
Mic Is

On at Book Revue

Guest Speaker

Songwriting instructor
Mel Glazer to speak
Feb. 2 during this
month's workshop at
Five Towns College.

Report in the March issue

Defibrillators

The Defibrillators open
for legendary band The
Zombies

Details on page 4

Next Workshop

March 1

The next songwriting
workshop is at 7:30 p.m.
March 1 at Five Towns
College in Dix Hills.

Find It Online

Visit our web site,
www.islandsongwriters.org

Host Seth Davis: The Focus Is on the Artist

by Pedro Pereira

Singer/songwriter **Seth Davis** created so much buzz with the open mic he hosts at the Starbucks on Main Street in Huntington that he got an invitation to try to replicate the success at the Book Revue bookstore. After some negotiation and preparation, Seth kicked off a Thursday night weekly open mic at the bookstore late last month.

Opening night at the Book Revue, Long Island's largest independent bookstore, attracted a diverse group of about a dozen singer/songwriters and poets, most of whom are veterans of the Starbucks gig, which has been going strong for more than a year.

"We had a small crowd of listeners, and we went 95 percent unplugged, which commanded re-tuning of ears and naturally discouraged chatter, so it was a respectful & intense listening," Seth said after the first Book Revue night.

'I'm regularly knocked out by the musicianship, the writing, the delivery and the charisma of some of the folks who show up.'

— *Seth Davis*

Seth, who hosted an open mic at the Starbucks in Long Beach for four years until the store management cancelled it last year, welcomed the chance to host another gig in Huntington, a town with a sizeable artist community and supportive audiences. He is hoping to duplicate the success of the Huntington Starbucks gig, which attracts large crowds just about every week. In summer, the crowds spill over to the sidewalk, where it is not unusual to see someone practicing with an acoustic guitar before getting in front of the microphone inside.

Seth, who has one CD under his belt and is recording another, says he feeds off the open mics. The rewards, he says, come from "seeing a player walk in with the guitar he just pulled out of the closet after two years and shake as he works through a song he loves; watching the same guy/girl evolve and start writing again and playing with the other players there, and maybe even getting some gigs or doing a recording; seeing someone shine like a little kid as they get the first applause they've experienced; and being part of a supportive community that nurtures the process."

The performances and the reactions they elicit, he says, are a source of inspiration. "Sometimes the ones who deliver the lowest degree of entertainment value are the ones who get the greatest applause. Thank God, because they each have the potential and need to be encouraged in order to continue and to bloom. And yes, I'm regularly knocked out by the musicianship, the writing, the delivery and the charisma of some of the folks who show up."

The Book Revue gig, which takes place at the in-store cafe, is on a four-week trial, at the end of which Seth and management will evaluate the open mic's success to determine whether to continue.

At Starbucks, the format seems to run on an “anything goes” philosophy. While most players use acoustic guitars, the



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occasional Les Paul or Strat makes an appearance.

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Writer's Choice

by Pedro Pereira

John Flor-Sisante has attended two ISS workshops. He should show up more often, considering the reception he gets, winning Writer's Choice both times.

Winner: John Flor-Sisante

This time John won with “The Night I Met Her,” an easygoing, finger-picked number with a catchy bass line and beautiful melody. Workshop attendees praised John for such lines as, “The sky is like a Vince Van Gogh, full of slingshot stars/While airplanes rumble Coltrane notes by the reservoir.”

John infused the song with unorthodox images and descriptions on the “love gained” theme, a subject matter that would have led less skilled songwriters down the path of cliché. “My missionary fingers traced the map of her skin/While her lips were a paintbrush on my face that she colors in,” John sang.

My song “New Hampshire” was the runner-up. In direct contrast to John's number, “New Hampshire” tackles the “love lost” theme with lines such as, “Tell me, does your mind ever/Take unplanned, lonely walks/Down that path you did not choose/Or is it more than you can stand.”

‘Find a Beat, Play It Fast’

Song-a-day man Steve Lieberman produces CDs on the cheap

by Pedro Pereira

ISS member **Steve Lieberman** starts his day early — 3:02 a.m., to be exact. That is usually when the idea for his next song dawns on him. As the morning progresses, he works on the lyrics as time permits. By lunchtime, he's ready to record.

“I rush home at lunch to record,” says Steve, whose brand of raucous post-punk rock separates him from the rest of the ISS pack. “I put the lyric sheet down, find a beat, play it fast and play the chords on the bass while imaging the melody while looking at the words. Then I record the lead vocals, back-up vocals, lead bass, bass bass, flutes and recorders, melodica, fiddles, trombones, shehnais and cowbells and drum accents in that order. I usually record up through the melodica part and then return from lunch somewhat on time.”

For a three-minute song, Steve explains, “I can do about eight overdubs allowing for setup and whatever tweaking I might do at that time. The chord structures are generally simple so chances for fatal errors are reduced.”

After work, which is about a couple of miles from his home, Steve records the final overdubs for the song and by 6 p.m. the cut is finished.

‘I rush home at lunch to record. I put the lyric sheet down, find a beat, play it fast and play the chords on the bass while imaging the melody while looking at the words.’

— *Steve Lieberman*

The process works for him, and the song-a-day songsmith says that for his most recent self-produced CD, the 22-track “Desert Fever Brigade,” he had to rerecord only three songs. The CD's track list is a work of art in its own right. Consider song titles such as, “Hippy in the Legion of Skin-Heads,” “Pokey Admin,” “Popularitaskala,” “Jewish Riot (Acoustic),” “Hippies Love Their Children Too,” and “And The Genre Police Never Sleep or Ian Anderson's Shot-Gun Bar-Mitzvah.”

Steve recorded a couple of CDs before “Desert Fever Brigade.” When it came to distribution of the new one, he says he had learned from previous experience on how to get it out at minimal cost. He says he spent less than \$200 to make copies of the new CD, vs. \$1,500 he shelled out for his first effort, “Bad'lania.”

“When I finished work on “Bad'lania” in June 2002, I was really a pup as far as these things go. The name I was familiar with in CD replicating was Oasis, so I inquired there. The prices were way too high for my standards. I believe for 500 copies it was over \$2,500, plus the cost of artwork, which would be about \$600.

“This sent me to the net surfing for replicators. I found a guy in Canada, Paul Murton of DBS Duplicators. There was a number of great things about this outfit. First, Paul himself is a graphic artist and the artwork, up to I believe six hours, is free. Second, you get the advantage of the buying power of the American dollar in Canada and, third, your CD is manufactured in the same plant used by Capitol Records. I got 500 copies with a 15-page booklet for a total cost of about \$1,500, or half what Oasis would have charged.”

When the time came to distribute his second CD, "Jewish Lightning," Steve decided to scale down. To start, he got a friend to take pictures for the CD jacket

and do the artwork. And rather than return to DBS Duplicators, Steve decided to take his business to Guitar Center affiliate DiskFactory. "For \$299, I got 110 copies with a four-page tray insert. The project was delayed horribly not at all by DiskFactory but by the busy

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Producing CDs on the cheap

Song a Day Keeps Boredom Away

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life of a 19-year-old graphic artist. I finished recording in April 2003 but the album was not released until Sept. 16. It was old before it even came out, a mistake I was not going to let happen again."

So for the new album, Steve decided to take control of the process, even doing the artwork. "I struggled with the artwork myself, using a free version of (Apple Computer's) Click'N Design 3D, some cool pictures left over from the 'Lightning' photo shoot and my overactive imagination.

"For Desert Fever Brigade, I returned to the DiskFactory because their overall quality was certainly comparative to DBS in Canada. I took their 'pro pak' this time for \$179 (\$199 minus a \$20 coupon from 'Lightning') I'm getting 100 copies of 'Desert Fever Brigade,' front and back tray card and one other page. That's it. Basically I did not return to DBS because they only work in quantities of 500-plus. I still have an inventory of 288 from the first printing of 'Bad'lania.'"

Besides distributing his music through CDs, Steve also gets his songs out through MP3 sites such as Germany's BeSonic.com, Australia's MP3.com.au, California's SoundClick.com, and Canada's sonic Awareness.com. He was also very active on mp3.com (no relation to MP3.com.au) until it closed late last year. His music has been received well by users of these sites, who often have sent Steve's songs to the top of sites' charts.

Although MP3.com was the largest of this genre of web sites, Steve is undeterred by its shutdown. "CNET bought the assets of the former MP3.com and promises to make a better distributor in 2004. We shall see."

Meanwhile, ISS's resident post-punk rocker will be sticking to his song-a-day regime.

Editor's Choice: Yada Yada Ya Ya

By Pedro Pereira

So this is shaping up as the **Steve Lieberman** issue. While I had a decent pool of songs from which to choose for this month's Editor's Pick, I kept coming back to Steve's "Yada Yada Ya Ya." Perhaps it's the irreverence of the title, or maybe the "so there" quality of the message, but I simply could not get as excited about any other song from last month's workshop as I did about this one.

'I can't understand a word you're saying
Yada yada yada ya ya ya
Is that a message you are conveying?'

—Steve Lieberman, *Yada Yada Ya Ya*

In this Ramones-style rave-up, Steve gives the musical finger to his detractors, who have knocked his high-octane, vocally garbled music for its hard-to-hear lyrics and its raucous quality. Steve turns the criticisms often leveled at him back on his critics with lines

such as "I can't understand a word you're singing/Yada yada yada ya ya ya/Production so bad my ears are ringing/Yada yada yada ya ya ya/That's not music, it's performance art/Yada yada yada ya ya ya/Look at me, I'm on the top of the charts."

Steve says he wrote the song in response to his Internet critics, who have access to his music through MP3 sites. But he might as well have written it about his critics within ISS itself.



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Who Played What

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

Rich O'Brien
"In the Bottom of a Bottle"
Mark Hussey
"High-tech Breakup"
Steve Lieberman
"Yada Yada Ya Ya"
Bill Goldsmith
"Foot Inside the Door"
Pedro Pereira
"New Hampshire"
Frank Gambino
"A Bit of Hard Luck"
Bob Campbell
"Count on Me"
Scott Diamond
"Magician's Secret"
Phil Scully
"One of a Kind"
Tony Tedeschi
"Saturday at the Nail Salon"
Sonny Meadows

"How Does a Patriot Act?
Andrew Kirschner
"The Tollbooth"
Estelle Henrich
"Mystic Blue Pearl"
Walter Sargent
"Georgie Boy"
John Flor-Sisante
"The Night I Met Her"

Listen in
at www.robrien.net

On the Air

ISS member Rich O'Brien's web radio show this month features on-air performances by Long Island songwriter Hank Stone.

Defibrillators Downtown

The Defibrillators are scheduled to play Feb. 8 at The Downtown in Farmingdale. The Zombies, whose hits include "Time of the Season" and "She's Not There," will follow. Tickets are \$25 in advance and \$30 the day of the show.



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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.org 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 workshops attendees can follow along and provide feedback.
Next workshop: March 1

Book Revue Open Mic Kicks Off

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African drums and bongos are also common. Sometimes a comedian or two shows up and just about every week, at least one poet takes the stage.

At the Book Revue, Seth says, "I desire an acoustic/poetic listening room." The goal is for "less chatter and a focus on the artist," he adds, pointing out that there are "isles of books and a nice town outside if folks want to talk about their day."

Seth says he enjoys the cafe setting because it attracts audiences that are more likely to pay attention to the performances.

"The bar and nightclub open mics I grew up on in (Greenwich) Village were attended mostly by artists who would do their thing and leave. Also, where alcohol is present there's the likelihood that somebody will be insensitive to poetry or to a gentle song, or even to someone whose performance is not at their speed. The cafe solves both problems, as it's a meeting place for listeners/supporters as well as the artists. And there's an all-ages, alcohol-free 'community.' Everyone is included."

Open Mics

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

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

Book Revue, New York Ave, Huntington, 6:30 p.m. Thursdays.

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. Featured performers followed by open mic. *Next gig: Feb. 19.*

Borders Showcase

Borders, Old Country Road, Westbury, hosted by **Rich Stein**, third Friday of the month. On tap for Feb. 20: Nick Vermitsky, The Defibrillators

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Visit our web site at www.islandsongwriters.org.