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JERRY KNIGHT

In his years as a back-up and session musician, Jerry Knight did not so much pay his dues as put them in the bank. Now, with his debut album on A&M Records, he's collected the dividends. The music on this first solo project is infectious, hook-heavy and up-beat. Despite his success as a founding member of Raydio (with Ray Parker) and as lead singer on their smash hit, "Jack and Jill," Knight has taken a wholly different approach here. Eschewing ballads entirely, he has concentrated instead on pure, scintillating rock and roll, both polished enough to be in the vanguard of pop and gutsy enough to deliver much more than a shiny veneer.

Born and raised in Los Angeles, Knight has assimilated influences from every genre of that city's rich musical spectrum. His youth was spent absorbing everything from Chuck Berry to Jimi Hendrix. His first taste of success came when he played bass on Bobby Day's "Rockin' Robin." Later, he backed the Coasters and The Platters. As he solidified his reputation more gigs came, culminating with a three album stint with his good friend Bill Withers. It was around this time that young Jerry began to write songs (for a time, as a salaried writer for Jobete) and lay the foundation of his own performing career. Session work continued and it was through it that he met Ray Parker and formed Raydio in 1977.

Knight came to the attention of A&M producer and A&R chief David Kershnerbaum and was soon signed to the label. Kershnerbaum, whose diverse production successes range from Joan Baez to Joe Jackson, has given Knight a sparkling sound with the kind of depth and punch that Gus Dudgeon provided for Elton John. It's music that rides the crest of the mainstream without ever sacrificing its own fevered originality. A consummate craftsman, Knight brings a refreshing combination of precision and fervor, first, to the songs he writes and then to their recording. The core of Knight's backing on this album is a trio known collectively as The Hero: Mark Bensi on drums, Vincent Banham on piano and Skip Adams on guitar. Their crisp, energetic playing illuminates the album and brings to musical life all of the explosive joy Knight put into the writing of "Good Times" or, for another example, all the sizzling funk of "Overnight Sensation."

Of all the aspects of this superb debut, perhaps the most remarkable is Jerry Knight's singing. His soft-edged tenor soars with inviting grace and flawless phrasing. His technical excellence is only surpassed by the emotional authority he brings to his performances. He never hits a false note, much less a wrong one. The result of all of this is an album whose appeal is doubled by the promise it makes for the career it launches. Jerry Knight is going to be around for a long time. He's just too good not to be.

