

# EVEN SUPERLUNGS HAS TO PAY THE

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Terry Reid, the greatest singer who never made it,  
might just find the sound he's looking for

LA QUINTA, CALIF.

**I**f you don't love it, hang it up," Terry Reid declares on a recent Saturday afternoon. "If your only guide is how much you earned, go get a job."

is standing in the kitchen of the modest two-bedroom house that he and his wife, Mette, rent in this golf town two hours east of Los Angeles. The man who opened the Rolling Stones at 16 wears an apron — he's just cooked up a lunch of Indian-style chicken — and twists an unlit American Spirit between his fingers.

ney has come up because, a few minutes earlier, Elliott Salter called. Reid let the email pick up and listened as the West Hollywood pawn shop owner left a message.

u need to start getting me money every month, Terry, or I've got to sell the cars," Salter said. "I love you dearly, but your love doesn't pay my bills."

Reid offers one of his throaty cackles at the turn of that last phrase. He's not angry or annoyed. Salter is a good guy. And sure, he'd love to play those cherry red Gibson Les Pauls and that Rickenbacker steel guitar again.

"I just can't afford to get them out," Reid says. "Everything I get at the moment, being honest, goes into the bills."

That is life at 66 for the greatest singer who never made it. The man who, as legend has it, turned down a chance to sing lead for Led Zeppelin. The tale is rock mythology at its best, but it doesn't pay the rent or replace the '99 Lincoln with the smashed one that's been sitting in the driveway.

Reid closes his eyes and slips into an impression of his beloved father, Walter, who owned a fleet of cars and agricultural equipment back in England. He's been gone for years, but Reid can still hear what he told him when the boy, blessed with so much talent, was turned down from another big show.

"You're doing well at the moment," Reid says with a wry smile. "But remember, life isn't always going to be a bed of roses."

## EXHIBILITY, POWER AND CONTROL

re he is, on German TV in 1969 or at Glastonbury in '71, a model of cool, lean long-haired, the voices of Otis Redding, Chris Robinson and Ray LaMontagne ed into one.

e style of what he was doing, that kind of opening up, he had a flexibility and er and control,” says Robert Plant, a friend from before Led Zeppelin formed. he could go, as Esther Phillips said, from a whisper to a scream in split onds.”

ham Nash, then in the Hollies, first met Reid in 1966, when he was opening for Rolling Stones as a member of Peter Jay and Jaywalkers.

u talk to any of his friends, they'll tell you,” Nash says, “I don't understand why not a gigantic star.”

k Douglas heard Reid in the late '60s. Later, Douglas would go on to produce osmith and John Lennon. He also produced the cover of Reid's “Speak Now or ever Hold Your Peace” on Cheap Trick's 1977 debut.

st that voice,” Douglas says. “It's a white guy who sounds like a black guy. And the kids, that was the coolest thing.”

a recent Monday night, Douglas and Reid walked into actor Johnny Depp's home ording studio in Los Angeles to begin work on a new song.

lglas met Depp before he was an actor, when he was a kid playing in a rock band Florida. He introduced Depp to guitarist Joe Perry at an Aerosmith recording sion four years ago, and the two became friends and started Hollywood Vampires n Alice Cooper. Now Depp and Douglas are executive-producing Perry's new

im, which features collaborations with Iggy Pop, David Johansen and others.

one night, Douglas and Depp were discussing other potential guests.

Depp goes, 'What about Terry Reid?' My mouth just dropped," says Depp, a guitarist who has an encyclopedic knowledge of rock history. "I had no idea where Terry Reid was. I didn't know if he did what Syd Barrett did. Went off and become a ... madman."

Barrett, Pink Floyd's original leader, famously melted down in the '60s and died in 2006, most anonymously in 2006.

In the studio, Douglas and producer Bruce Witkin listened to the mix of a song Reid did with Perry, "I'll Do Happiness." When it's out, the blues grind will be the first studio recording Reid has released in 25 years.

There's also a special re-issue of Reid's 1973 album, "River," planned and a short film, which takes him to the Bethesda Blues and Jazz Supper Club on April 24.

That night, Perry and Reid laugh as the singer, late in the song, breaks into a thick falsetto.

"The fact that he was able to go from down here to up here as smooth as silk," Perry says. "I'll tell you, I hope this leads to a label getting behind him. But the main thing, for this first song, I want to give it away, to just get it out there."

Depp arrives midway through the session. He sips red wine as Reid, wearing headphones in a basement studio, creates a melody for a second Perry collaboration.

After midnight, everybody takes a break. They stand in the kitchen trading

ies until Reid picks up one of Depp's acoustics and launches into "To Be Treated  
y," a heart-wrenching tune he recorded in the 1970s.

tchat stops. Depp, across the kitchen island, flips out his phone like a kid at a  
lor Swift show. Reid plays beautifully, accentuating a slow pull of the low E  
ng. It's clear that whether it's a packed club or an audience of five, Terry Reid  
ies to play.

## **ILLIANCE ON RECORD, LOW SALES**

d grew up in farming country, about 80 miles north of London. Walter always  
ouraged his playing, buying him guitars, driving him to gigs and persuading his  
e, Grace, to let their only child be.

aid, 'Look, you've got a choice,'” Reid remembers. “‘Either he gets a job  
king up potatoes in a pouring field or he does this. And he's so happy doing this,  
eave him alone.’”

ore long, Reid was paying a buddy to do his homework and, with Peter Jay and  
Jaywalkers, opening for the Stones. That was 1966. Two years later, star  
ducer Mickie Most released his solo debut, "Bang, Bang You're Terry Reid" and,  
n after, the follow-up, which contained the song that would lead to Reid's  
name, "Superlungs My Supergirl."

t's when the Led Zeppelin legend was born.

Yardbirds were dissolving and guitarist Jimmy Page recruited Reid for his new  
d. Rather than reject him — that's the way the story is often reported — Reid

ally just asked for a few weeks. He had a contract to open for the Stones.

aid to Jim, 'Well, you know, I'll just do this tour and be back in a minute,' " Reid  
s. " "Oh, no,' he says, 'we have to do it right now or you're out.'"

e, Reid laughs.

aid: 'Hang on. I'll tell you what I'll do. If you call Keith Richards and tell him I'm  
going on the tour and B, pay me what he's going to pay me,' I said, 'let's give it a  
t.' "

t, he knew, wasn't about to happen. So Reid recommended two friends for the  
a willowy singer named Robert Plant and drummer John Bonham.

l if that's not enough, Reid would get another shot at rock stardom. Guitarist  
hichie Blackmore also approached Reid about joining his band, Deep Purple. This,  
lat out declined.

at wasn't my bag," Reid says. "I like to make a little sense out of me lyrics. They  
e too metal."

n Reid's career turned. A dispute over his contract stopped him from recording  
four years. And when he returned to the studio, Reid established a pattern. His  
ords were always solid, with spectacular peaks. But other factors – from poor  
ing and release delays to limited promotion – would lead to commercial failure.

ke to say my records weren't released," Reid says. "They escaped."

ening to those six studio albums can almost make you angry. As so many classic  
kers count their millions, Reid talks of how he might scrape together enough for

ownshop payment.

er,” from 1973, is the perfect jam-band record. “Seed of Memory,” from 1976, is er, packed with pedal steel and irresistible melodies.

ad great hopes for that record,” says Nash, who produced “Seed.” “It showed ry to be the brilliant artist he really is.”

ling Stones producer Chris Kimsey brought an electric bounce to “Rogue Waves” 979. It also bombed. Finally, in 1991, Warner Bros. paired Reid with producer vor Horn, a slick hit-maker with Yes and Frankie Goes to Hollywood.

“The Driver,” Reid recorded a Waterboys song, “The Whole of the Moon.” But 7 weeks before his version came out, Chrysalis Records re-released the six-year- Waterboys version as a single. It rose to No. 3 in the U.K. “The Driver” appeared.

spite of the production, that may be the strongest, most consistent album he r made,” says Peter Jesperson, the former Replacements manager who now is a : president at New West Records.

## **HEN ARE WE GOING TO RECORD?’**

Friday night and Annette is out with a friend. Reid stands in the living room, his s ballad “Without Expression” playing over the stereo.

at’s the first thing I wrote,” he says. “God, I was, like, 14.”

is a jubilant storyteller, full of hugs and never stingy with a bottle of wine. His

He may no longer be as velvety and the highest notes may be harder to hit, but Reid, on his best nights, can turn any song inside out.

That is what has frustrated a longtime friend, bassist Chico Reyes.

“The one thing that has always held him back is him,” Reyes says. “You’re living off this legendary legend. When are we going to record? That’s my question every year.”

That’s why Reyes wasn’t surprised when a Reid documentary, “Superlungs,” began to implode in mid-production last fall. Richard Frias, a former music writer, signed on with Reid to become a co-producer and, by fall, had interviewed more than a dozen people, including Plant, Nash and Animals singer Eric Burdon. He envisioned a movie that could do for Reid what 2012’s Oscar-winning “Searching for Sugarman” did for folk singer Sixto Rodriguez.

Except that Reid became frustrated with the project. He felt Frias hadn’t given him enough information about the film’s direction. He didn’t like the promotional clip Reid prepared to raise money.

At a Los Angeles coffee shop, Frias talked of his last meeting with Reid. He drove to Reid’s Quinta to show him raw footage of his interview with Plant. An argument soon evolved into screaming. It is then that Frias raises an issue he considers sensitive and important. He believes their disagreement grew more heated because Reid kept talking.

“At that point, he didn’t give a damn about anything I wanted to show him,” Frias says. “I was pretty much heartbroken. This is a person you’re trying to help.”

## LIFE WAS JUST A WALK IN THE GARDEN

thing is simple with Terry Reid, not even the idea of redemption. He doesn't care much for stories wrapped up with a bow. Where the hard-drinking hero hits bottom, comes up and, before long, is living happily ever after. You know, like Jeff Bridges in *Crazy Heart*."

Does he drink too much? At first, Reid answers with a straightforward no and rejects the idea he's ever had a problem. But then he's told that both Douglas and another person — who admire him and are themselves recovering alcoholics — felt that Reid's drinking kept them from getting him back in the studio at points in the 1980s and 1990s.

Finally, Reid concedes.

"I've had a screwdriver," he says. "They're right about that one. That was my drink. I can't remember the last time I had a screwdriver."

When he ever drank too much, Reid says, it was during a custody battle that kept him from seeing his daughters in the 1990s. These days, he's happier and in much more control. Annette, he says, has been a calming force.

"Drinking is not a problem for me at all," Reid says. "I'll tell you why I think people do it. They look for a reason. Why did this go wrong? Why did that go wrong? F— it."

Then he raises his hand as if to say, isn't all this talk about drinking getting a bit out of hand?

ing a drag from his unfiltered cigarette, Reid talks about Marty Robbins and  
mie Rodgers and then, pointing to his guitars, asks if he could play a song.

turns “Scarlet Ribbons,” a whispery ballad done by Rodgers in the 1950s, into  
omething grittier, twangier, more powerful.

l then Reid pops a burnable CD into the stereo. A wall of guitars blasts through  
room. That’s Joe Perry. Then Reid’s voice kicks in, twisting through an almost  
ldle Eastern melody. This is the rough mix of the song he had been working on at  
p’s.

ome point, Reid nods as a line he particularly loves arrives.

only life was just a walk in the garden,” he sings along, “and all the rows I’ve  
d through the chaos of my life.”

re’s a cackle, a half-half kick in the air and a right jab. He is dancing now  
ause this, Terry Reid knows, might just be the sound he’s been searching for.

ry Reid and Cosmic American Derelicts April 24. (Pre-concert discussion with  
ry Reid and Washington Post reporter Geoff Edgers at 8 p.m.) Tickets: \$20.

hesda Blues and Jazz Supper Club, 7719 Wisconsin Ave., Bethesda. Call 240-330-  
0 or visit [bethesdabluesjazz.com](http://bethesdabluesjazz.com).