

## THE DIAMONDS

Dave Somerville liked to joke that he'd spent more than 50 years without a day job.

But that didn't mean the former member of The Diamonds spent his career slacking off. In fact, in 2006 when we talked to him, he was as busy as he was in the late '50s, when the Toronto-based quartet was crooning up the charts with such pop hits as *Little Darlin'*, *The Stroll* and *She Say (Oom Dooby Doom)*.

Somerville had a busy concert schedule through to 2014 but died of cancer in 2015.

When he reflected on his singing career in our interview, Somerville had just returned from a week-long gig and was preparing for another. He had performed on more than a dozen cruises over the year in such places as the Caribbean and South Africa performing his solo show of hits from the '50s and '60s. And prior to that he did several reunion gigs with his fellow Diamonds, Phil Levitt, Ted Kowalski and Bill Reed that still brought out long-time fans.



The Diamonds had 15 Top 40 hits. Photo: Courtesy of The Diamonds

Some of those shows were PBS television specials that featured the group's tight harmonies, while other performances came when The Diamonds were inducted into such institutions as the Doo Wop Hall of Fame.

"I never could have predicted it," he said from his Hollywood home about the longevity of the early rock and roll hits The Diamonds dished out. He recalled touring with Buddy Holly in the late '50s when both wondered if their music would last even a year. But some 50 years later Somerville said he was as widely recognized as ever because of his link to rock 'n' roll's past. "I'm authentic because I was there," he said.

And The Diamonds were certainly there in the '50s.

In an era where vocal groups dominated the airwaves, The Diamonds clearly etched their mark on pop music's history with 15 Top 40 hits. Kowalski, with whom we also talked before he died in 2010, said the group started when he and Levitt were students at the University of Toronto. The two were out doing some surveying when Kowalski saw a pretty co-ed and let out a high pitched "wooh." Levitt said, "Hey, you sing tenor, don't you?" and soon the two had teamed up with Reed, and later Somerville for a performance on CBC. Shortly afterward, The Diamonds were performing south of the border.

They eventually got onto the *Arthur Godfrey Show* and began recording hit singles. Songs such as *Why Do Fools Fall in Love* and *The Church Bells May Ring* on the Mercury label garnered good sales and attention, but it was *Little Darlin'*, a cover of a song by The Gladiolas, that rocketed them to fame. They did a little clowning around in the studio singing "la, la, la, las" and adding a spoken part to give the tune a distinctive Diamonds flavour. The song hit No. 2 on Billboard in 1957.

The group managed to keep on the charts until the early '60s, but eventually the original members left to be replaced by others.

For Somerville, the music never stopped. He moved to Hollywood in the '60s, did commercials and nightclub work, and ended up co-writing the theme song to the TV series *The Fall Guy*. He continued to dabble in various forms of entertainment, offering music on websites for downloading and trying to make deals for a movie or Broadway show. He was still recording CDs and compiling Diamonds' hits into collections for long-time fans.

(Over the years there have been persistent rumours, usually on the Internet, that American actor Tom Hanks' father was once the lead singer of The Diamonds. Numerous sources, including arts, music and recreation website ThoughtCo, say the chatter is fake. "Nice story, false from start to finish. Tom Hanks' father was never a singer, much less a member of The Diamonds," says the site, which is found at [www.thoughtco.com](http://www.thoughtco.com). "The Diamonds' original lead singer was Dave Somerville, a native of Ontario, Canada with no known familial connection to Mr. Hanks."

As for the other original members, Reed died in late 2004 while Levitt retired from engineering and died in 2012.

"I didn't think it would last," Kowalski said of The Diamonds' music, "but the nostalgia era brought it back."

And with all the hits the group had, Kowalski has fond memories of singing

*You'll Never Walk Alone* when the quartet performed encores in their nightclub act. "It was a different type of harmony from the usual rock 'n' roll ones."