

about 150 people present, coming from Belgium, Japan, Mexico and around the United States. Bringing them to Southern California was a need to share and, OK, overshare how and why the Carpenters matter. # Toni Lee from England holds up the " Now & Then " album art that features the Carpenters' Downey, Calif., home, as she stands in front of the house on April 25, 2019. (Marcus Yam / Los Angeles Times) # Which is funny, because not even their fans look at the group as anything like the voice of a generation. During their recording career, they became famous for making America feel good at a time when there was so much to feel bad about. The Vietnam War. The struggle for civil rights. Watergate. Wistful soft-rock -- the Carpenters, Bread, James Taylor, Carole King, that guy who sang " Feelings " -- was a balm in troubled times. # The Carpenters' sunny affirmations (" Top of the World, " " Sing ") were sweet enough to give you an ice cream headache. Their midtempo songs and ballads, though -- " We've Only Just Begun, " " Goodbye to Love, " " Only Yesterday, " " Rainy Days and Mondays " and especially their version of the Leon Russell/Bonnie Bramlett composition " Superstar " -- were often transportive, thanks to Richard's exquisite skill as an arranger, but most of all because of Karen's contralto, which had an extraordinary relationship to the microphone and rarely seemed to be showing off -- it just richly is, finding the right places to go. # " I don't think even she realized how great she was, "