

## Profile: MAIA SHARP

We've passed the point where it's news that **Maia Sharp** is a giant among her music industry peers. Those who write the songs, the singers who scout out the best material for themselves and major artists who seek the stimulus of work with their most creative colleagues, have already placed her name at the top of their list of collaborators.

The secret is out among the public as well. Beginning with *Hardly Glamour* in 1997, **Sharp** has released four solo albums and one trio album with Art Garfunkel and Buddy Mondlock, each garnering critical recognition, and built her following through touring on her own as well as opening for such headliners as Bonnie Raitt, Keb' Mo', Patty Griffin, Art Garfunkel and Jonatha Brooke.

In spotlights, on national radio and television, penning songs for Raitt, The Dixie Chicks, Trisha Yearwood, Cher and many more, in writing sessions with Carole King, Lisa Loeb, Jules Shear and David Wilcox, behind studio consoles producing for Garfunkel, Edwin McCain and others, **Sharp** has proven her ability to excel wherever talent manifests itself in music. One of the few milestones she had yet to pass was to apply all she has learned by producing an album of her own, on her own.

Until now.

With ***Change the Ending***, from Blix Street/Crooked Crown Records, **Sharp** brings the facets of her career together fully, for the first time. Writing or co-writing all 11 tracks, she also debuts as her own producer, taking the reins in every avenue of conceiving, recording and completing the album. It was, she admits, a unique opportunity.

"It just felt right," says **Sharp**, who is based in Los Angeles, "like all the pistons were firing, and it was time to bring all the experiences together. But it was a challenge too. When I walked out of the vocal booth, which was most often at my home studio, there was nobody there to either applaud and say 'That was great' or say 'Yeah, I don't think we have it yet.' I had to get outside of myself and make that call on my own. There couldn't be any ego involved. It couldn't be just because I sang it. It had to be, what does it *really* sound like? Is this *really* the best I can do?"

This process, and the high standards she holds for herself, led **Sharp** to work differently than she ever had. Sometimes she would set a song aside for several days and allow some distance to develop before she came back to it, with fresh ears. This could be time-consuming. But there were tradeoffs too.

"For my last album, *Echo*, we had three weeks in the studio and that was pretty much it. The cost of studio time was adding up quickly," **Sharp** notes. "On ***Change the Ending***, I could sing parts as many times as I wanted from my home studio, off the clock. I could try more things and make left turns that might have been difficult for a co-producer; they may have talked me out of it. I think it let this one be more personal."

And that meant ***Change the Ending*** is both intimate and varied. **Sharp** is a communicator, blessed with a broad vocabulary, verbal and musical. She writes

conversationally, with an ear for finding poetry in direct expressions of emotion. The complexities of a relationship taking a wrong turn come alive over a strong medium-

tempo groove and sharp melodic hook in the chorus of the album's first single, "**Me After You.**" A similar theme launches on "**Your Stepping Stone**" with just a stinging acoustic guitar motif and a thigh-patted beat before morphing through a series of contrasting textures and feels. "**Sober**" sounds as the title suggests, a little fuzzy and woozy, though the message quickly takes an unexpected, ironic turn. And on "**I See Cecelia,**" which Maia penned with her father, the respected songwriter Randy Sharp, swinging brushes on the drums and sad but loveable Salvation Army style horns evoke the affection woven into her appreciative words.

While much of the material on ***Change the Ending*** is relatively new, some of it is more seasoned, particularly those that have already been covered by other singers. "**Standing Out in a Crowd**" is one example. Like many of **Sharp's** songs, it comes from her own experiences and observations, in this case regarding the loneliness that young girls in particular can feel when ostracized for being "different." She might have sent out this message on an earlier album, if not for the fact that Trisha Yearwood released it first, several years ago.

"Her version of the song is fabulous, so I stayed out of its way for a while," **Sharp** says. "But I was looking for an opportunity to put it out on a record and maybe change it up a little bit, make it a little darker. Give it a few more clouds in the verse so there are more of them to part in the chorus. This album seemed like the perfect time to do this.

***Change the Ending*** allows us even another glimpse into **Sharp's** artistry, through her saxophone solo on an instrumental remix of one track, "**Buy My Love.**" "I'm really proud of that one," she notes. "My guitar player, Linda Taylor, reharmonized it so the melody is the same, but the chord structure underneath is more complex. I got to play saxophone and really stretch out which was particularly fun for me. When an album features a remix, it's almost always a club-style thing, a bigger, more electronica version of the single. I wanted to go entirely the other way with '**Buy My Love (Remix).**'"

It adds up to the most comprehensive portrait to date of this vital singer, writer, producer, arranger and instrumentalist. "I don't have one style of instrumentation that's always right," **Sharp** insists. "I love to incorporate some new, signature sound that maybe you didn't hear on the last song. Could be strings, horns, piano, organ, just some new color every time."

Maybe that's where the title, ***Change the Ending***, comes from. But truthfully, this feels more like new beginnings, pointing toward horizons this singular artist is no doubt already contemplating.

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The logo for Blix Street features the word "BLIX" in a large, bold, black, stylized font with thick, rounded letters. Below it, the word "STREET" is written in a smaller, black, sans-serif font with all-caps and wide letter spacing.