would be given to Jack Daugherty, once a trumpeter for Woody Herman's band, who helped bring the duo to the attention of Herb Alpert, co-owner of A&M. According to some sources however, Richard played a major role in that production, as well as all of the Carpenters' early work, even though Daugherty was given top billing for it.

Weeks after its debut, "Darling" shot to number one on Billboard's Christmas Singles chart, and returned to that position in 1971 and 1973.

Now knowing there was a tremendous Christmas market out there for them, the Carpenters began sowing the seeds for their first seasonal set — 1978's *Christmas Portrait*. The rock invasion of the 60's and 70's, however, suddenly made their plan seem old-fashioned to many in the music industry, including the sibling's record label. After work was initiated