

Sir John Rowles

'When I left Hawaii in 1978 I was broke. I was sitting at a piano, knowing that things would start looking up if I could come up with another hit song. What worked for me last time was using my sisters' names, putting Cheryl Moana with Tania Marie's middle name, so I went to work on the name Tania, plonking away on the piano and singing until I came up with: 'Tania, our song will go on forever/Sweet Tania, this song is for you.' I also recorded an album of new material *This is My Life* to take advantage of the success of Tania and it achieved gold status even before it went on sale in New Zealand.'



John Edward Rowles was born on 26 March 1947 in Whakatane to Phyllis and Eddie 'The Rock' Hohapata-Rowles, a foreman for the *Ministry of Works* driving heavy machinery. Phyllis was European and Eddie was three-quarters. He played for the *Maori All Blacks* from 1934 to 1938 and they were both talented singers. A previous child had died when a week old and John was given his name. Another brother Edward died in 1949 and John later adopted his name, becoming John Edward Rowles. John had 7 siblings, one of them Wally later sang under the name Frankie Rowles. The family moved to Matata and later lived in a state house in Kawerau where Eddie found work at the *Tasman Pulp and Paper Mill*. Three of the sisters became teenage mothers; the babies were brought up as Eddie and Phyllis's.

John attended *Kawerau North School* then *Kawerau South Intermediate*. When he was 10 he entered a talent quest in Whakatane organised by Howard Morrison's Family and he won first prize. Later John bought a *Gibson Les Paul* guitar and organised a band called *The Kawerau Shadows* which played at local dances. His father managed the group. In 1962 John left school and got a job planting in the *Kaiangaroa Forest* then worked at the *Kawerau Mill* as a fitters mate for a year.

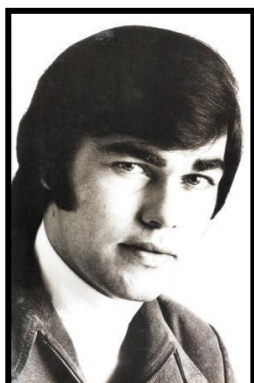


One night while watching *Rim D Paul and the Quin Tiki's* perform in Rotorua he had an epiphany and moved to Auckland where he found work as a guitarist and vocalist with *The Chevronaires* at the *Picasso Nightclub* in Cook Street. The band included; Trixie Willoughby, Dave Low and his brother Eddie Low. John and Eddie moved to Melbourne in 1964 after signing a six month contract to perform at the *Riverside Inn* in Melbourne. They hired Lucy Toko and moved to *Pinocchio's*, then John moved to Sydney and joined a group called *The*

Dingdongers, later renamed *The Sundowners*.

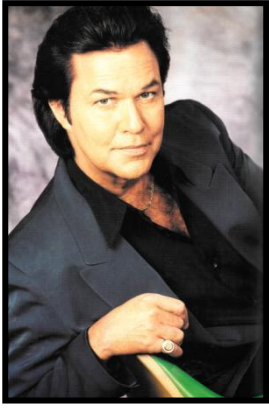
After a year John signed with Graham Dent who had previously promoted Johnny Devlin and *Max Merritt and the Meteors*. Dent launched him as *JA-AR* and organised him to appear on Australian television's *New Faces* of 1966, Johnny O'Keefe's *Six O'clock Rock* and *Bandstand*.

In 1967 John signed with Peter Gormley who managed; Cliff Richards and the *Shadows*, Frank Ifield, Olivia Newton John and *The Seekers* and later founded *Festival Records*. Rowles moved to England in 1968 where his first release was *If I Only Had Time* which reached #3 on the British charts, #6 in Australia and #2 in New Zealand. He was 20 years old. A self titled album was released and a follow-up *Hush Not A Word To Mary* did almost as well. John opened for *Herman's Hermits* and appeared on numerous television shows including *Top of the Pops* and *The Cliff Richards TV Show*.



He returned to New Zealand to perform at sell-out concerts and was awarded the 1968 *NEBOA Entertainer of the Year Award*. His second album *That Lovin' Feeling* was released in 1969 and he represented New Zealand in the *Rio De Janeiro Song Festival* with his own composition *Cheryl Moana Marie* which was voted in at #5.

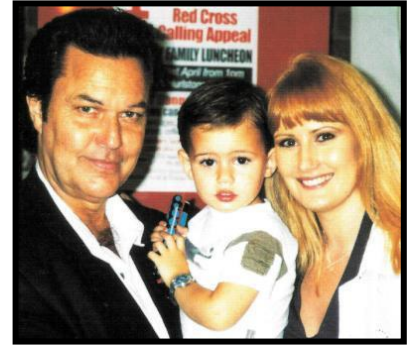
When released as a single it reached the #1 on the New Zealand charts, #20 in Australia, #64 in the USA and sold millions of copies.



Peter Gormley booked Rowles into the *Flamingo Hotel* in Las Vegas as a support act to Connie Stevens then he played Reno and Lake Tahoe. In Florida he performed at the 1970 *Miss Universe Pageant*. After playing at *Duke Kahanamoku's Nightclub* in Hawaii for a month, John formed a 50-50 business relationship with Kimo Wilder McVay, bought the club and continued there until 1972 when he signed a 5 year contract with the *Royal Hawaiian Hotel* to sing in their *Monarch Room*. In 1971 he had been presented with Hawaii's highest entertainment award, the *No Ke Oi*, which means 'The Best'. He toured South Africa and continued working around the USA.

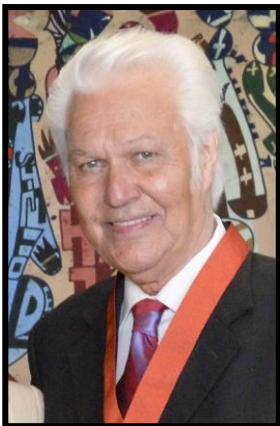
In 1974 *MCA Records* decided not to continue his contract and John split with McVay. He received a *Special Benny Award* of which only two have been given. At the time he was recording his *Live Back Home* album at *His Majesty's Theatre* at the time.

He left Hawaii in 1978 and moved to California where he wrote *Tania* which reached #1 in New Zealand and #39 in Australia. A late booking in Hawaii caused him to cancel a sightseeing trip to the South Pole which saved his life. It was *Air New Zealand Flight 901* which crashed into Mount Erebus in November 1979.



He sang at the *1980 Royal Command Performance* in Auckland before Queen Elizabeth II and the Duke Of Edinburgh and was awarded the *OBE (Order of the British Empire)* for his contribution to the music industry. John criss-crossed the Pacific as a lone operator, performing in Australian *RSL* clubs and in Hawaii. He continued putting out albums at his own expense and did a roofing advert for *Gerard Roofing* that got him in hot water for supposedly taking the micky out of stutterers with his "Go for G-G, G-G, G-G, G-G, Gerard".

Rowles signed a deal in 1988 to perform at the *Hilton Hawaiian Village* on Waikiki Beach for a year and recorded *Island in the Sun* which reached #4 on the New Zealand single charts. John and set up a home on the Gold Coast with Deborah -Leigh Ashton who also became John's back-up singer and they went on to have two sons, Dane and Blake. John and Deborah are now separated.



In 1990 John performed a concert at the Aotea Centre with a guest appearance by his sister Tania who had recorded a single in 1986 called *Don't Turn Around*. The next year he toured New Zealand then promoted his album *From a Distance* in Australia for six months.

Rowles had a cameo role in the 2008 New Zealand film *Second-Hand Wedding* and in early 2009 he was selected to appear in *Dancing with the Stars*, partnered with Krystal Stewart. Sadly he had to retire from the competition with low blood pressure.

Rowles released his autobiography, *If I Only Had Time* in October 2012. He was appointed a *Knight Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit (KNZM)* for services to entertainment in 2018.