



Island Songwriters Showcase

Long Island's Largest Songwriter Association

January 2004

The State of ISS

Director: Organization 'Still Very Much Relevant'

On the Air

ISS member Rich Stein's CD *Unspoken* is getting radio airplay across the country and in Canada, in addition to several Web radio programs.

Visit Rich's site:
www.clearsteer.com

Online Radio

Same as offline?
Details on page 3

Next Workshop

January 5, 2004

Don't miss the next songwriting workshop: 7:30 p.m. Feb. 2, 2004 at Five Towns College in Dix Hills.

Find It Online

Visit our newly redesigned web site,
www.islandsongwriters.org

Happy
New Year!

by Pedro Pereira

ISS director **Sonny Speed** took some time last month to reflect on the Island Songwriters Showcase's accomplishments in the past year and discuss what's in store for the New Year. Excerpts of that conversation follow.

How would you describe the current state of ISS?

The ISS is going through a transition from a meeting place for writers back to a true workshop environment. When I started 10 years ago, it was more about writers at all levels coming to the workshops to connect. Over the last two years, it became more of a meeting place than a workshop. The feedback was becoming complacent and it was getting away from helping the writers. But I've been trying to drive it back to that, and now I get the sense it's about the music again.

What would you consider the biggest accomplishment of the past year?

Adding the annual "live" critique workshop for performers at The Song Box was one biggie, and changing the look of our web page and newsletter to reflect our new direction was another. I want to make sure I get another performance workshop going; the people who did it got a lot from it. That's part of songwriting too — developing presentation skills. We'll try to do the next one this summer.

In addition to another performance workshop, what else is on tap for 2004?

I am looking into getting guest speakers for each meeting, as I did a few years back, to talk on topics that the writers want to hear.

What about recruitment?

I want to see more island writers attend, so I think we need to advertise much more. A big problem has been getting a press secretary who can handle all of the different deadlines for submitting notices to the papers. Recruitment is directly related to this. We have a regular attendance at meetings of 25 to 30 on average, though it is slower in the winter. But our mailing list, which includes past and current attendees, is about 275 members.

How do you plan to boost promotion of ISS in the coming year?

A lot of other groups are vying for press too. This makes it harder to get space. But on the upside, more trade papers are out so we will need to develop relationships with the new ones. Also writers at these papers change like the wind, so people you know today may not work for them next month. But what am I going to do to get exposure? A lot of legwork. I have been around long enough to know that you only get what you ask for. No one stumbles onto you and writes an article out of the blue. So I am going to ask the membership to submit articles from writers they feel do justice to the local music scene and contact them to generate interest in our events.

Is ISS still relevant or is it at the risk of outliving its usefulness?

It's still very much relevant to songwriters in need of support and a much-needed outlet for artists looking for honest feedback. We are the only group offering this on the island. The network and showcase opportunities are still needed badly.

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Song Circle

Area songwriters gather for afternoon of music and fun

Writer's Choice

by Gerry Dantone

It seems we are always living in the best and worst of times — at least if you listen to writers of prose and song. The end of the world is *always* at hand and there never seems to be a time when society is not at a critical crossroads. Hope

Winner: Tim Huss

and disaster are always just around the corner. The thing is, just because there have always been such claims in the past, it doesn't mean we are in that kind of time right now.

Tim Huss addresses this topic with the timely "Scattered in the Wind," a tune about us getting our act together before it's too late. "Will there ever be a day/When we'll sail away to a place/Where we'll meet face to face/Where side by side, we won't fight/Give and take, and compromise/Where in the end, we'll be friends/Instead of scattered in the wind."

Runner-up **Frank Gambino** also had critical matters in mind with his anti-circumcision ode, "The Theology of St. Paul as an Infant." This hilarious song found simile and metaphor no one ever thought before! Frank sang, "C'mon rebbe,,, let's not and say we did/C'mon now, let the boy keep his lid/And let's keep Christ in Christmas/Keep the farmer in the dell/The pig in his pen/The lion in his den/And the turtle in his shell."

by Pedro Pereira

Guitar in hand, I made my way last month to my first-ever song circle. It was at ISS member **Rich O'Brien's** house, an event he dubbed the "Second Annual Long Island Jam." And it could not have been more fun.

Rich, who hosted the event with his wife Barbara, gathered an eclectic and talented assortment of songwriters and musicians to share their music with peers in a non-threatening, relaxed atmosphere. We sat in the O'Brien living room, taking turns playing songs.

Variety was the order of the day, with performances ranging from the Rich's bluesy originals to **Amy Uleis'** classical-inspired piano playing to **Frazer'** nearly flawless fingerstyle playing to **Hank Stone's** catchy pop tunes.

"It was cool to listen to some really good performances in such a relaxed setting, and get to hear the enormous variety of songwriting that's out there. I think each of us brought a different flavor to the group, which made it a great gig," said Amy.

Among the ISS members present were **Barry Be, Mark Hussey** and **Suzanne Ernst**. Amy gave the piano in the O'Brien living room a rare workout. Mark, who introduced his first tune with a self-deprecating "I'm not a performer" disclaimer, proceeded to contradict the warning by playing and singing with ease and skill.

Hank floored me with his song "Father's Lament," a true gem written from the perspective of the father of a sick child that includes this verse: "Lord, I beg you, make me suffer/For my sins, I will be reconciled/I'll submit to your supreme justice/but take this fever from the brow of my child." Hank also provided some spontaneous leads on my song "Everything." Thanks to him, that song never sounded better.

"My circle of musical acquaintances continues to expand, and I am knocked out by the singing and playing ability you all demonstrate," Hank said after the event. "Hopefully some deep friendships and possibly collaborations will develop."

Attendees enjoyed the event so much that Rich now is considering organizing one in the summer, to take place at his house or someone else's. Mark has already volunteered his house as a possible site.

"I think everyone had a good time and was able to enjoy good music and good company. One of the best things was that people from different groups like the Long Island Music Coaling and the ISS got to meet each other," Rich said.

Blood Drive a Partial Success

By Gerry Dantone

A blood drive was held in November at the Ethical Humanist Society of Long Island in Garden City. It was sponsored by the society, the Center for Inquiry – Long Island, ISS and Long Island Music Coalition on Monday. While New York Blood Services, which handles the actual collection, was happy with the results, we had hoped for a greater public response.

However, the music *was* great and everyone involved did a tremendous job. Thanks to everyone who came down to play, which included **Hank Stone, John Walsh & Yvette, the Buddha Box Girls & Kevin, Kathy Fleischmann, Sonny Meadows, Bill Goldsmith, Stuart Markus, Rich Stein** and **Forever Falling**.

Highlights included Sonny's new tune about donating blood (of course) and top-notch performances from Stuart, Rich and many others.

Aboard the Online Bandwagon

by Walter Sargent

Within six months of the introduction of iTunes, Apple Computer's bid for a piece of the online music business, three more high-tech titans — Microsoft, Dell and now HP — are also going for the gold. Hardware and content sales are cooking, so in the name of journalistic research, yours truly decided to download iTunes and buy a few tracks.

My first purchase was "Rough Boy" from ZZ Top's 1986 release, "Afterburner." I'm not a big ZZ Top fan, but they have their moments and, in my opinion, "Rough Boy" is one of them. Getting the only cut I wanted on that album for a buck felt good so I went looking for more chestnuts. Hey, wouldn't it be great if I could get Yes' "Tales of Topographic Ocean" for a buck a song? (Tales was a double album with four half-hour cuts). No such luck. No luck finding other old favorites like "Hocus Pocus" by Focus. I guess I can't really expect them to cater to old music nuts who used to pick through the record bins for the Edgar Boughton Band and Beggar Julia's Time Trip.

What can you expect from a can of Sprite with a built-in radio?
I want to change the channel already.

Radio online, same as offline

Not knowing what else to buy, I turned to iTunes radio and found a bazillion channels grouped into dozens of genres spanning the decades. They even have an *eclectic* channel. Cool. With a few clicks, I am happily immersed in "ambient beats and chilling vocals". It occurs to me that I may never need to buy another track online. Why should I? I've got the soundtrack for my "stylish, mysterious, dangerous life" and "consciousness-expanding Goa and psychedelic Trance" right here, and now for free. While the profusion of online radio stations has definitely expanded my instant music selection, it is still hobbled by an industry pushing the same stuff down every channel.

RadioParadise bills itself as "an eclectic selection of some of the best songwriters on the planet". The songs are OK, but hardly the best on the planet. It sounds like traditional pop-rock slightly warmed over to me. I click on over to Radio Paradise's web site and learn that its playlist is 90 percent major label with no submission policy or programming policy statement anywhere to be found. Likewise at Radiolo, which claims "no boundaries", but pushes Beck, Dave Mathews and the Red Hot Chili Peppers. Meet the new boundaries — same as the old boundaries.

Wondering what some of the other tech companies were doing with their bold initiatives, I went to Loudeye's website. (Loudeye is hooked up with Microsoft). Their vision of online radio is that it can be branded, which means Sprite can plaster the company logo all over the radio. Why a listener would want that is unclear. As for the music selection... well, what can you expect from a can of Sprite with a built-in radio? I want to change the channel already.

Just as we suspected, the culprit is a moral hazard

Under the iTunes ambient radio channels, I find "Magnatune New Age — direct from the artist, no major labels." Magnatune does not claim to be a paradise without borders. Magnatune says simply, "we are not evil." In contrast to the empty, if not deceptive, puffery of RadioParadise and Radiolo, Magnatune is tapping a core consumer instinct that we've all been cheated. The economic basis for this is explained in the Red Herring article "Music Industry: Stop Shirking." Writer Umair Haque suggests the implicit contract between the established music companies and listeners is no longer viable. Not only has the Internet virtually erased distribution costs, but it also exposed the industry's so-called "agency costs" to competition.

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Who Played What

The following songwriters brought songs to the ISS workshop in December:

Rich O'Brien, "Hard to Break Through;" **Mark Hussey**, "A Better Chance;" **Steve Lieberman**, "Retriever Fever/Shelter Pup;" **Bill Goldsmith**, "I'm Floating Through It All;" **Pedro Pereira**, "Even You;" **Frank Gambino**, "Theology of St. Paul as an Infant;" **Tim Huss**, "Scattered in the Wind;" **Bob Campbell**, "You Fill Me Up;" **Scott Diamond**, "Pure Love"

Editor's Pick

by Pedro Pereira

Frank Gambino gets the "atta boy" this month. He wins Editor's Pick just for the topic alone—circumcision. That the lyrics and rhythm were just as good only helped to seal his win.

Winner: Frank Gambino

Not too many roomfuls of guys would laugh heartily when such a topic comes up. But Frank had us in stitches with such lines as, "Rebbe, don't be doing that/Why you want to go and steal the fella's hat/How's he going to be a big man 'round town/if you rob him of his crown?"

As those of us who've heard Frank's songs before know, he can be a real cutup. He attacked his topic with surgeon-like precision and humor.



What's Doin'

ISS members are always out and about. Check your local listings for appearances live, on the radio or even on TV. Go to www.islandsongwriters.com for gigs and links to member sites with information about CD releases, shows and MP3s. Here's what's happening in the coming weeks. (*Check with the venue first because dates and times may change.*)

ISS Workshop

Test out your songs in front of fellow musicians, who provide constructive feedback. The workshop is on the first day of each month at **Five Towns College, Burrs Lane, Dix Hills**. Run by ISS Director **Sonny Speed**, It starts at 7:30 p.m. Bring a guitar to perform your song live, or you may choose to play a CD or tape. A piano is available for keyboardists. Be sure to bring 25 copies of your lyrics so other workshop attendees can follow along and provide feedback.
Next workshop: Feb. 2

Borders Showcase

Borders, Old Country Road, Westbury, hosted by **Rich Stein**, third Friday of the month. Jan. 16: Bob Westcott and Sonny Meadows; Feb. 20: Nick Vermitsky and The Defibrillators

State of ISS: 'Still Very Much Relevant'

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How would you rate the importance of the web site in promoting the organization?

The web site is a key component. We use it to showcase our writers and provide links to their own web pages. Our webmaster, **Walter Sargent**, is doing a great job redesigning it. We're going to add more links to other organizations and put up more artist information. We are the largest songwriting organization in the area, so we want our site to reflect that.

You've been leading this organization for 10 years. What drives you?

You can be a writer and play your own songs, stay in your basement and play them for your family and friends. You're guaranteed a pat on the back from your mother or your spouse, but it doesn't mean you're necessarily doing it right. And that's why ISS is important. And I love to see the development of the writers who join the organization. I love the excitement of hearing a voice, or a song, for the first time. I get off on that. As a producer I'm always looking for that something special, but it goes beyond that: I've been involved with music for 40 years, and to be in a position where I can help others develop their art gives me a lot of pleasure.

Aboard the Online Music Bandwagon

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One of the added values that record labels presumably bring to the marketplace is that they act as agents "hired" by music listeners to find interesting and worthwhile musical artists. Recognizing that alone explains why they are in such deep trouble. It's painfully obvious the industry has succumbed to what economists call a "moral hazard." A moral hazard occurs when there is no accountability for agency costs, when "the interests of the record labels (the agent) diverge from the interests of the listeners (the principal) and the labels become more interested in their own economies of scale and brand identity than providing listeners with music they value...just to feed the bottom line."

Radio stations without public submission or programming policies that are hard-wired to technology or content vendors are not a vision for the future. Been there, done that. File-sharing has proven much more efficient for consumers to take on their own search costs and avoid the middleman. If Magnatune's vision is even slightly more efficient than file-sharing, it will be a lot of music to a lot of ears.

For more on these topics:

Online Radio: www.magnatune.com, www.radioparadise.com, www.radioio.com, www.loudeye.com

Red Herring Article: http://www.herring.com/ForumPage_111903-04.aspx

Steve Jobs interview: <http://www.rollingstone.com/features/featuregen.asp?pid=2529>

HP Does Music Online: <http://news.ft.com/servlet/ContentServer?pagename=FT.com/StoryFT/FullStory&c=StoryFT&cid=1069493676868>

Dell DJ: http://biz.yahoo.com/bw/030925/255413_1.html

Open Mics

Borders, Jericho Turnpike, Syosset, hosted by Bill "Scoop" Ryan, first Thursday of the month. Sign-up at 7:30 p.m. *Feb. 5, March 4.*

Starbucks, Main Street, Huntington, 7:30 p.m. Mondays.

Pisces Cafe, Railroad Ave, Babylon, 8 p.m. Wednesdays.

University Cafe

Suny/Stony Brook, hosted by **Sonny Speed**, 8:30p.m. third Thursday of the month. Jan. 15: Bill Goldsmith, followed by open mic.

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