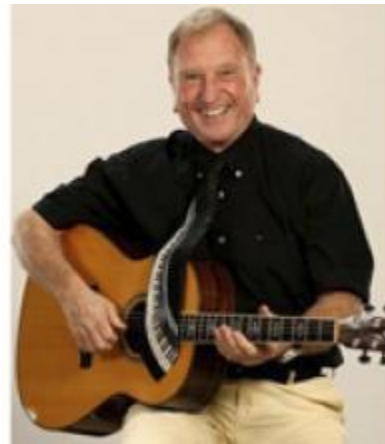


# In praise of THE UNSUNG HERO

**Garth Nosworthy never scaled the heights of fame and fortune, but he left his mark on the local music scene**

By: John Einarson



The Mongrels in 1967: Joey Gregorash on ladder, Garth Nosworthy seated below.

Winnipeg has had more than its share of music luminaries. Their names are known worldwide and it's an impressive roster of talents who got their start in or around our fair city. They've left their mark and championed Winnipeg to the world.

But there are also those who made their mark and left a legacy without ever scaling the heights of fame and fortune. Their contributions, sometimes below the media glare, may be less known but are no less significant. These are the unsung heroes. One of them was Garth Nosworthy.

I first encountered Garth in the halls of Grant Park High School in the spring of 1965 when his rock group, TC & the Provincials, was playing for a student election campaign. I was transfixed by this young man, as small as me, wielding a red Gibson Les Paul Junior guitar bigger than him. At 13, he was already a formidable guitarist.

I later learned Garth had been playing since age five. I can still recall the band playing a pep rally in the school gymnasium before a Pirates football game and changing the words of the Dave Clark Five's current hit, I Like It Like That, to: "The name of the coach is Yakamischak."

Garth progressed through a series of short-lived groups until he and buddy Duncan Wilson formed The Mongrels in 1966. In short order, the band, fronted by Joey

Gregorash and with Garth now on bass (he switched instruments when their regular bass player kept missing rehearsals), became one of the top-echelon rock bands in the city. One of the highlights of their live shows was when Garth would pick up the guitar for Kansas City and play the instrument behind his head.

In The Mongrels' heyday, Garth was earning several hundred dollars a week, more than his high school teachers. He was a rock star in our midst but was always approachable and genial, no ego whatsoever.

In contrast with most of his rock 'n' roll contemporaries, Garth shunned cigarettes, drugs and alcohol and remained that way all his life. He never needed any stimulants -- he was naturally energetic and enthusiastic. We became friends in senior high, but Garth's presence at school was limited due to the demands of being in a popular rock group.

The Mongrels opened for some of the biggest acts of the day and recorded several singles for local music company Franklin Records, including Funny Day, My Woman, Sitting In The Station, and after Joey was replaced by Alan Schick, Do You Know Your Mother? and Ivy In Her Eyes, all produced by the Guess Who's Randy Bachman.

Bachman also produced an album's worth of original material with the band for RCA Records in Chicago. The Mongrels later signed with Capitol Records, but their album was never released. Having gone as far as they felt they could go, The Mongrels folded in 1971.

Garth went on to a 35-year career as an air traffic controller, but he never abandoned music. Instead, he became a talented songwriter, contributing his compositions to a number of important local causes. In 1985, he financed the recording and pressing of A Christmas Wish, with funds going to the Rainbow Society. A few years later, he formed the family entertainment group Just Kiddin', performing his original songs for children and adults across the province, including frequent appearances at the International Children's Festival, Teddy Bears Picnic and Winnipeg Folk Festival. He served as the band's booking agent.

In addition, Just Kiddin' performed at the Bay's annual Breakfast With Santa event at the downtown store's Paddlewheel restaurant for 20 years, delighting countless youngsters with their music and merriment, and became as much of an institution as the appearance of Santa himself. Just Kiddin' recorded three albums, winning a 2001 Prairie Music Award for Imagination. They even rerecorded the Mongrels hit, Funny Day.

Whenever we would meet over the years, Garth was always enthusiastic about music. In his later years, he even signed up for guitar lessons, claiming he wanted to learn the right way to do all the things he'd been doing the wrong way. Always self-effacing, he likely played guitar better than his instructor. He remained a tireless supporter of the local music scene and relished working with other songwriters.

He was proud of his children, Lindsay and Greg, and supported Greg's drumming career. As well, he was very active in community affairs and support groups. All this while holding down a full-time job and playing in Just Kiddin'. His energy was boundless.

When the Paddlewheel restaurant closed its doors last February, Garth set about keeping Breakfast With Santa alive by organizing a similar event at Tec Voc high school in December. He was determined to keep the event alive by starting a new tradition. However, not long after the event was announced, Garth was diagnosed with cancer and hospitalized just before Christmas. He never got the opportunity to begin that new tradition, passing away on Jan. 9 at age 62.

So long, Noz. You definitely left your mark.

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