

Biography of bunny walters



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Bunny Walters is a New Zealand musician that reached fame in the early 70's, with his rise through the charts to the #4 spot with his single ' Brandy', to the low points of his career, where he disappeared from the spotlight due to a conviction. Despite this, he continued his career, eventually reaching his stride in the 80s recording jingles, but never again reaching the heights his fame used to have. As a part of New Zealand musical history, Walters showed throughout his journey as a musician the pitfalls that one can find in the industry, either through being blacklisted or from a change in career paths.

In his early years, Walters was musically inclined, learning the piano at a young age. Hitting his teenage years, he left Katikati and went to Rotorua where his brothers were; from then on, it was history (Smallman, 2016). Getting his start in the mainstream in 1969, he appeared on the talent event, *Search for Stars* ; in this, he competed against another similar singer, Tui Fox. While he came second in the competition, it was a launching pad for his career, with his first single being released later that year, named ' Just Out of Reach' (Shaw, 2014). As his first song to reach commercial success, this was the real start of his introduction to his New Zealand audience. As such, Walters would from thereon kickstart his musical journey.

However, just staying in New Zealand wasn't doing too much for his career. In a bid to rise through the ranks, he performed at Expo 70, abroad in Japan. This was an important step for Bunny Walters, as it allowed for him to spread his image to another staging ground. Having an international appeal worked in his favour, with him garnering a new reputation due to him performing overseas. At this time, many New Zealand artists found further success when

moving from the country to other nations (namely Australia). This is evidenced by artists such as Dave Dobbyn and Gene Piersons, all who reached higher levels of success when moving away from their home country.

There were numerous notable sonic highlights for Walter's discography, including 'Take the Money and Run', a pop tune highlighting the singers vocal range, reaching no. 2 on the charts in 1973. This followed one of his other major hits, 'Brandy', which reached no. 4 in 1972 (Muzic. net. nz, n. d.). However, this track had a major international appeal, with Barry Manilow's 'Mandy' cover releasing in 1974, transitioning a pop ballad to soft rock. This isn't the first case of the song being covered in this instance; it was originally written in 1971 by Scott English, becoming a hit on the UK's charts. While it achieved much more success internationally when Manilow covered English's track, Walters version was still a certified hit in its own right in New Zealand. Not only this, but it showed a keen eye for what would be popular in the industry.

Releasing his first album in 1972, 'Sings For Lovers And Rockers' was a collection of previous hits and covers, featuring a sound including pop with a mix of soul and funk. With this being his first (and only) proper album release, it allowed for him to show his audience his singing chops. However, it wasn't just glitz and glamour for Walter's career, with a run in with the law halting the progress he made in the music industry in 1974. Due to being convicted of possession of marijuana, he was effectively blacklisted (Jackson, 2016). As this happened, his appearances on radio, television and clubs dwindled down, resulting in a drop in subsequent fame. While the

punishment for the crime was paid in full, many believed that the outcome of what seemed to be a small matter was overblown, and eventually lead to Walters being ‘disillusioned’ by the industry (Jackson, 2016). Furthermore, it is important to note how young Walters was at the time; when this happened he was only 21 years of age. To reach a level of fame while young, and begin to lose it while still in his prime would be catastrophic to one’s psyche.

It wasn’t until 1976 that Bunny Walters found his groove again, releasing a new vinyl that year, ‘Never Too Young To Rock’ with the B-side ‘Boogie Woogie Woman’. Then again in 1978, he dabbled in commercial music again, recording a promotional single for the Labour Party at the time, titled ‘To Be Free with Labour’. While once being titled as the ‘New Zealand Tom Jones’, these tracks did not carry the same energy his previous releases had (Smallman, 2016). However, casting aside further success in the standard musical way, he found footing in the business of jingles. It is reported that in 1986, 80% of all jingles (with male voicing) featured Bunny Walters, alongside the New Zealand pop singer, Annie Crummer (Jackson, 2016). This further shows his talent and drive; while he was not where he started, he still displayed his work ethic and drive as an artist, outputting a mass of work.

Walters also featured on television shows throughout New Zealand; while first appearing in Happen-inn, becoming a regular, he later went on to appear in Shortland Street and the 1978 film, Skin Deep. This shows that Walters was more than a musician, and had interests in other commercial art forms such as acting. This is further displayed by his role in the opera ‘Porgy and Bess’, which he was a part of in 1991. While not adding to his

discography, appearances on television and film was a form of exposure that helped him become recognizable to New Zealand.

Despite passing away in 2016, Bunny Walter's legacy will be remembered through his work produced from the late 60's to the 80's. While controversy may have stopped his career from rising, something that he never fully recovered from, he still made contributions to the New Zealand music world, either through television appearances, radio, music or jingles. While his early career provided his biggest hits, his charm and voice led him to other avenues in life.

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