

THE STATE OF ISS

Director Tells What's on Tap for the New Year

Next Workshop

February 7

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

Happy Holidays!

The ISS wishes you and your loved ones a joyous season and wonderful new year.



Find It Online

Visit our web site,
www.islandsongwriters.org

By Pedro Pereira

ISS Director **Sonny Speed** took some time before the Holidays to muse about the organization's progress in the past year and what lay ahead in 2005. Topics covered include new-member recruitment, the ISS web site and the plans to continue featuring guest speakers at the organization's monthly songwriting workshops.

Sonny has been running ISS for at least a decade — he forgets exactly how long — and says he still gets a huge kick out of hearing a tune for the first time and seeing songwriters grow into the craft. A producer, multi-instrumentalist and band leader (The Defibrillators) Sonny remains an important asset to the organization.

Looking back on the past year, what would you say were the highlights for the organization?

Two items: The redesign of the web page was a big improvement. [ISS Webmaster] **Walter Sargent** did a great job in updating the look and functionality. This is a point of entry for most new members and it is critical that we look good to potential members so they take the step to come down to the meetings and events.

The second item is having guest speakers at the monthly workshops. I think it gives the group a chance to hear some new perspectives about writing.

Do you plan to continue featuring guest speakers at the workshops?

Yes. I have agreed to have [songwriting coach] Mel Glaser as an ongoing speaker every 4 months. I have been talking to a few others as well. Last year I tried to mix it up, from software company CEOs to advice on marketing your songs to basic writing techniques. I canvassed the crowd and asked what they wanted more of. The response falls two ways — "How do I get a record deal" or "How do I get a great recording." Since these are not about writing I may have to change my guest list a little.

There seem to be more new faces at the workshops than in previous years. To what do you attribute this?

I think three things have helped in this regard. They are the new web page, Mel Glaser's classroom students crossing over to our organization, and the fact that I try to get us listed in all publications that list songwriting groups. A few hardcover books came out last year that listed us. Unfortunately, on a sour note, we don't get listed in the Newsday guide any longer.

But the old-fashioned way still works best — word of mouth. So if we're doing good, people tell others.

How do you plan to keep up the recruiting momentum in the coming year?

Advertise! I plan to post the meetings and events back on Newsday and on Cablevision local guides.

What are new members primarily looking for, and how do their needs mesh with those of the existing members?

New members want to connect with serious players. Network opportunities mostly. Some want to wake up an old love for songwriting. I find that we have to appeal to a wider range of writers now more than ever to keep their interest.

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What are the benefits of attending the monthly workshops?

The feedback, the songs, the people, the support, the network, the chance to grow as a writer. It's a support group, a sanity check, or insanity, at times.

How do you measure the growth in individual members as they attend workshops?

Growth is the key. Over the years I have seen a lot of personal growth in the members as writers and performers. As the ISS director and as a producer I put a lot of effort into helping artists meet their potential. This is important. How do you measure growth? It's not in numbers; it's in musical notes. I have seen **Sonny Meadows** grow from an ISS newbie with style into a Long Island folk legend playing the IMAC. I've seen **Shari Diamond** go from a mom who wrote children songs to the head of her style and playing the Nassau Coliseum.

Writer's Choice

by Walter Sargent

The December workshop was truly exhilarating. We heard so many strong tunes, and it was gratifying to hear so many writers finding their voices.

Winner: Bob Campbell

All the more credit then goes to the Writer's Choice winner, **Bob Campbell**, for his "Feeling Like a Foreigner." Bob has always had an ear for a hook, but it all came together this time. Lyrics, melody, composition and theme were concisely and memorably expressed in a powerful blue-state anthem that really captured a sense of isolation and surreal shock.

Mike Svezia summed it up in a word, "Yeah!" It may not look like much in print, but the way he says it, the word carries an enthusiastic endorsement. Bob is definitely onto something.

The runner-up slot goes to **Frank Gambino** for his "Don't Want To Rest On My Laurels." The title is a setup for his trademark punchline "I just want to sit on my big fat ass," which is fine with us as long as he keeps whacking us upside the funny bone.

On the whole, the songs were so good, several ballots had more than one song written in. This created

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And that's just to name two, but we have many, many others. Look around the room at a meeting. They are all better off for belonging. But it isn't only about performance, it's about better writing, development of a style, learning a new comfort level with your music or just simply trying something new. I wish I could name all of the ISS members who have shown growth but that would take months. *Everyone* has grown.

At this point we are down to only two monthly events for the membership — the University Cafe and Borders Syosset gigs. Is anything else in the works?

The two are still growing in my opinion, so it's hard to split the attendance. The Borders gig is doing quite well and the University Cafe is still building, but I think we have to offer another spot for our original music. I will be talking to the Pisces Cafe in Babylon along with Sonny Meadows about doing an ISS feature and open mic there.

What else do you foresee in the coming year?

A few things: more services on our web page for members to promote themselves, like web links, audio files etc. I also want to expand out live appearances, I have been offering members gigs that come to me that I can't play and I want to find a way that I can get the word out that we can offer original-music players for shows (maybe through the web too). I have had requests for another live performance workshop, so that may happen too.

To meet the growing requests for more production tips I am considering an in-studio workshop series at Son Spot for artists so they can understand how it all works and how to better use your studio money. If this works out I will ask other producers and studios to host in-house classes as well.

How long have you been director now? What keeps you going?

There was an article in the Good Times paper back in the mid 90s about me taking over the ISS but I can't pin it down. I helped out a year or so prior to running it, so that clouds my memory as well.

What keeps me going, Hmm... It isn't the money. You know it's all volunteer and I have to give my heartfelt thanks to all of the members who give their time to the ISS. Because without them we have nothing.

Basically it comes down to this: I love original music. I love hearing a new tune; it gets my creative juices flowing. That, and I have a deep dedication to the long Island music scene. I believe you have to be a true "music activist" if you want to make changes through your music. I feel the ISS allows me the chance to effect change. Long Island original music is strong, it always has been. But it's still looked upon as NYC's little brother and that's a shame. I want to change that. In the past 10 years I have seen many LI "music activists" step forward to break that image. This is a great thing but we need more. I guess it basically comes down to recognition for the ISS and its members. I just don't think it's time to get complacent. If I do slow down please replace me. Oh yes, I also drink a lot of triple-shot espressos.

Peace and Love

WHEN EVERYTHING HAS BEEN SAID

By Pedro Pereira

This time of year I often find myself listening to John Lennon's solo music. Perhaps it's a subconscious commemoration of the anniversary of his untimely death or a subliminal effect of hearing "Happy Christmas/War Is Over" on a daily basis.

After last month's ISS workshop, I had another reason to be thinking about John. When **Gerry Dantone** played a recording of his song "Peace Love" I couldn't help comparing it to all those wonderful tunes John wrote about peace and love.

And while it may seem unfair to try to compare anything to what John Lennon wrote, it's almost inevitable in this case. After all, not many other songwriters have managed to write about these topics with as much sincerity, courage, emotion, beauty and simplicity. Not many people could have pulled off lines such as "All you need is love," "Love is real, real is love" and "Give peace a chance" with the kind of conviction that John mustered. Besides, how many revolutionaries can claim to have written a song that has become a standard at weddings?

Besides, how many revolutionaries can claim to have written a song that has become a standard at weddings?

So when Gerry distributed his lyric sheet last month and I saw the title of the song, I cringed a bit. My first instinct was that we were about to be served a plate of cheese so sweet it would drive a Frenchman mad. I mean, what can be said about peace and love that hasn't already been said? But I was pleasantly surprised when I scanned over the lyrics. There was no pretense of grandiosity, no syrupy declarations or preachy admonishments.

Instead, what Gerry served up lyrically was simplicity itself, and with that, the kind of beauty that more often than not eludes songs that try to say too much and end up saying little. Here, Gerry is saying, "Peace, love, is that all there is?" and he goes on to conclude in a very understated way: "Peace, love, it comes down to this."

Over a pleasant melody worthy of the great Beatle himself, Gerry sings, "There is no one who'll change your heart/It's all of your own doing/There is no word, no perfect truth/There's just the souls you're touching/Everyday."

This is truly inspired songwriting. In a simple, straightforward way the writer shares with the listener what may be construed as some fundamental truths, despite the declaration that "there is no perfect truth." It all comes down to how you choose to live your life and how you hold yourself accountable for your choices.

And while Gerry wades into more controversial waters with the lines, "There is no prayer to save our lives/There's only understanding/There is no fate to guide our way/There's just the world we're making," it would be misguided to get caught up in the words while disregarding the affirmation of the underlying message.

Not too many writers can pack a universe of meaning into a mere handful of words. A facility for beautiful lyrical simplicity often coupled with a minimalist production approach was part of the genius of John Lennon.

While Gerry's production approach to "Peace Love" isn't exactly minimalist, his direct, simple words pass the John Lennon test. And most importantly, he succeeded in addressing a topic fraught with danger, a topic that in lesser hands would have bubbled over with sweet goo.

"Peace Love" is track 11 in UniversalDice.com's new album, "Out of Many, One," available at cdbaby.com. Gerry is the band's main songwriter.

Who Played What

Here's the list of songwriters and songs from last month's ISS workshop:

Jim Caputo
"Wood for the Fire"

Gerry Dantone
"Peace Love"

Michael Svezia
"Get Over It"

Walter Sargent
"Say Goodbye"

Frank Gambino
"Don't Want to Rest on My Laurels"

Scott McDonald
"I Hope Love Is Stronger than Pain"

Sonny Meadows
"I Got Drafted into Christmas"

Mark Hussey
"Bleh-volution"

Bob Campbell
"Like a Foreigner"

Tim Huss
"Lesson of a Cowboy"

Estelle Henrich
"Petty Crime and Punishment"

Tony Tedeschi
"A Night Walk in Manhattan"

Pedro Pereira
"Anxiety No. 3"

Steve Liberman
"Unholy War in the Holy Land"

Bill Goldsmith
"Crackhouse Blues"



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: Feb. 7

University Cafe

The next gig is **Jan 21**. Don't forget, an open mic follows the featured performers.

Promote Yourself on the ISS Web Site

The ISS is now offering songwriters *their own web pages* on the ISS web site. Whether you already have your own web site or not, a personal web page on the ISS site brings you closer to the traffic with a polished and professional look. If you don't already have a web site, it is an especially good deal. The fee is \$30 a year.

Plus, you are supporting ISS web site development. So if you like the way the web site is going, you can help *keep it going* by signing up. Please see the web site for details: <http://www.islandsongwriters.org>

Writer's Choice

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a bit of a problem and no one is quite sure how to handle it, so we had to hire immigrant election workers for 45 cents an hour to determine voter intent. **Pedro Pereira** is looking into who designed these ballots and **Sonny Meadows** filed an injunction to counter Frank's petition to move to electronic voting. Meanwhile, **Campbell** officially recused himself from the debate while quietly appointing himself the new director of the ISS.

Open Mics

Borders, Jericho Turnpike, Syosset, hosted by Bill Ryan or Vincent Crici, first Thursday of the month. Sign-up at 7:30 p.m. *Next gig: Jan. 6.*

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

Sea Cliff Coffee Co., Sea Cliff, 7:30 p.m. Tuesdays.

University Cafe

Suny/Stony Brook, hosted by **Sonny Speed**, 8:30 p.m. third Thursday of the month. Featured performers followed by open mic. *Next gig: Jan. 21.*

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