

TERRY KNIGHT

He (Who Had Everything)

by Joseph Tortelli

Terry Knight lived the rock 'n' roll dream. At the age of 20, he was a popular disc jockey. A few years later, he became a regional pop star harboring national ambitions. Before reaching 30, Knight managed, produced and promoted America's favorite hard-rock band.

He was born Richard Terrance Knapp in Flint, Mich., on April 9, 1943. Upon graduating high school, he joined the staff at WFCY radio, Alma, Michigan under the name Terry Knight. The peripatetic DJ passed through radio stations WJBK and WTAC, before settling into the night (when else?) shift on CKLW, a Detroit/Windsor outlet. Knight, who learned rudimentary guitar and harmonica in the early '60s, felt the excitement created by the British Invasion. In December 1964, he quit his radio job and traveled to England, an errand folkie in a quest for musical glory.

Discovering that ambition and audacity, by themselves, were no guarantee of acclaim, Knight returned to CKLW in 1965. Another DJ introduced him to the Jazz Masters, a Flint band which played basic rock 'n' roll and rhythm 'n' blues. The quartet consisted of drummer Don Brewer, guitarist Curt Johnson, bassist Herm Jackson and organist Bob Caldwell. The musicians, whose ages averaged about five years younger than Knight's, accepted an invitation to become his band.

Knight changed the group's name to the Pack, a term with universal teen appeal. And who was the leader of the Pack? Why, Terry Knight, of course.

What Knight lacked in talent — he had a thin voice with little vocal range; his band had average local rock group chops — he compensated for with style. Knight dressed in the latest mod threads and wore his hair in a gallant Lancelot fashion. Knight couldn't compete with Detroit's Mitch Ryder or Ann Arbor's Bob Seger in the scream 'n' sweat department. Nor could he approach his idols, Bob Dylan and Mick Jagger, as a songwriter. What he did as well as anyone was project an image, which, like his singing, was detached, cool. Terry Knight embodied '60s suburban teenage cool.

During the summer of 1965, the group cut its first single, "Tears Come Rollin'," for Wingate Records, a Detroit soul music label. In 1966, Terry Knight and the Pack recorded "How Much More" for Lucky Eleven, a hometown (i.e., Flint) record company owned by Otis Ellis.

In an August 1968 interview with *Go* magazine, Knight explained that the failure of those early singles nearly caused the break-up of the band. "I had already decided," he said, "that maybe I wasn't good enough to make it . . . We were all terribly depressed, so to take our minds off

everything we started playing a new Yardbirds LP (*Having A Rave Up With The Yardbirds*) that one of the guys had picked up that afternoon. All of a sudden we found ourselves raving about one of the tracks. We looked at each other and knew right there that we had finally found the song for us."

That song, "Mister You're a Better Man Than I," vaulted Terry Knight and the Pack up the charts in Midwestern markets. The Pack copied the Yardbirds' track with its folk-rock sound, fuzz guitar interlude and protest lyrics ("Can you judge a man by the way he wears his hair?"). "Better Man" caught the attention of Philadelphia's Cameo Records, which became the national distributor for Lucky Eleven. On its own label, Cameo issued records by Bob Seger and ? and the Mysterians, a rival Flint band with whom the Pack played local dances. Knight probably felt mixed emotions when the Mysterians' "96 Tears" captured the national spotlight while the Pack struggled to escape regional confines.

During the summer of 1966, the Pack's pleasant but redundant version of "Lady Jane" delicately jostled with the Rolling Stones' original for Detroit airplay. A couple of months later, the group scored a sizeable regional hit with "A Change On The Way," Knight's finest folk-rock composition.

Knight veered from the folk-rock path and covered Ben E. King's ballad "I (Who Have Nothing)" at the close of 1966. His voice fattened by echo and stretched to its cracking limits, Knight overcame his typical reserve and summoned the emotional power to express the song's feelings of self-pity and loneliness. Knight stuck to the song's original arrangement, including string parts. But the former disc jockey, rediscovering his radio-trained speaking voice, added a fresh dimension to the number: He spoke softly during the introduction and between verses. "Everybody," he told listeners, "no matter who they are, and no matter how different they might be, always runs across the same problem at least once. And that's the problem of love."

Knight coaxed "I (Who Have Nothing)" to #46 nationally. In many markets — even those outside the Midwest — the song fared far better.

The group's first album, titled simply *Terry Knight And The Pack*, featured "I (Who Have Nothing)" and included "You're a Better Man Than I," "Lady Jane" and "A Change On The Way." Besides singing all the lead vocals, Knight produced the album and wrote eight of its 12 songs. "Lovin' Kind" and "What's On Your Mind" reaffirmed Knight's predilection for folk-rock; "Numbers" and "Sleep Talkin'" indicated a corresponding punk

rock influence. "I've Been Told" fused the two styles.

The album cover lists a fifth Pack member: Mark Farner. Along with Herm Jackson, Farner is credited as bass guitarist and backing vocalist. In fact, Farner temporarily filled in for Jackson. But soon Farner would become the permanent lead guitarist, replacing Curt Johnson, who would be drafted into the military.

In February 1967, Knight and the Pack released "This Precious Time," a classic P.F. Sloan folk-rock tune. In areas where the band's folk-rock propensities were well-known, "This Precious Time" moved up the charts. But it stalled in most of the country, perhaps because it represented such an abrupt change from "I (Who Have Nothing)." Also, by 1967 psychedelia had supplanted folk-rock as the happening pop style, a change which the fashion-conscious Knight should have sensed. Instead, he committed the cardinal sin of the trendy; he was caught trying to sell last year's fad.

Knight bounced back to his "talking" formula on Joe Tex's "One Monkey Don't Stop No Show." But the swinging horns and funky lyrics demanded a gritty voice, not Knight's smoothness.

The Pack's second and final album, *Reflections*, confirmed Knight as an astute observer looking for a hit formula rather

than as an innovator conveying a musical vision. In addition to the two latest singles, the album included a prime example of psychedelic punk titled "Love Goddess" and a heavy version of the Stones' "Satisfaction" that foreshadowed Knight's productions of a few years hence. But the impersonations of Donovan ("Dirty Lady") and Dylan ("Dimestore Debutante") proved that imitation is not always a sincere form of flattery.

Knight and the Pack parted company in the spring of 1967. The Fabulous Pack, as the group tagged itself, reclaimed its Midwestern rhythm 'n' blues heritage on songs like "Harlem Shuffle" and "Widetrackin'." Knight chose a harpsichord-dominated pop tune called "Lizbeth Peach" as his first solo single. Cameo Records signed Knight to a five-year recording contract that included the opportunity to produce other acts such as the Dantes, Cedric Smith and Rocky and the Visions. Record company executive Neil Bogart gave Knight a corporate vote of confidence: "We're planning an all-out campaign to give Terry the recognition that he deserves as one of the top performers in the business."

The singer next formed the Terry Knight Revue, an 11-piece unit that incorporated

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Complete U.S. Terry Knight And The Pack Discography

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Singles

label	record #	title	year
Wingate	007	Tears Come Rollin' / The Color Of Our Love	1965
Lucky Eleven	225	How Much More / I've Been Told	1966
	226	You're A Better Man Than I / Got Love	1966
	228	Lady Jane / Lovin' Kind	1966
	229	A Change On The Way / What's On Your Mind	1966
	230	I (Who Have Nothing) / Numbers	1967
	236	This Precious Time / Love, Love, Love, Love, Love	1967
	236	One Monkey Don't Stop No Show / The Train	1967

Terry Knight Solo

Cameo	482	Lizbeth Peach / Forever And A Day	1967
	495	Come Home Baby / Dirty Lady	1967
Capitol	2409	Lullaby / Such A Lonely Life	1968
	2506	Saint Paul / (The Legend Of) William And Mary	1969
	2737	I'll Keep Waiting Patiently / Lullaby	1970

The Fabulous Pack

Lucky Eleven	003	Harlem Shuffle / I've Got News For You	
	007	Widetrackin' / Does It Matter To You Girl	

Albums

Lucky Eleven	SLE-8000	Terry Knight And The Pack	1966
	LES-8001	Reflections (also issued as Cameo C-2007)	1967
ABKCO	AB4217	Mark, Don & Terry 1966-67 (two-record compilation)	1972

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violins, brass and a pair of go-go dancers. The Revue debuted at the Versailles Penthouse Club in Cleveland during May 1967. Apparently it didn't travel much further, because Knight surfaced as a folk singer at Detroit's Chess Mate coffee house that July.

Ed Coe, manager of *Tonight Show* emcee Ed McMahon, also handled Knight, who considered embarking on an acting career. Knight moved to New York in order to be closer to the entertainment world. He made guest appearances on NBC-TV's *Tonight Show* and ABC-TV's *The Dating Game*. Additionally, Coe arranged for Knight to write music for *The Incident*, a 1967 movie that starred Tony Musante, Martin Sheen and, inevitably, Ed McMahon.

Knight's musical star dimmed in 1968, when the American Arbitration Association ruled that Cameo Records, after issuing only two solo singles, had breached the singer's contract. With his five-year recording and production deal voided, Knight played New York folk clubs and concentrated on his songwriting. "I'll still be writing for the kids," he told *Go*. "They're everything as far as I'm concerned. They're terribly important; everything about them — their hang-ups, their worries, their fears . . . These are the things I'll devote my attention to. I'll do my thing and other things for the kids."

His idea of what the kids wanted included "St. Paul," a 1969 novelty single for Capitol Records about McCartney death rumors that closes with the tacky "Hey Jude"-inspired fadeout, "Na, na, na . . . Hey Paul."

Knight's former sidekicks Mark Farner and Don Brewer had a clearer idea of what the kids wanted. They knew that the kids wanted it loud. The guitarist and drummer formed a power trio with bassist Mel Schacher, who had played in a late edition of 7 and the Mysterians. Knight agreed to manage and produce the trio in return for complete artistic and financial control.

Knight worked quickly and effectively. He named the group Grand Funk Railroad. He signed the band to Capitol Records through his Good Night Productions in the summer of 1969. Before the end of the year, Grand Funk Railroad had a hit album, *On Time*. Naturally, Terry Knight produced it.

The singer-turned-manager devised an ingenious two-track marketing strategy. Knight directed large scale promotions, notably a massive Times Square billboard exhibiting the trio's faces and the first sell-out concert in Shea Stadium since the Beatles. His response to the critical buzzsaw that cut the group's loud, simple sound was equally bold. In a deft bit of media baiting, Knight publicized the critics' attacks on the group, orchestrating a classic Us vs. Them showdown: Us being Grand Funk Railroad, leaders of what Knight called the New Culture; Them being stuffy critics who belonged to the past. Knight's strategy triumphed. Grand Funk Railroad became the most popular band in America.

Not easily satisfied, Knight discovered another group, Bloodrock, for whom he produced "D.O.A.," a 1971 single that nearly resuscitated the "death-rock" genre.

Yet musicians chafed under Knight's tight control. In March 1972, Farner, Brewer and Schacher fired the Svengali who had engineered their dizzying ascent. Knight countered with a multi-million dollar lawsuit and with court orders to impound the group's equipment. Eventually, all parties agreed to an out-of-court settlement of the bitter dispute.

An added irritation came from Allen Klein, the businessman who had shut down Cameo Records and left Knight in the lurch a few years earlier. Klein's company, ABKCO Records, reissued the Pack's old recordings in a two-record set titled *Mark, Don And Terry*, mimicking Knight's last Grand Funk project, a double disc compilation called *Mark, Don And Mel*. The third billing probably annoyed Knight less than the music publishing rights, which Klein's ABKCO Music controlled. Ironically, Knight, widely regarded as Grand Funk Railroad's exploiter, found himself exploited by an even cannier tycoon.

During 1972, Knight also formed Brown Bag Records, a subsidiary of Terry Knight Enterprises. The record label, which was distributed through United Artists, released a self-titled album by a group named Mom's Apple Pie. When his company issued that record's offensive album cover, Knight accomplished the seemingly impossible: He proved that one could underestimate the taste of the rock 'n' roll audience.

Knight had lost touch with the kids. And with the marketplace.