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## COOKE-ING IN HUNTINGTON

### Open Mic Kicks Off at Cooke's Inn Restaurant

#### Next Workshop

*March 7*

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

#### Universal Dice

ISS member Gerry

Dantone's band,

Universal Dice, serves up a heaping dose of political commentary in its new CD, "Out of Many, One."

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#### Unfinished Business

ISS writing coach Mel

Glazer will lead a

workshop on unfinished songs Feb. 15

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#### Find It Online

Visit our web site,

[www.islandsongwriters.org](http://www.islandsongwriters.org)

By Pedro Pereira

The new place to be on Thursday nights in Huntington is the Cooke's Inn on New York Avenue (Route 110).

A new open mic kicked off on Jan. 20 at the restaurant, owned by Juanita Cooke, a friend of local luthier and ISS member **Scott McDonald's**. Scott set up the open mic with Juanita with the hope that the Cooke's Inn "will turn into a special place to see friends each week, play tunes, eat great food and have a great time," he said.

The open mic at the Cooke's Inn is a much-needed venue for the vibrant local music scene, which has been without a stage since the cancellation in September of a weekly gig at the Starbucks on Main Street.

Scott asked his friend **Gary Ivan**, a local artist, to host the event. Gary is a fixture of the local music scene and has MC-ed open mics around Huntington for many years, most recently at the Café Madonna.

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On debut night, a host of local performers showed up to play to a sizeable audience that braved the frigid weather to be there. Several people who attended said they were pleased with the location and the setup, and they would try to work the open mic into their weekly routines.

One of the main attractions of the Cooke's Inn is the food, of course. Juanita and her staff serve up a tasty menu of Caribbean, Cajun, Southern and soul food entrées that met with the approval of the crowd.

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## TORNADO ALLEY: AN ACOUSTIC TRIP

By Pedro Pereira

ISS Director **Sonny Speed** has put together an acoustic group in the vein of Crosby, Stills and Nash. The group, called Tornado Alley, features Sonny, ISS members **Vinny Crici** and **Tim Huss**, and drummer **Robert Langley**.

"This is an acoustic group with three-part harmonies," said Sonny. "It's all original American music that takes the listener on a cross-country road trip from New England to California while tuning in the local airwaves. It's based on the concept of '60s soloists forming groups like CS&N, Poco, The Souther Hillman Furay Band, Loggings and Messina, etc. We stay close to the roots of American music styles — something for everyone.

Sonny, who owns Son Spot Studio in Commack, has worked with all members of Tornado Alley in some capacity. He has produced Tim, worked with Vinny in ISS and is also a member of the Defibrillators, the celebrated aging-is-hip blues band for

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## COOKE-ING IN HUNTINGTON

### Writer's Choice

By Gerry Dantone

The Writer's Choice winner for January 2005 was **Vinny Crici** for "You and Your Piano."

#### Winner: Vinny Crici

A regular to the winner's circle, Vinny is well known for his mastery of melody, harmony and arresting chord changes that, though they may be surprising, are always sweetly appropriate.

This month's winning tune is a nearly perfect example of this strength in an area where many songwriters, basically, simply cannot compete.

The tune's premise is simple: someone's heart has been broken and the victim of love turns to the piano to find solace. With a new melody appearing almost every 30 seconds or so, there is never time to be bored.

Not only are there verses and choruses, there are also bridges, instrumental breaks, refrains, reprises and vamps! And perhaps the tune was not three minutes long! This constitutes a year's work for many of us! Congrats to the master of melody, Vinny Crici on another tuneful masterpiece.

*Gerry Dantone may just learn a 4th chord to go along with the trusty three others he already knows.*

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The open mic kicked off an hour later than the scheduled time of 7:30 p.m. Gary had some problems with the sound equipment, but he finally coaxed a single speaker to produce enough sound to get people in front of the microphone.

The list of performers included ISS members **Tony Tedeschi**, **Walter Sargent**, **Martha Trachtenberg** and yours truly, in addition to Scott McDonald himself, performer/producer **Larry Moser** and local guitar virtuoso **Nick Vermitsky**.

The excitement over having a place to play again in Huntington was palpable and each artist seemed to feel it by giving his or her all in front of the mic. The audience, comprising many of the folks who used to attend the Monday night open mic at Starbucks, seemed especially appreciative.

Hopefully, both performers and audience members can keep up the momentum to ensure that the open mic at the Cooke's Inn is a success and not a short-lived experience, as has been the case with just about every open mic in Huntington for the last two or three years.

The Starbucks gig lasted about two years, but even though it packed the little corner café with the big corporate name just about every Monday night, management decided last summer it was no longer viable, even after host **Seth Davis** tried to save the event by negotiating down his modest hosting fee. Previously, four other open mics had failed in the period of about a year. They were at the Madonna Café and at the café inside the Book Revue bookstore. Two other venues that hosted open mics briefly, 69 Wall Street and City Deli, now do business under different names.

At the Cooke's Inn, there is a \$5 minimum spending requirement for anyone who attends the Thursday night gig. Hopefully, this amount is modest enough for attendees and large enough for the establishment to keep the gig going.

The minimum spending requirement is a good idea. It seems to work at the Pisces Café in Babylon, which has a two-drink minimum during the open mics it features on Wednesday nights. That gig has been going for a while, so it seems the owner has hit on something.

So be sure to grab your guitar or keyboard and head down to the Cooke's Inn on Thursday nights.

## SONNY SPEED FORMS ACOUSTIC BAND

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Which Robert Langley plays drums.

Sonny said he was primarily looking for good harmonizing voices when he formed Tornado Alley. He said he may add a fiddle to the mix, and a CD of the band's music is definitely in the plans.

The band is wasting no time getting in front of the public. Its debut is already scheduled for Saturday, Feb. 12 at the Eclectic Café at the Unitarian Universalist Society of South Suffolk, 28 Brentwood Road, Bay Shore. Tornado Alley is scheduled to take the stage at 8:30 p.m., and an open mic is slated to start at 7:30 p.m. Anyone wishing to play should sign up by 7:15. Also playing that night will be acoustic performer Pat Wictor, who is touring in support of his fourth CD, "Waiting for the Water."

Admission is \$8 for adults and teens, and \$6 for senior citizens. A variety of refreshments is available. The Eclectic Café is an all-volunteer, non-profit organization, and it requests that anyone attending its shows donate canned or dry goods for local charities.

## CD Review

# UNIVERSAL DICE TACKLES BIG THEMES

By Pedro Pereira

Long Island band Universal Dice's third release is a musically and lyrically ambitious collection of songs, titled "Out of Many, One," that will have you tapping your foot while pondering some of the most controversial issues of our times.

Universal Dice is the band led by ISS Newsletter founder **Gerry Dantone**, who writes most of the tunes, sings and plays guitar. His musical co-conspirators are keyboardist Tom Beckner, guitarist Bob Barkus, songwriter/bassist Sam Camino and bass player Ed Canova.

From corporate layoffs to the child-molestation scandal in the Catholic Church to the plight of Afghan women under a repressive regime, Universal Dice tackles some difficult themes without ever succumbing to preachiness. And while condemnation and indignation occasionally accentuate the message, for the most part the band succeeds in taking a sympathetic approach to the issue at hand.

Such is the case with "I am the Woman Who Has Awoken," a song inspired by a poem written by Afghan female activist Meena, who was assassinated in 1987 for speaking out against fundamentalists and the Soviet-controlled puppet regime then ruling the country.

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Pop "Out of Many, One" in your player, and you'll quickly be singing along to the infectious chorus of "God Wants Me to Hate You," an uptempo number delivered with an intensity reminiscent of Elvis Costello's early music. The song offers an ironic take on the oft-repeated Bible-based justifications for homophobia. Or you might catch yourself swaying along the reggae rhythm of "Welcome to 1984," a track that deals with censorship.

Homophobia, censorship and gender repression in distant regimes may seem like a tall order to cover in one CD. But Universal Dice doesn't stop there. The band offers a rapid-fire litany of anti-right-wing themes that would make John Ashcroft weep.

For starters, "Out of Many, One" kicks off with "Master of Low Expectations," an ingenious satire on our current commander in chief that uses nothing but his own bumbling words to deliver its indictment. Gerry picked up such priceless presidential nuggets as "War is a dangerous place" and "I stand by all the misstatements that I've made" to write the song. And they are uncomfortably amusing.

But lest anyone walk away with the impression that "Out of Many, One," merely condemns, it's important to note that there is an undercurrent of hope that lifts the message into a positive plain. This is particularly the case with the songs "Still Alive in the USA," a percussion-heavy uptempo anthem and "Peace, Love," a Lenonesque ballad that asks, "Peace, love, is that all there is?" and goes on to conclude in a very understated way: "Peace, love, it comes down to this."

The band approaches each song with a visible sense of economy and lyrical sensibility. The music is as informed by the Beatles as by Costello and other late '70s/early '80s acts. "Out of Many, One" is mature rock for mature listeners who don't mind having to think when hearing music.

## Who Played What

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

**Bill Goldsmith**  
"All The Way Downtown"

**Suzanne Ernst**  
"Stephanie's Song"

**Mark Hussey**  
"Sorry I Let U Down"

**Frank Buddine**  
"A Life By Now?"

**Mike Suezia**  
"It's Your Birthday"

**Gerry Dantone**  
"Invisible Man"

**Andrew Kishner**  
"I'm Gonna Do A Little Dance"

**Bob Campbell**  
"Break Out"

**Vincent Crici**  
"You and Your Piano"

**Estelle Henrich**  
"The Sounds you Hear"

**Steve Lieberman**  
"Watching Me Puppy Play"

**Guy Prezzullo**  
"Constant Sea"



## 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](http://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 7*

### University Cafe

No University Café gig is scheduled for this month. Some changes in how this gig will be handled in the future will be revealed during the February ISS workshop.

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## 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.

In addition to creating a web presence for yourself, 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>

## Can't finish that song?

Still trying to finish that song you've been working on for weeks? Or even months or years? ISS writing coach **Mel Glazer** will help you. He has scheduled a workshop for unfinished lyrics and/or musical ideas for 6:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. Feb. 15 in Westbury. To enroll in the class, contact Mel at 516-829-2474.

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### 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: March 3.*

**The Cooke's Inn**, Huntington, 7:30 p.m. Thursdays

**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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### ISS Staff

**Director:** Sonny Speed  
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