

**UNCHAIN MY HEART**  
**NATASHA MILLER & BOBBY SHARP**  
**KELLY'S ON THE ISLAND**



Dropped in Saturday night on a CD release party hosted by our local Natasha Miller for the new joint production done with Bobby Sharp, also an Islander. Bobby Sharp might not be "name" to the youngun's, but old timers and jazz aficionados certainly will remember the man who penned the song that Ray Charles made famous, "Unchain My Heart".

Mr. Sharp had only messed around with music until formal training done on the GI bill after his stint defending the homeland during WWII. He attended the Greenwich School of Music (NYC) in 1946 and the Manhattan School of

Music in 1948. Shortly thereafter, he cut a single on the Wing label, which was picked up by Ruth Brown as "Sweet Baby of Mine."

From there, he played gigs with Benny Carter and the Kenmie Lunceford band. He also He also worked with songwriters Charles Singleton, and Dan and Marvin Fisher (their father, Fred Fisher, wrote "Peg O' My Heart"), developing a solid reputation as a very good Tin Pan Alley composer.

"Unchain My Heart" was written in 1960 and picked up by Ray Charles in 1961, but an unscrupulous industry producer named Teddy Powell took half of the rights up front and paid him only \$50.00 down before managing to seize the rest of the rights for a small sum later on.

Sharp also penned tunes for Sarah Vaughn, Sammy Davis Jr. and his friend, author James Baldwin. Sharp wrote "Blues for Mr. Charlie," in honor of Baldwin's 1964 play of the same name; Sammy Davis recorded that song later with a Quincy Jones arrangement.

His father was a well-known concert tenor in New York City, while the boy was kept far from "sin city" in Los Angeles until Bobby pleaded to come live with them. Sharp's parents knew all of the Harlem Renaissance people; they lived in an apartment building in Harlem with Duke Ellington, Walter White, Roy Wilkins and artist Aaron Douglas. It was the peak of the Harlem Renaissance, and poet Langston Hughes was a family friend.

The usual bickering, cheating of musicians over royalties, and vampirish industry practices robbed Mr. Short of much of his royalty earnings and conspired with a drug habit to bury his talent for twenty-five years. Cleaned up and living on

the Island, he heard vocalist Natasha Miller on KCSM-FM and found out she lived not far from his own house. He called her up and the two eventually hit it off so well that Miller started using his material in her concerts. She then did an entire CD of his music, which has been extremely well received by critics. Well enough to earn her more than one slot at Yoshi's, the premier West Coast venue for jazz and a stage that habitually showcases world-class musicians.



Saturday night was a neighborly affair with all the kids living on Bobby's block invited to come and many old friends and musicians showing up to meet and greet. While Miller sang a bluesy "I'm So Broke", all the little girls came up and danced on the stage. The two of them did a friendly duet on the piano before Mr. Sharp performed solo on the keys. Sharp's voice remains rich and well modulated, quite putting aside the effects of living 79 pretty hard years, and his

piano is as deft as ever. His eyes are bright and his senses are sharp as he embarks on this second career. It was a joyous celebration Saturday night and just another local CD release party on the Island -- which happened to include some world-renowned musicians. We wish Mr. B. Sharp all the best.

