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Island Songwriters Showcase Newsletter

September '99

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ISSers OUT AND ABOUT

Many ISS members performed at the popular **Annual Fall Festival** at **Heckscher Park in Huntington** this month. I don't know how the town does it, but every year they have a beautiful weather and this year was no exception. It's always the first weekend in October. Each year draws more and more people and events so look out for it next year. Maybe it will be you who performs.

October is also the time many celebrate Halloween. For musicians, there were various ways to get in the mood. **The Poe Project Live** on Friday, October 29th, is the brain child of **Dennis Daniels** and featured many local writers, musicians, actors, radio personalities and dancers who interpret Edgar Allen Poe's works. The event was held at the **Vanderbilt** this year and was in the second year of its running. Many ISS members such as **James Yarsky** and **Jim Dexter** gave their talents to this project this year as well as last year's, that was held at **Five Towns College** and very well received. A double-CD is available and all proceeds from the event benefited the **Saltare Foundation for the Arts**.

Also, at the **Conklin Barn** in Huntington, ISSer **Bob Westcott** was part of the Grateful Shed Halloween Costume Ball.

Hope you all had a great October and remembered to turn your clock back!

ISS WORKSHOP MEETING

ISS workshop
Five Town's College
September 13, 1999

ISS HITS THE BOOKS

By Shari Diamond

It was back-to-school and back-to-the-ISS. Actually, it was just another grueling workshop where you want to wear a T-shirt afterwards that reads, “I survived an ISS meeting”. Man, we are one intense bunch of people. Actually, it was just really late when I was writing this so I was getting a bit punchy. I truly enjoy the meetings because they make you think. And let’s face it – on a Monday night, the brain is still in denial so this is no small task. But for all that have brought a song to be examined and prodded, you can appreciate everyone’s neurological synapses connecting. Uh-huh...

Up first for the flogging was one of our faithful ISSers, **Andrew Kirschner** performing, "Butterwing Woman Descending". Taking influence from ISSer Rick Crawford (no relation to Cindy), Andrew expanded his lyrical abilities in this fantasy trance-like song. Vinnie thought the title alone had a musical appeal, which drew him in. He added though that it didn’t have enough variety in melody (only 2 chords). Rick agreed and added that the narrative didn’t have enough material to make this story complete for the listener. He also suggested that Andrew procure a capo. Sonny S. felt it set up a good dreamy-type song with the 2 chords but suggested upping the tempo and embellishing the lyrics. And then the jokes started in about the word “butterwing” – maybe it should be butterball, etc. Yep – you get feedback and comedy here. Most liked the imagery and feel of this song.

A fairly new addition to the ISS, **Hedy Kramer**, performed the song “Little Faces”, a song she wrote before going back to school as a 2nd grade teacher. A very sweet and sentimental song from the heart. Andrew liked the concept and melody but felt some words didn’t fit. Sonny M. enjoyed the simplicity and content of the lyrics. I commented that I agreed with Sonny, but suggested not repeating the 2nd line of the chorus. Sonny S. agreed and felt the chorus was an opportunity to expand on the sentiment. Brian liked the song but felt it needed some release regarding the chord changes but otherwise a fine song. Great first effort! We hope to hear more from her.

We had a treat tonight. Music man **Vincent Crici** brought his friend and lyricist **Joan Diamond** (no relation to me) to share one of their collaborations on tape “Kite and Anchor”. Joan by the way is the host at the open mike at the Hicksville Public Library (see the last page). This ballad poignantly describes a relationship with a wonderful analogy to a flying kite and the anchor keeping it safe. Gerry thought it was beautiful all-around and did not find one citation to hand (Gerry is one of our resident love-song police persons whose mission is to seek out and expose clichés). Stuart agreed. Bob loved it but had some trouble with the word kite having a musical quality. Some wanted to hear more lyrics in the bridge. Bill had trouble with the word “oddly” and felt it stood out too much. Sonny S.

wouldn't change anything but thought it was missing a verse and suggested modulating a verse and making the bridge stand out more. Overall, a very well liked song.

The second song on tape from the dynamic duo **Vinnie Crici** and **Joan Diamond** was titled "I Feel Your Memory" which was sung by another person. This was a very upbeat pop tune. Unfortunately we did not have lyric sheets to provide more insightful comments (Vinnie paid the fine) but we were all able to tell this song was hot. Sonny S. suggested off the cuff to get a female singer. Both Sonny S. and myself commented that the drum beat dated the song. Absolutely diverse writing styles. All agreed this song was in the groove.

Gerry Dantone brought on tape, "Bosko & Admira", a song he had previously presented to the ISS at a workshop meeting. He actually utilized some of our comments. The song took place during the Bosnian war and zones in on a love relationship between two people of "opposite" faiths. Andrew felt it was a good idea and story but didn't hear enough changes in melody to bring out the emotional content of this song. Frank liked the lyrics but commented that the music needed more variety. Brian felt that musically, the last verse, which was shorter, worked better. Rick suggested a stop in the music could embellish the feel more and noted some lyrical changes. Stuart thought it worked real well and like the slightly detached quality of the song. Some felt the production of the drums didn't agree with the melody. Vinnie liked the song and commented on some tense usage. He also felt that melody had a happy feel while this story did not. I remembered this song from the last workshop and still enjoyed it. This is a very complex and powerful song.

Rick Crawford, who decided to write a song this month in a minor key (ha, ha) performed "All Quiet". He actually had fewer verses than Andrew. I saw him playing outside in the parking lot playing to an oak tree before the meeting. He said he was playing to the "ents" (you know from Tolkien – because I forgot). Andrew felt it was lovely and mysterious and poetic and wouldn't take out a verse. Sonny S. suggested that the closures of the verses should be the chorus and should be up a notch. The crowd agreed and thought he might want to omit the tag line on the 2nd verse or build it up more. I suggested ending with the "all's quiet" or pausing between the last 2 lines for more effect.

Brian Sendrowitz performed "Our Love Will Blow It All Away". He is such a fine songwriter. The love song police didn't touch this. Sonny S. got blown away –get it? – by the imagery. A lot of Woody Guthrie noted. Most felt it was great. Rick recognized that this was not a formula song and felt it was a dead-on winner. And Brian has won the writer's choice twice before so we shall see. Vinnie loved it and felt that the bridge should come out a little more in emotion.

Sonny S. suggested more dynamics in the line where he was talking. A definite winner!

The writer formerly known as **Bill Ryan** has taken over my job. This is the kind of review typical of a member of the foreign legion.

This was it. The song we knew **Sonny Meadows** had in him titled "My Wife Won't Call For An Ambulance (I OD'ed on Viagra)". He had everyone doubled over, and the evening peaked with this song. He was asked if the song was hard to write and if maybe the chorus was a bit premature. Badda-boom! But seriously, the images Sonny presented were very clever and that's something you don't find in too many songs today. A big hit!

The group had a lot to say about **Frank Gambino's** "The Father Time", which is a good thing since you want people to think about your songs. Brian thought it had a good groove and suggested a bridge 2/3 of the way through the song, calling it the "golden mean". Some were thrown a bit by the use of father and mother in conjunction with the metaphor of Father Time. In general, a very well liked tune.

Stuart Markus paid tribute to his fans in "My Bar Room Friends". Well, it's about time he thanked his groupies for following him all over the Island. The group was unsure about the tone of the song. Some expected it to be more like the theme from TV's Cheers, but most found it to be more sentimental and not so hooky.

And that's how it ended. And the look-alike Bill vanished out of the room without a trace.

SONGWRITER'S CHOICE

BRIAN SENDROWITZ

"Our Love Will Blow It All Away"

A semi-regular to the winner's circle, **Brian Sendrowitz** has the advantage of outstanding performance abilities, and of course, great songs. His tune "*Our Love Will Blow It All Away*" was not unusual for Brian in style or subject matter, but since his usual style is passionate, insightful and

complex, it never wears thin. You have to love a song that goes "Though I'm still giving up the ghost, it sure is nice to have you here." Congratulations.

All-star tunesmith **Vincent Crici** enjoys collaborating with different lyricists and this month enjoys an honorable mention award with **Joan Diamond**, his favorite wordsmith. This well deserved honor is for "*Kite and Anchor*," a lovely love song that never quite becomes cliché, an outstanding feat! Nice sentiments cleverly stated. Why can't all songs be like that? Thanks to Vin and Joan.

Gerry Dantone writes the old fashioned way - without sampling other artist's hooks.

ISS SHOWCASE

Oct 18, 1999

JP's L.I. Grill, Farmingdale

Shari Diamond

September 20, 1999

JP's L.I. Grill, Farmingdale

By Shari Diamond

It's all in the numbers! I always viewed 12 as a lucky number. Maybe because it's the day my son was born. Maybe it's because it's so close to an unlucky number yet nothing ever happens. Maybe it's because it's the number of a TV station. I don't know. Anyhow, whoever wasn't here tonight really screwed up because we had some of the finest musicians on L.I. performing tonight. Here's what we got to hear.

For starters, we all gave a big hand for **Sonny Meadows** after he tightened the bolt on his harmonica holder, which he stated was from 1963 as was his guitar. And guess what? So am I! There's numbers for you. (Quick – do the math) The good humor blues guy started us off with "*A Fool For Those Curves*" and "*My Wife Won't Call For An Ambulance*", the latter being about OD'ing on Viagra.

He got some interesting sound effects from the audience with that one. He really loosened the place up. The man is hot!

The host of the open mike jam at JP's on Wednesdays, **Frank Walker**, followed but he did not reveal the age of his guitar. Oh well! He started his set with "*In Front Of You*", catching our attention. His second song "*Something Real*", was an upbeat tune searching for something true in a relationship. Poetry and inspirational music were combined. He rocked.

Newbie **Diana Schimkus** performed next and she has a wonderful captivating voice that compliments her guitar accompaniment so nicely. Her first song "*Everywhere I Go*" flowed perfectly and she followed with "*Kristin*", which she stated was intended as a harmony piece. So Frank got up and sang harmony which made this song really come alive. She is a confident heart-warming performer and we hope to hear more from her.

We were real lucky tonight to have such an accomplished songwriter here to perform and she's back from her tour in Europe with **Ritchie Blackmore**. I'm talking about **Marci Geller**, who brought her keyboard and played the soulful numbers "*Last Night*" and "*Close Your Eyes*", a song she wrote for a friend whose wife does not get him. Is that English? She sings woven tales of deep inner emotions stepping into a darker side she says but I think of it as more insightful. A big welcome back and we hope to hear more from her soon.

As a new member of the group Jordan River, **Jim Dexter** took the stage and transformed his guitar by tuning it to some evil Martian sound as he put it. "*Inside*" was his first song and it was so soulful. Very reminiscent of early David Crosby and very haunting. Jim ended his set with "*Keep On Going*" while his friend **Butch Poveromo** played the congas. The song flowed so well I was transported to a tropical space and I must thank you for doing so. They were having so much fun playing and we enjoyed listening. A great and I mean great set!

Another fine accomplished performer. **Cathy Kreger**, accompanied by **Butch** again on congas, kept the mood with “*I Heard A Whisper*”. This music is just what the soul needs. She then performed a song written by another writer, which she stated felt so good to play, titled “*The Wine*”. We be a happy audience. She captivated the audience despite some Monday night football antics from the bar.

The talent didn’t stop there. **Don Bracken** came from all the way out east and played “*No God*”, a very deep thought provoking song. Don really sings from the heart with such power. Don is a North Fork representative and gave us some gripe about us westerners coming out to do some rural pumpkin picking! You know you love the business! Then he broke into the song “*Dead Man Waltz*” with **Martha Trachtenberg** and **James Yarsky** accompanying to sing the na-na parts. A technical foul was issued from the bar. Oh, that had to do with the football game. Nevermind. Glad you could come out and play with us.

Writer’s break. Bill Ryan pinch hitting (oh, that’s baseball. I get soooo confused).

Vincent Crici’s songs always feature something that is lacking from today’s commercial radio – a melody. I usually leave these showcases with one of his melodies still in my head (editor’s note: there’s not much competition – ha ha). And tonight was no exception with his song “*If Any Woman Approaches Me*” and its very addictive chorus. He then treated us to “*Happily Ever After*”. This lovely ballad (yes, I said lovely), was recently featured on News 12, and hopefully will be included on Vinnie’s long awaited CD.

Okay – break’s over and I am back.

This month’s songwriter winner, **Brian Sendrowitz**, went up the middle for the pass to perform the song “*Planes Fly By*”. If he doesn’t pull you in, I don’t know what will. He is amazingly insightful for someone fairly young. He followed with “*Trouble With The Gravity*”. Another knockout with lyrics “I’m not falling from the sky/I’m just having trouble with the gravity”. Whoa!

I gave up my spot to play (I didn’t feel like it) to **Andrew Kirschner**. That was nice of me, huh? So he brought his alternative rock sounds to JP’s tonight with the songs, “*Alli Bye*” and “*What To Say*”, which left me speechless (just kidding!). Andrew’s gift is being out there muscially! How far out I am not sure. He always tries to elicit great imagery in his songs.

The Tone followed and played “*Hearts Screaming*”. Even the title is captivating.

Great lyrics. His second song was titled “*Only Dreaming*”, a haunting and dreamy melody. He’s become so much more focused on his writing it’s just wonderful to hear and see the growth (not that he wasn’t good before).

Bob Isaacs started his set with an old love song titled “*Your Love Is Keeping Me Going*”. He stated that he likes singing with Michele Monté, whom he wished was here tonight. His second song “*My Old Friend*” he debuted at one of the ISS meetings and he commented that he did NOT utilize any of our suggestions. The song worked anyhow. What do we know!

Rick Crawford, a great supporter of the ISS and a master of poetic lyrics, performed “*Coal*”, his short song he stated. He then performed a more in depth song “*Acropolis*”. His songs are dark but carefully planned with moving imagery.

Lightening up things was **Martha Trachtenberg**, whose CD is a-coming. She started with the oriental flavored song “*Laow-zee-toon*”. Not! Her real first song “*Hide And Seek*”, was a playful number which she probably won a songwriter’s choice for. Actually, all her songs are winners. Her next song “*If You Were Here*”, has nothing to do with her personally but you would never suspect it with the detail in this song. It’s chilling. Martha rose above the football cheers and once again, floored us. Look out for her upcoming CD “*It’s About Time*” to be released this Christmas!

Our last performer was **Dominique**, who has a wonderful Americana sound, played “*Long Black Cloud*”, a cool Mississippi delta blues song. His second song “*I Needed You*” was a slower quiet blues number, and then Sonny Meadows jumped in with his harmonica to complete that blues feel. I could listen to this kind of music all night. A superb way to end the evening.

Special thanks to our host **Sonny Speed** for always keeping us going, and to all the staff at JP’s and to our sound guy **George Trapani**.

Come down on October 18th to JP’s L.I. Grill and enjoy yourself!

BORDERS RECAP

October 7, 1999

Borders Books, Syosset, NY

Bill Ryan continues to do a fabulous job as host of one of our popular ISS

events. This night, we heard performances from **Bill Ryan, Carl Ferrara, Phil DeStefano** and many others. It's fun and we are well received there.

SONGWRITERS IN THE ROUND COMMACK

October 14, 1999

Barnes & Noble - Commack

A night of great original Long Island music was played this night by host **Sonny Meadows**, and friends **Bob Westcott, Jane Ross** and **Louis Parish**. The all-purpose roundtable was well received by the audience who was not shy in participating. Don't you be shy – come on down for a treat for the ears.

SONGWRITERS IN THE ROUND WESTBURY

October 15 1999

Borders – Westbury, NY

By Rich Stein

This evening, we heard performances from **Nick Vermitsky, Jerry McKeveny, and Scott B. MacDonald**, and of course from myself for a night of mostly instrumental madness. Nick mixed in music by Leo Kottke as well as originals; Scott delighted the crowd with the variety of string instruments at his command: lap Dobro, electric guitar (the first one he ever built), and banjo all made an appearance; Jerry offered up a healthy dose of his vocal and instrumental songs, and I played some of my favorite numbers that don't see the light of day too often. The crowd was very receptive. Borders is a great place to be on a Friday night! It's relaxed, comfortable and always a good way to meet new people.

See Rich Stein at meetings or gigs for more info or call 742-2817 or e-mail him at clearsteer@aol.com.

Next Westbury Borders event is November 19th. Come join us.

Director's Blurb

ISS workshops have become increasingly popular and we want to ensure that all members get enough time for comments. If you want your song heard but you're not looking for critique, please save the debut for the showcase. If you want feedback, **please remember to bring 25 copies of the lyric sheet.**

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