

Larry Morris

When you hear Larry Morris backed by some of New Zealand's hottest musicians, you're hearing the past, the present and the future of New Zealand rock & roll music. NZ Musician Magazine

I got into music because of Larry Morris and the Rebels. Mike Chunn

Larry Morris is the whole reason that me and Todd started Dragon. Mark Hunter

Larry Morris Coppins was born on 4 August 1947 in Auckland to Lister (b. Williams) and Mervin Coppins, a foundry-man. Lister's father was Morris Williams. She was a book keeper at *Rendell's Clothing* when she met Merv and they moved to Christchurch soon after she gave birth. Back in the 1940s Lister sang in *Arthur Skelton's Band* at the *Orange Ballroom* covering for her sister Win Dean now and then. Larry's parents broke up when he was 4, then Lister met John Sturdy, an English jack-of-all-trades on a working holiday. He married Lister and adopted Larry, legally renaming him **Larry Morris Sturdy**. John found work at the *Farmers Trading Company* and they moved to Auckland.

Larry commenced school at *Richmond Road Primary* then, when John became a trouble-shooter for *Farmers*, they moved to Papatoetoe where Larry attended *Otara Intermediate*. At *Papatoetoe High School* he played representative soccer and softball, tennis and golf.

Around this time Larry heard Elvis Priestly singing *Jail House Rock* and talked his father into taking him to see the film, then he learnt some songs and got up at parties to sing along with the record player. Another early influence was at age 14, visiting the *Montmartre Coffee Lounge* in Lorne Street with his step-father and talking the bouncer into letting them watch Tommy Adderley perform, accompanied by pianist Mike Walker. Just a few songs but enough to build a dream on!



John's job took the family south to Manurewa, Palmerston North then Ngaruawahia. Larry got fed up with forever starting at new schools and at age 15 he was attracted by the huge sign saying, 'See the world! Be a man! Join the Navy!' So he did! He studied at *Devonport Naval Base* and 9 months later sailed out on the *HMNZS Rotoiti*. Larry became violently seasick, left his post to vomit over the railings and was immediately arrested and thrown in the brig where he became aggressive. John drove straight up from Taumaranui and spoke for him at the court marshal and Larry was discharged without conviction.

Larry joined his parents in Taumaranui and found a job at the *Mananui Sawmill* where, while unfreezing pipes one cold morning, he mistakenly filled his burner with petrol instead of diesel. The resulting explosion burnt the building down and Larry hurriedly left town the next day. His parents moved to Auckland and bought the *Dairyland Milk Bar* in Herne Bay then helped Larry find part-time work at *Moriarty Car Yards*.

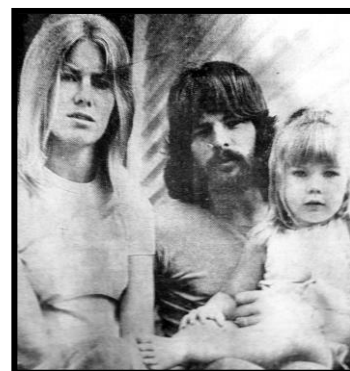
Local emcee Johnny Watson arranged for Larry to attend one of Benny Levin's talent quests and although Levin did not see any potential in Larry, the backing band were looking for a lead singer so they invited Larry to join, then renamed themselves *Larry's Rebels* and won a residency at the *Top Twenty Nightclub*, following *Ray Columbus and the Invaders*. In 1965 Russell Clarke, who later managed Bunny Walters and Craig Scott, took up *Larry's Rebels* contract and, after some promising recordings on *Phillips*, he and Benny Levin founded *Impact* to release their recordings. The band added strobe lighting, bright costumes and frenzied stagecraft to their act and played to 18,000 screaming fans at *Western Springs Stadium*.



In 1967 they released an album called *A Study in Black*, supported the *Yardbirds/Walker Brothers/Roy Orbison* Auckland shows then toured Australia with *The Easybeats* finishing up in Melbourne working the club circuit for *AMBO*, a large Australian booking agency. *Let's Think of Something*, written by Roger Skinner, hit number one on the Auckland charts and the band returned to Auckland and wrote and recorded *Dream Time* which hit number four and received an *APRA Silver Scroll*. Their version of the song *Painter Man* had steady sales until public decency advocate Patricia Bartlett complained about Larry singing 'shit-cans' in the third verse; '*did adverts for T.V, household shops and brands of tea, labels all around tin cans.*' The *NZBC* banned it but it went on to make number six on the Auckland charts, staying there for eight weeks. August and they were back on the road again working the *Golden Disc Spectacular* with *The Avengers, The Gremlins, Lee Grant, Ray Woolf* and *Sandy Edmonds*.

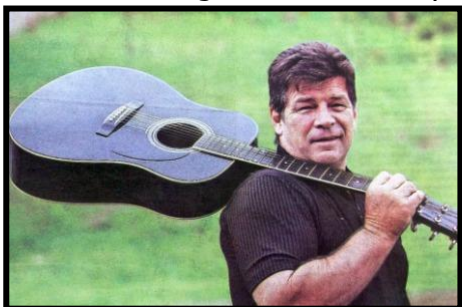
In an attempt to promote a clean-cut image the band performed a televised service at the *Zion Hill Methodist Church* in Birkenhead, swelling the congregation to 300. The gig went so well that they returned two months later, then recorded a charity EP to support the *Old folk's Christmas Cheer Fund* and performed a *Christmas Farewell Spectacular* at the *YMCA*.

When *The Who* played Auckland in 1968 with the *Small Faces* they discovered that excess baggage on their *Sunn Amplifiers* was going to be more than they paid for them so they gave them to the band. Larry nearly drowned during a fake rescue bid to save a *Miss New Zealand* contestant during a promotional Auckland harbour cruise then *Larry's Rebels* returned to Melbourne to perform to 150,000 music lovers at the *Moomba Festival*. *Everybody's Girl* hit number one in NZ but Australia proved too tough to crack and they returned home to a successful *Blast Off '68* tour and another hit song; *What You Gonna Do about it?*, a *Small Faces* song!



By 1968 the pressure was on; Terry Rouse suffered a nervous breakdown then Larry decided that enough was enough and left to become a DJ at *Radio I* and to continue a solo career. He had secretly married Sue in 1965 and they had a daughter, Kim. He performed at a huge *Sheltered Workshops* charity concert at *Western Springs*, gained a residency on *TV1's Happen Inn* and joined the breweries pub circuit. Russell Clarke found him cabaret work in Tahiti, he worked *Tommo's Place Nightclub* and released a string of singles; *Bad Moon Rising, The Hunt, The Game* and *Juliette*. In 1970 he was thrown off *C'mon* after claiming that Howard Morrison's *Born Free* was not suitable for a psychedelic pop show and throwing a rotten apple at him live on national television.

In December police found traces of marijuana in the ashtray of a rental car and threatened to arrest the entire entourage until somebody owned up. Larry took responsibility and three months later pleaded



guilty and was fined \$60. The *NZBC* banned him from television and radio and he lost his club and pub gigs but his mates rallied to his cause; pianist Mike Walker invited Larry to sing with his jazz trio at *The Embers Nightclub*, Barbara Doyle became his manager and gave him a residency at her *Ranch House Restaurant* and Tommy Adderley booked him into his *Granny's Nightclub*. By the end of 1971 the *NZBC* ban was lifted and Larry signed to *Polydor* and released a series of successful recordings including *It Is Written*. *Gemini Records* produced his first solo album, *5.55 am*.

Returning from a season in Tahiti, Larry was arrested for possession of LSD and remanded to *Mt Eden Prison* for 14 months and sentenced to 7 yrs prison, backdated 6 months for the time he had already done. At *Paremoremo Prison* Larry lost the top joint of his index finger during a riot in the finishing shop and he later assisted in the failed escape of Mervyn Rich, donating his hair for a dummy in his cell. The prisoners nicknamed him 'Stardust' after the recently released 1974 film, of the same name. Larry was released in December 1975 and Hugh Lynn hired him as promotions manager for his *Crazy Shirts* shop distributing *Black Sheep Jeans* and skate boards. Barbara Doyle reinstated him at the *Ranch House* and he returned to the breweries circuit with a cabaret-style floorshow, toured with Tommy Adderley's *Headband* and then hit the beach resorts with *Hello Sailor*. In late 1976 he founded *Moon Records* and released his single *Laugh for Me* and the album *Reputation don't Matter Anymore* featuring songs he had written in prison. Paul Dainty hired Larry as support for the David Bowie 1978 *Heroes Tour*, then Larry formed *Shotgun* and gained a residency at Queen Street's *Mainstreet Nightclub*.

Muriel Barton sold *Mascot Recording Studios* to Larry and Hugh Lynn in 1978 in a pay-when-you-can deal and in 1979 *Shotgun's* single *Taste of the Devil* was released. In August 1980 he moved to London to try to break into the UK music scene but was unable to pick up much work as a singer. Londoners were more interested in the new punk sound than Larry's brand of rhythm and blues! As manager of an electronics shop he earned enough to bring over his new family; Helen Biggs and baby Rachel but they all eventually returned to Auckland in 1982 and Larry and his band took over a residency at the *Numbers Club* for 5 months then moved to the *Foundry Nightclub* until it became too dangerous to play in 1984. Pianist Mike Walker recalled, 'Man, that place was wild. It was so packed you couldn't move. There'd be fights and blood amongst the mayhem and some nights there'd be security on stage watching out for the next bit of trouble.'

After his break up with Helen, Larry decided to head for the USA but because of his drug convictions he had to illegally cross over from Canada. He spent the next six years in Hollywood partnering a music-publishing house with *Ngaruawahia Music Festival* co-organiser Robert Raymond, and writing and recording jingles with Max Merritt in Brian Cadd's *Salad Bowl Recording Studio* in Los Angeles. Larry had known them both from his Melbourne days. He moved to Alabama for two years then bought a CD/DVD store in Orlando, Florida. When song writer and producer Cadd relocated to Nashville in 1989 Larry regularly made the 12 hour drive to sing on his demos.



Larry, his third wife Nancy and their two sons, Luke and John-Henry, flew back to Auckland in 1993 his mentor Tommy Adderley had just died. He helped arrange Tommy's benefit concert at the *Gluepot Tavern* and enjoyed singing with 3 ex-members of *Cairo* so much that he has been with them ever since. Renamed the *Larry Morris Band* they recorded an album called *Here and There* and gained a 7 year residency at the *Pig and Whistle* pub in Rotorua. In 1999 they performed at the *Louis Vuitton Challengers Ball* for the *America's Cup*.

He was kept busy doing voiceovers for adverts and fronting his band. In December 2001 he took a party of 35 entertainers to East Timor to entertain the NZ peacekeepers, bankrolled by Sir Peter Leitch, and received a special commendation from PM Helen Clarke who called him a 'New Zealand Rock icon.' He also shared *Pacific Entertainment's*, 2006 *Best of the Best Tour* with Ray Columbus, Sharon O'Neill, Tom Sharplin, Johnny Devlin and Shane. When Ritchie Pickett died in 2011, Larry arranged two memorial concerts in 2012 and 2016 and created a *Ritchie Pickett Music Scholarship* at *Cambridge College* to purchase instruments and support talented students.

He suffered a major setback in 2005 when his car left the road returning from a New Year's Eve gig in Rotorua, and then doctors discovered a faulty heart which needed surgery. On a brighter note he met Gloria and they married in 2015. Larry's daughter Kim Whitaker-Sturdy is an assistant director with a long catalogue of successful films including *Alice in Wonderland*, *War Horse*, *Black Hawk Down* and *Children of Men*, her personal favourite. He also has another daughter; Rachel, two sons; Luke and John-Henry, two step-sons: David and Christian and five grandchildren. Larry also has 5 siblings through his birth-father Merv, a half-brother and 4 half-sisters.



Six months after his 1976 release from prison, Larry was nominated for *Entertainer of the Year* along with Brent Brodie and winner John Clarke. *Amnesty International* awarded Larry and his band a *Supreme Award* in 2000. Larry joined the *Variety Artists Club* in 2007 and was vice-President from 2009 to 2011. He received a *VAC Scroll of Honour* in 2008 and the *Benny Award* in 2013. He also has a star on the *Orewa Walk of Fame* along with Graham Brazier, Ray Columbus, Tom Sharplin and Sir Howard Morrison; accepted by his mate Shane Hales in September 2011 as Larry was away touring. In 2017 an anthology of Larry's Rebels hits (*Larry's Rebels 1965-1969*) and a Larry Morris compilation (*Thirteen*) were released.