

**JEREMY MILLER & SANDFLY**

**SPOTLIGHT ON THE SQUARE**

**MARCH 6, 2004**



**FIRST SATURDAYS COMES TO AN END**

In a spontaneous mood, Island-Life headed over to Pete Escovedo's old hangout, Spotlight on the Square to catch the Island's First Saturdays Concert, a series organized by local phenom Natasha Miller which has showcased a variety of musical talent for the last three years on the first Saturday of each month. We

had heard that Jeremy Miller, her own brother, would be debuting as front man after supporting his sister on backup lead guitar for many, many years.

Unfortunately, after we entered the high-ceilinged former aerobics studio turned nightclub, we found that we had by chance stumbled on the farewell event of this long running series, for Natasha was dropping the schedule to conduct her own musical business. She is cutting a CD with a major label and will host her CD release party at none other than the West Coast's premier jazz club, Yoshi's. Which means she joins company with the Heavy Hitters of the jazz world. People like McCoy Tyner, Bobby Hutcherson, Al Jarreau, Bobby Sharp, Peggy Lee and Nora Jones.

Not too shabby for an Island girl.

Babylon's Sandfly led off, some 15 minutes late due to a snafu at the local taqueria, then promptly ran into serious sound problems with miserable balances and virtually no vocals. We had to change our seats to the back so as to try to get a better mix, but it only tempered the horns. The mastermind of this multicultural ska-reggae dance band is Samir Moussa, who realized that this just was not going to work after Natasha fiddled with the speakers and the sound system during two songs. He then changed the set list and sang two rather nice ballads while doing his best to fight the P.A. system that was trying to kill his act. Have to say, he managed to overcome a number of obstacles and we would recommend checking out Sandfly in their homebase at Ganesh in the City, or checking out [www.sandflycentral.com](http://www.sandflycentral.com). We saw them under the worst of conditions and they still did quite well.

Samir was born in Washington, D.C., to a Lebanese father and a Colombian mother. He has played San Francisco's legendary Fillmore several times, and he's had international gigs, from Canada to Lebanon to Colombia to Denmark to Greece. A lifetime of travel through the lands of his culture and beyond has made Samir a citizen of the international community, speaking four languages and leading him to a creed of: "One world, one love, one blood."

Jeremy Miller labors under the onus of being the brother of a rising star and a quasi-famous sister. Who probably wrote the program notes and the promo copy in the newspaper, which stated "Jeremy's sound is reminiscent of Sting and Dave Matthews . . .". Well, we have to say, this is one example of why you should never let family write your ad copy, for the initial impression we got from the write up was that this was some kind of "be nice to bro even though his music is derivative as all hell" kind of thing.

In fact the only thing Jeremy Miller shares with Dave Matthews is the occasional use of the hybrid picking style. Matthews, who performed for years entirely alone on acoustic, employs a driving, percussive sound consisting of strong power chords and fairly simple solo runs with hella strumming, designed to fill in the spaces when no band is there to back up the player. Jeremy Miller used single note patterns by pick and fingers exclusively in a style more reminiscent of jazz guitarist Wes Montgomery, a significant cut above the rest in ability and challenge. At times, his dense flourishes of single-string runs approached the complexity of Zappa's "Pink Napkins" or the "Black Page" and to compare him to artists trying to accomplish significantly less is to do him an

injustice. With his consistent return to B13 and subdominant variations, he placed himself firmly within the world of jazz, and well out of "groove oriented pop/rock", as the playbill would have put him.

He learned his chops from masters out of the Wyndam Hill label and Miles Davis camps and has a CD coming out on minor label Poignant Records. We would be extremely surprised if Atlantic or somewhat more substantial does not snap him up quickly. And we figure it will take about 5 years or so before we see him playing before crowds like the Russian River Jazz Fest. Dan Foltz, a music teacher in Babylon, filled in on drums and Jeremy's brother, Justin, nailed it all down with his five-string bass.

Again, here the demons of the sound system tried their best to destroy this fine artists' debut, which might have been overcome with a more vigorous vocal attack -- to some extent. But the Fates held the threads of the Series this Last First Saturday on the Island.

We happened to hear old time Islanders in the back saying, "I been waiting six years for the boy to come out solo. Glad he did it finally. Man he is good." And so we must conclude Jeremy Miller is one to watch.