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the Song

Songwriter Mel Glazer Shares Tips at Workshop

Weeding Out

A new online music-sharing service, Weed, has a promising model that rewards those who download files.

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Tim Huss

ISS member Tim Huss is scheduled to perform live on WSUB-FM 90.1 at 8 p.m. March 18.

Next Workshop

April 5

The next songwriting workshop is at 7:30 p.m. April 5 at Five Towns College in Dix Hills.

Find It Online

Visit our web site,
www.islandsongwriters.org

by Pedro Pereira

Songwriter **Mel Glazer**, who has written songs recorded by Elvis Presley, Etta James and Robert Plant, told ISS members during the February workshop to never throw away anything while in the writing process.

Glazer said he used to dismiss ideas that would come up while writing a song because they didn't fit with the concept of the song. But he said he came to realize that each idea is a gift and throwing it away is a "big mistake."

"What I started to do was I started to write down everything," he said. He found that an idea that didn't fit the song at the moment might be useful later. "Write down everything and categorize it. File the ideas any which way you want to file them."

It is also important to follow the song where it takes you, rather than letting your intellect force the song down a certain path. In his experience, Glazer said he has learned to "not to let my head think that it's wiser than my feelings."

'Write down everything and categorize it.
File the ideas any which way you want to file them,'

— Mel Glazer

He said a writer has to believe in the song for it to mean something. "I don't get involved with a title unless I've lived it or I've lived part of it," he said.

Good writers must trust themselves and believe in what they are doing, he said. In his experience, Glazer said, the more he listened to himself, the better it was for the song. "One person has to take control and be in charge, and that is you," he said. To illustrate the point, Glazer told a story about an answer Willie Nelson gave when asked when he knew that a certain album of his would go platinum. Nelson answered, "when the record company turned it down."

Glazer also advised ISS members to "know what your groove is," but to not let that prevent them from trying new grooves. It's important to continue pushing the bounds of creativity. "Keep on pushing the envelope," he said.

He also talked about the fine balance of writing songs that are somewhere between writing poetry and just setting any words to music. Writers must be careful to not keep trying to write poetry as songs, he said.

When collaborating with other writers, he said, leave your ego at home. Keep writing until both writers are happy with the song. "At the end when the song is finished, it comes out infinitely stronger than when one person tries to pressure the other collaborator." If one person takes too much control, the song suffers, he said.

Artists with whom Glazer has collaborated include Carole King, Sammy Fain, Aaron Schroeder and Arthur Siegal. Glazer co-wrote "Speedway," which Presley recorded and the hard rock band Static-X covered about two years ago.

Writer's Choice

by Gerry Dantone

It is always difficult to write the Writer's Choice column when you've won it yourself. Thank goodness it doesn't happen too often!

Winner: Gerry Dantone

In this case, however, I can mention the inspiration for this tune with the unlikely title "I Am the Woman Who Has Awoken." Before the 9/11 tragedy, I had been doing some reading on the subject of religious fundamentalism and became interested in the situation in Afghanistan.

Aware that bin Laden had declared war on the United States in 1998, I learned that there was an organization that had opposed the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, American support of Jihadist rebels, the civil war after the Soviets, the Taliban, and the Northern Alliance. This was a group that supported the creation of a liberal secular democratic republic with equal rights for women in Afghanistan. Imagine that! Of course, all other factions ignored, hated, or hunted them.

The founder of the organization, called the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), was a woman named Meena whose husband was murdered by fundamentalists in 1986 and was later murdered herself,

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Songwriting Competition Is On at Songwriting.net

by Tim Huss

If you are interested in entering songwriting competitions, or playing at showcases around the country, you may want to check out www.songwriting.net. This is the web site of USA Songwriting Competition.

Once you register your e-mail with them you will receive announcements on songwriting competitions, special showcases and radio stations that may play your music. USA Songwriting Competition's mailings also include helpful discussions on the independent songwriters trade such as "How to Use the 'Indie Bible' to its Fullest Potential", and "CD Vendors and Services that will Help You Sell Your CD."

Best of all, it's free, unless you decide to enter the competition. According to the site, "Winners will be selected by a blue ribbon committee of music industry judges, including record label publishers, producers from SONY Music, Warner/Reprise Records, etc. This is a chance to be discovered by the biggest names in the music business." The organization charges \$30 a song, which is where you can rest assured they make a bundle! It's worth a look however, so give it a try.

Musings: Simple Is Beautiful

by Pedro Pereira

In a recent issue of Acoustic Guitar magazine, flattop sensation John Mayer says your songwriting is only as good as your playing. This gave me pause, for I've never really considered myself much of a guitar player, even though my interest in playing preceded my songwriting endeavors.

I have seven guitars, but I couldn't play a scale on demand. I'd have to look it up first. I can play a rudimentary lead, but don't ask me what notes I'm plucking.

Perhaps I'm revealing more than I should, but then again, it doesn't bother me that much. The main thing is that when I compare my playing today to three years ago, I have definitely improved. At least I *can* play that rudimentary lead now.

And if Mayer is 100 percent correct, Bob Dylan, Leonard Cohen and James Taylor are, at best, OK songwriters.

So to the extent that I have improved my playing, and as a result, made my more recent songs somewhat more interesting by adding single-note flourishes to break up the strumming, I agree with Mayer. But then I listen to his music, and I have to look at the flip side of his comment. At which point does the mission to craft an interesting song overtake the message or the feel of the song? Mayer seems to have struck a decent balance, but in some instances he risks falling into the trap of complexity.

It was this very trap that spurred the punk movement of the late 1970s. Rock had become too unwieldy. And unwieldy tends to be, well, ugly. Whereas there is beauty in simplicity. This is something contemporary songwriters such as Lucinda Williams, Samuel Beam of Iron & Wine, and Mark Everett (who calls himself E) of the Eels understand. Even when Eels' music appears to get complex, when you peel back the layers, you're still usually looking at a three- or four-chord ditty.

And if Mayer is 100 percent correct, Bob Dylan, Leonard Cohen and James Taylor are, at best, OK songwriters. Clearly, Taylor is in a different league from the other two as far as guitar playing, but he is never flashy or overly complex. And though I don't particularly care for his music, I can appreciate its simple beauty. As for Dylan and Cohen, they are two of the finest songwriters of the last four decades. And while their music has evolved over the years, it retains a charming simplicity that provides just the right amount of support for their first-rate lyricism.

Welcome to Weed

by Walter Sargent

Weed is the latest DRM technology that hopes to legitimize peer-to-peer file-sharing once and for all. Like Napster — the first Napster, which rocked the world — Weed lets you upload and download files for free. Unlike Napster, musicians have a real chance of actually getting paid and consumers never have to worry about being sued. How does that work?

Weed lets you download a music file and listen three times for free. After the third time, the Listener must buy the file or it stops working. Part of the money goes to the musicians and part goes to the person you downloaded the music from. Weed is multi-level marketing for the masses and anyone can play. There is no buy-in, upfront costs, no recruiting and no sales goals. Simply put, it doesn't cost anyone a dime to promote a Weed file. Not only are you allowed to do it, you can even make a few bucks along the way.

Here's one possible scenerio: I buy a Weed song from the artist. The artist gets paid. I put the file on my web site. I don't need to clear it with anyone. I can just do it. Other people come to my site and download the file for free. Some of them like the song and buy it. The artist gets sales he wouldn't get without me. I get a commission for my part in it. Legally, it's very neat.

What about hackers? Won't they hack the Weed files or the player and get the music free? Yes. Hackers will hack because they can. But notice that they are not just getting the music for free. They are also depriving themselves of the residual income. Who cares? We are talking about nickels and dimes, right? Well, if you're going to bother to promote something, why not keep the residual income while rewarding the artist that made the music you like and probably want more music from?

What about the competition? All of the current online music services run by the major labels are still restricting their playlists while trying to look "independent." Clear Channel has a controlling interest in XM Radio and its playlists. Even with 100 channels, it's still "all household-name music all the time." If you want to go somewhere new, changing the channel isn't gonna get you there.

While there are a few independent-minded online music services, right now Weed may be the only one in the field that uses word of mouth to the fullest. The biggest downside at the moment is convenience, but that is changing rapidly. Weed files now can be played on recent versions of RealPlayer and MusicMatch Jukebox and the software only works on Windows PCs or Macintosh PCs with OS X, Virtual PC emulator software and Windows. Long-term plans include expanding supported platforms.

How much is a Weed file? Weed shines by letting the artist decide how much to charge: anywhere between 79 cents and about \$4.

No one can say whether Weed will be as successful as Napster, but I will say that Weed is a DRM with a future. The reason it has a future is because it is fair to consumers and producers. Producers need to promote their creations in order to develop a demand. There can't be any demand for something no one knows anything about. At the same time, it makes no sense for producers to promote something if they are letting the cat out of the bag in such a way that they can't get paid. Weed solves both of these problems.

Check out weed at <http://www.weedshare.com/>.

Who Played What

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

Tim Huss
"You heal the Hurt Inside of Me"
Amy Uleis
"The One"
Gerry Dantone
"I Am the Woman Who Has Awoken"
Bill Goldsmith
"Cloud of Smoke"
Steve Leiber
"Dog Park"
Sonny Meadows
"Checkin' His Beard"
Walter Sargent
"In the Future"
Rich O'Brien
"Feeling Free"
Estelle Henrich
"Airport Cowboy"
Matthew Windwer
"Don't Blink"
Debra Lynne
"The Loving Zone"
Frank Gambino
"Clap Your Hands"
Mark Hussey
"Walking on Clouds"
Bob Campbell
"Living an Epiphany"
Pedro Pereira
"I Need a Hand"

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

Tim Huss Gig

ISS member **Tim Huss** is scheduled to perform at 8p.m. March 5 and 20 at the Fire Island Grill, 1575 Montauk Highway, Oakdale. If you are interested in doing a few songs on the nights Tim is playing, contact him at HussHawkeye@aol.com or just show up.

by the Afghanistan branch of the KGB. For information on Meena, go to <http://rawa.fancymarketing.net/meena.html>. The inspiration for the song was a poem she wrote that began "I am the woman who has awoken."

The Afghanistani Constitution recently approved claims equal rights for women but at the same time requires all laws to be religiously correct. It remains to be seen whether Meena's dream will ever be realized.

A good question regarding the song was raised by **Stuart Markus** who wondered whether the tune could be misinterpreted as a call to violent action, such as suicide bombings. The key line that should make it clear that this is no fanatical call to violence is the following: "With all I have, I will be with you/On the path to liberty." Personal or other forms of liberty are concepts foreign and repugnant to fundamentalists.

Runners-up for Writer's Choice included **Tim Huss** for the heartfelt "You Heal the Hurt Inside of Me," and **Amy Uleis** for girl-singer pop tune "The One."

Gerry Dantone is not really a woman.

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: March 18.*

Borders Showcase

Borders, Old Country Road, Westbury, hosted by **Rich Stein**, 8 p.m. third Friday of the month. March 19: Tim Huss, Walter Sargent.

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Visit our web site at www.islandsongwriters.org.

Writer's Choice

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17 years ago to the day I am writing this, on Feb. 4, 1987