

Tom Sharplin

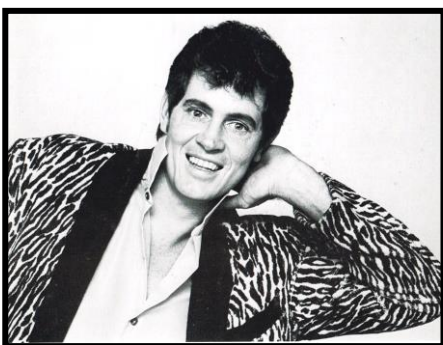
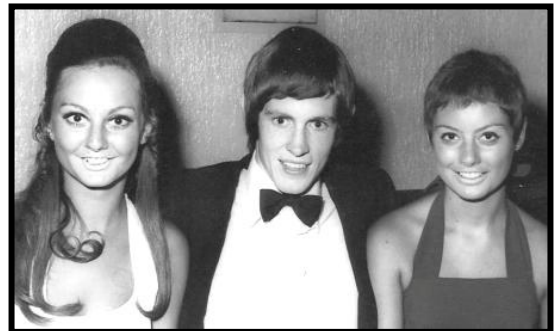
Always stay two or three drinks behind the audience.



Thomas Richard Sharplin was born in Auckland on 5 April 1949 to Beverly (born Neiper) and Rod Sharplin. Rod worked as a quarry machine driver and for a time managed an ice-cream factory. Tom was the middle son of two brothers, Terry and Greg but later discovered he had another younger brother, Richard, who had been adopted out although the boys had been told that the baby died at birth. Richard later discovered Tom from watching him on television and thinking, 'He looks like me, he sounds like me!' The family moved to Tauranga in 1955 and Rod built a home for them.

Six year old Tom and older brother Terry were riding on the back of their uncle's tractor, ploughing a school field, when it hit a tree stump. The others were thrown clear but the plough-discs ran over Tom's right foot. He also lost the top of a finger but doctors managed to save his arm. When his mother called their parish priest to come and give the last rites she was told that he was too busy to come that day. Tom pulled through but that was the end of his strict Catholic upbringing. Six years later his right leg was amputated 15cm below his knee for a better prosthesis attachment. 'I forget about it most of the time. I was captain of my rugby team when I was 12 but I had to give it up. The other kids were scared to tackle me in case they got hurt.' He became goalkeeper in a Bay of Plenty representative hockey team and ran the school steeple chase despite being banned. Tom hid in the starting bunch and was doing well until his artificial leg broke. He finished the race holding the two bits together and still managed to beat most of his mates.

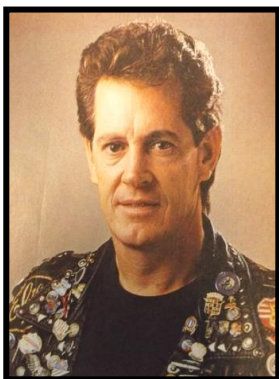
Tom schooled at *Tauranga Primary* and then became a founder pupil at the new *Merivale Primary*. His father loved singing and took Tom to see the *Howard Morrison Quartet*; Tom was hooked. He especially loved their shiny black stage shoes. Soon after that he won a drawing contest for a free ticket to see *The Kinks* perform in Hamilton. The warm up group was *The Mersymen* headed by Tommy Adderley wearing his famous silver suit and Tom decided there and then that that was what he wanted to do. Tom's other early influences were *Larry's Rebels* and the *La De Dahs*. At that time Tauranga musicians were mostly inspired by local talent such as *The Four Fours* (later called *Human Instinct*), *Sonny Day and the Sundowners*, *Ritchie Picket*, *Dr Jazz* and *Kokomo Blues*. Tom would stand in front of the stage and watch the band all night then he would go home with his ears ringing! At *Tauranga Boy's College* he started singing in a school band called *Five to Go* then joined *The Arms & Legs* which went on to become the top band in the Bay of Plenty supporting tours by the *La De Dahs*, Mr. Lee Grant and *The Underdogs*. Tom also sang at the only licensed restaurant in Tauranga, *The San Francisco*, with the *Johnny Carson Trio*.



In 1967 Tom left Tauranga for Auckland, winning a bursary to study graphic art at *Auckland Technical Institute*. He still sang with *The Arms and Legs*, hitch-hiking to Tauranga on weekends to perform at the *Sierra Bianca Restaurant* managed by Sir Howard's brother Laurie Morrison. When the band broke up in 1969 he got a gig with the *Arthur Skelton Orchestra* for a year then won a residency at the *Surfside* on Saturday nights. Around this time it was uncommon for bands to play in Hotels; they usually played at dances, halls and restaurants.

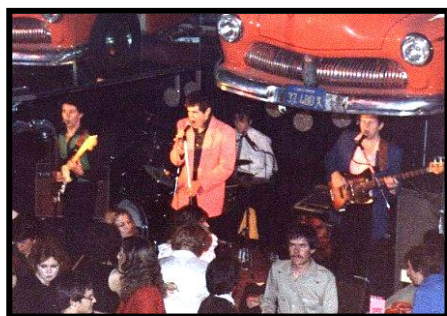
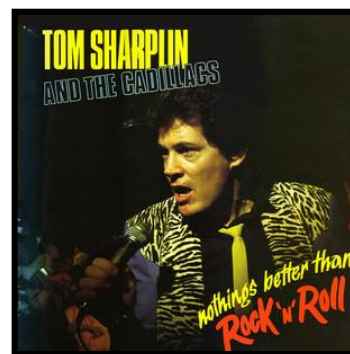
Tom took singing lessons with singing coach Hubert Milverton-Carter, who also taught Bunny Walters, Suzanne Donaldson, Craig Scott, Sandy Edmonds and Donald McIntyre. Tom featured in *Superpop 70*, the Royal Variety Show for Prince Charles and Princess Anne, at *Western Springs Stadium*.

In 1971 Sharplin recorded his first single, a cover of *Love Is A Beautiful Song* which he financed himself, but the original version reached New Zealand a week ahead of his release. Nevertheless it made #12 on the national charts and it opened up opportunities for him to perform in stage-shows. After doubling as a graphic artist for 4 years, designing posters and adverts for Auckland buses, Tom went full-time in 1972 with Johnny Devlin as his manager. By 1973, with a gig as resident vocalist with the *Latin Quarter Band* (featuring Benny recipient Jim Joll) at the *Intercontinental Hotel*, and regular appearances on NZBC's *Happen Inn* program, Tom decided to go it alone and manage himself.



The *Woodstock* film was released in 1970 featuring the 12-piece rock & roll group *Sha Na Na* preceding Jimi Hendrix at the Festival. The musical *Grease* was playing on Broadway and a huge 1950's revival was underway. Tom noticed that the Buddy Holly brackets in his stage-show had audiences keyed up so he included more rock & roll in his repertoire and added leopard skin suits, drainpipe trousers, slinked back hairdos, dark sun glasses and chewing gum. The pop singer became a rock n roll animal. Most of his outfits were found at op shops or made by his first wife Mary. He recorded *Love Is a River* in 1973 and in 1974 co-formed *Tom Sharplin & Graffiti* with Ritchie Pickett on keyboards and released *Heart Beat*. They supported national tours with Johnny Devlin, Maria Dallas, Nash Chase, Angela Ayres and many others.

Tom Sharplin and the Rockets was formed in 1977 and their *Tom Sharplin Rock n Roll* album was released in 1978 with two singles, *Pretty Blue Eyes* and *Blue Moon*, doing well. The budget album sold 4,000 copies in it's first 3 weeks. He was nominated as *Entertainer of the Year* in 1979, *Tom Sharplin and the Rockets* won the *1980 Group of the Year Award* and that same year he formed *The Cadillacs* which featured on the NZBC's *Rock Around The Clock* TV Show in 1981, hosted by Paul Holmes. In 1982 *Tom Sharplin and the Cadillacs* released a self-titled album from which came the singles *Endless Sleep* and *Sweet Lolita*. A second album followed in 1984 called *Nothing's Better Than Rock n Roll* featuring a duet with Jodi Vaughan called *Hey Paula* which took the *Top Country Duet of the Year Award* that year.



From 1981 to 1984 Tom managed *King Creole's Nightclub*, beneath the *Civic Theatre* in Queen Street, in partnership with John Tabla, owner of the *Aladdin's Nightclub*. Tom and the Cadillacs were featuring at *Aladdin's* when the venue became available and they felt there was a niche for a dedicated rock n roll night-spot. Martin Crowe, calling himself Russ Le Roq, was DJ there for 2 years until he released his single, *I Wanna Be Like Marlon Brando*. Tom helped him get into the cast of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* touring Australia and they performed together in *Grease*. They had met at the *Potter's Wheel Tavern* in New Lynn which was owned by

Crowes parents. Tom recalls the *Queen Street Riot* on 7 December 1984 at Auckland's *Aotea Centre* which brought about the demise of the Club. 'After the riot the town was deserted for weeks and with January coming up, which is traditionally a slow month, we decided we'd had enough!' Later it became a jazz club run by Tommy Adderly and Billy Kristian.



Tom married Trudy Hunter in 1982 and they have two sons, Elton (b 1984) and Lennon (b 1988). He also had two sons from an earlier marriage, Leon (b 1972) and Clint (b 1974). In 1991 he lost 18 year old Leon in a traffic accident. He was a seventh former at *Tauranga Boys College* so the school named an outdoor stage after him. Local dignitaries formed the *Leon Sharplin Driver Education Trust* to help Western Bay of Plenty schools introduce road safety as part of their curriculum. Tom and a number of his musician friends organised fundraising concerts for the Trust. The 1989 *Rockulator* album was dedicated to Leon and Ritchie Pickett wrote and recorded *Farewell But Not Goodbye* in his memory.

Tom has headlined shows and concerts in Penang and Singapore, appeared on Singapore's top television music show *Let the Good Times Roll* and has also performed in Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Australia and Nashville, Tennessee. He toured New Zealand in 2006 as part of the *Best of the Best* show alongside Johnny Devlin, Ray Columbus, Sharon O'Neil, Larry Morris and Shane. His fourth album, *We'll Sing in the Sunshine*, was released in 2008 featuring Ray Woolf, Shona Laing, Suzanne Lynch, Brendon Ham, Toni Williams, Larry Morris, Pio Teri, Gray Bartlett & Gerry Merito. Since 2013 he has toured New Zealand and Australia with *Operatunity*, bringing entertainment to small communities and retirement communities.

Tom was awarded the *Variety Artist Club of New Zealand's, Scroll of Honour* in 1991 and their ultimate award, *The Benny*, in 2002. He was a committee member from 1995-97, Vice President in 2004 and has been President since 2005. He's been nominated for *Entertainer of the Year* three times. In 1997 he was on the steering committee to promote the *Panmure 150 Anniversary* celebrations and designed their logo. He is also an active participant in the *Variety Children's Charity*, having travelled with their annual *Variety Bash* throughout the country currently 25 times, collecting for children who are sick or have disabilities. Many other charities are helped by Tom; *Wilson's Home, Kidney Kids* and *Crippled Children's Society* being a few examples. He served as Vice President of the *Amputee Society of Auckland and Northland* for a number of years. He also tutors vocalists and bands. *Tom Sharplin & the Cadillacs* received their *Orewa Boulevard Star* in 2010. His fifth album, *Tom Sharplin, Mr. Rock & Roll*, was released in 2015.



After 30 years he sold his beloved 1953 *Cadillac* limousine car when he and Trudy built another house on their front section and lost their garage. He is a keen photographer and collector with a huge library of Elvis and Beatles recordings plus hundreds of autographs by great rockers such as Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley, Ray Charles, Johnny Ray and Billy Fury. He is also a great fan of the *Beatles*, once watching their movie, *A Hard Day's Night*, four times in one day. He even lost his after-school job because he had a mop-top haircut. When the *Beatles* visited in New Zealand in 1964 Tom travelled to *Auckland Airport* to watch them arrive and he is still a great fan, leading a tour group on a 2014 nostalgia visit to Liverpool, London and Hamburg.

Tom has been an exponent of Maharishi's *Transcendental Meditation* for 40 years, finding it very useful during the difficult times, and spent time in counselling after his son's death, fighting depression. He still enjoys running and is a skilled and insightful portrait artist. He and Trudy have 3 grandchildren, Flynn, Indy-Rose and Sequoia.



He was offered a chance to join Australian band *Somebody's Image* when their singer, Russell Morris, went solo. He was also listed to join *Mi-sex* after vocalist Steve Gilpin's death in 1991. 'I turned them down! You can't hold a family together working at that level of commitment and I had already failed one marriage. It's not all about me; my family is the most important thing. I'm quite happy to be obscure.'

Tom has learnt from the *Operatunity* singers that it's very beneficial to your voice to drink a can of *Coca Cola* before going on stage. Apparently it clears the phlegm from your throat, especially if you've got a cold!