



WHERE YOU BEEN?

Dwindling Participation Hurts ISS Cause

November 2005

Next Workshop

The next ISS monthly songwriting workshop is scheduled for Dec. 5.

Borders Mic Now on Fridays

Formerly on Thursdays, the monthly event is now scheduled for the first Friday of every month.

Next gig: Dec. 2

Writer's Choice

Frank Gambino takes the prize with a song about New Orleans.

More on page 2

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www.islandsongwriters.org

By Pedro Pereira

October was a long month. Sure, it was still the usual 31 days dutifully represented in your calendar, but between downpours, computer failures and a bunch of live music events, it proved to be a hectic month.

Poor me, I know. After all, my commute is one flight of stairs and a working Internet connection keeps me in business. That wasn't always the case in the past month, but I won't bore you with that. Or with the long woeful story of the failure of a six-month-old computer that put the publication of this issue of the newsletter in doubt. Or with the quick succession of power failures, cable outages and phone service disruptions that in some cases were attributable to the extreme bad weather we just had.

What I would rather address with you is participation. ISS is an organization, and as such, it is only as good as the contributions of its members. That means attendance at events organized by ISS is critical to keeping this organization dynamic and relevant.

Our semi-annual showcase at the University Café in SUNY Stony Brook attracted exactly one member who wasn't scheduled to perform.

I have been disappointed in the level of participation I have seen at recent events, including last month's workshop. Our semi-annual showcase at the University Café in SUNY Stony Brook attracted exactly one member who wasn't scheduled to perform. The same happened with an event at the Sea Cliff Coffee Co. in September.

Historically, or at least in the four years or so since I joined ISS, we experience ebbs and flows. And that is natural with any type of organization. The current decline in participation, however, is the worst I have seen.

ISS serves an important function for the community of singer/songwriters who draw support from the organization to improve our craft. But the organization's overall mission is diminished if we can't even muster more than one ISS member to attend events that showcase the art of our peers.

We all have busy lives and it is tough to make a lot of these events, especially for those of us who are parents. My hope is that we can all make a little more effort in supporting the organization. Otherwise, how can we expect the organization to continue supporting us in our individual musical endeavors?

Borders Open Mic Now on Fridays

The monthly ISS open mic at the Borders Café in Syosset has been moved to Fridays. Sign-up is still at 7:30 and the music still starts at 8 o'clock. The event, alternately hosted by **Vinny Crici** and **Bill Ryan**, includes a feature performance, typically by an ISS soloist or a band featuring ISS members. This month the featured performer is **Sarah Haddock**, who will play on Nov.

Continued on page 2



Keeping It Alive

Dwindling Participation Hurts Cause

Continued from page 1

4. The following month, on Dec. 2, the feature artist will be **Tornado Alley**, which features ISS Director **Sonny Speed**, Vinny, **Tim Huss** and **Robert Langdon**.

Be sure to stop by Borders, bring your guitar and get in front of the mic, or at the very least, just sit and listen.

Writer's Choice

By Pedro Pereira

Frank Gambino takes the big prize for the October workshop. Unfortunately for Frank, the prize is a big fat nothing aside from the

Winner: Frank Gambino

recognition of his peers, who gave him the Writer's Choice award for "Bourbon Again."

And deservedly so. Frank wrote about the tragedy in New Orleans with skill, even wit, avoiding the maudlin pitfalls that might trip up a less-skilled writer.

With his trademark funky rhythm and gravelly vocal, Frank sang, "Bourbon again, I can see its players/and its prayers and its mayors of song walking along/Help me old friends 'cause I'm feeling kinda queasy/It's so big and not so easy to face being erased."

Frank was the runaway winner, easily garnering more votes than the other songs presented at the workshop. Members commented on the imagery in the song as a main

Continued on page 4

At the Park

On Columbus Day weekend, the Long Island Fall Festival took place at Heckscher Park in Huntington. The festival is an annual event that includes a carnival, fair and live music. Among the acts this year was the **Defibrillators**, the aging-is-cool blues band whose members include Sonny Speed and long-time ISS member **Sonny Meadows**. The band ran through some numbers from its first CD, released two years ago, as well as some cuts from its next disk, due out in early 2006. As usual, the performance was top-notch.

Stony Brook Showcase

Did I mention that attendance at this event was shamefully low? Anyway, it was another night of wonderful performances, not unlike the first showcase last spring. Performers were **Walter Sargent**, **Bob Campbell**, Tim Huss with Sonny Speed, **Bob O'Malley**, **Steve Robinson**, **Frank Gambino** and **Bill Goldsmith**. Sonny Meadows' band, **Blacklisted and the Banned** also played. A second band, **Gerry Dantone's Universal Dice** had to cancel and there wasn't enough time to replace them. As a result, an unscheduled one-song performance by yours truly closed the show.

Speaking of Steve Robinson

Steve was the local featured performer at the Folk Music Society of Huntington's Hard Luck Café last month. This is a monthly gig that features an open mic and feature performances. Steve followed **Ina May Wool**, a New York-based singer songwriter who got her start in Massachusetts some years back. Ina May and guitarist **Dan Weiss** delivered a riveting performance.

Steve, a recent addition to the ISS member roster, delivered a compelling set of mostly originals, including a song he wrote about commuting to work by train with his wife. I can't remember the song title or any of the words, but damned if the melody hasn't gotten stuck in my head! As a songwriter and performer, Steve has it all: an accessible playing style, thoughtful lyrics and pleasant vocals. He has recorded a CD that he says should be out within weeks, and if it's anything like his performances, it will be worth picking up.

Which Leads Me to a Concluding Thought

The folk music society charges \$8 admission (\$6 if you're a member) to the Hard Luck Café series. The place was packed. Open mic players show up not knowing if there will be enough time for them to play. Yet, ISS events are free and we are having attendance problems. If we charge, will they come?

COMPARING ONLINE MUSIC DISTRIBUTORS

By Walter Sargent

Comparing digital music distributors isn't easy. On the surface, they are all busy looking as trendy as possible, but the claims are different, the markets are different, and what their services actually deliver are also very different.

In Part 1, we looked at some raw data to see how CD Baby's digital distribution partners compared on performance. Although the actual revenue was too small to draw meaningful conclusions, the fact that top two distributors accounted for 84 percent of the sales is a huge difference looking for a cause.

In Part 2, we look at the claims made by the services and begin interpreting these results. I'd like to make a distinction between "competitor" services and "ally" services. "Competitor services" have an intrinsic competing interest. Private-label distribution services that exclude independent musicians are obvious competitors. Services that accept the (freely offered) right to distribute their music, but for all practical purposes keep it out of the loop, are still competitors but in a less obvious way. These distributors tend to have a very consumer-oriented pitch that completely obscures their position on independents and any conflicts of interest. It is also pretty common for competitive services to exaggerate their claim to be a source of hip, new independent sounds. What gives them away is no-submissions policies.

"Ally services" are strategically aligned with the interests of independent musicians who are an integral part of the business model. mp3.com was an ally, a visionary and an early casualty of the online music industry. Many others, like CDBaby, Magnatune and Broadjam, are racing to fill the void. All allies have to declare themselves with artist-oriented pitch and, ideally, a submissions policy.

All CD Baby partners should be allies, but let's take a closer look.

Apple iTunes: The fairness and effectiveness of their service is indisputably aligned with independent artists.

Arvato: These guys are an enigma. It's clearly a business-to-business site with absolutely no mention of the music business or downloading.

AudioLunchbox: This site conspicuously features independent musicians. I found some really cool music on it the other day, but it's currently offline for an upgrade. Definitely worth a look.

Bitmunk: their streaming feature doesn't work and I can't find my CD through their search feature, only through their alphabetized listing.

BuyMusic: They feature mainstream musicians, but I was able to find my CD here although the audio clip doesn't seem to work.

Catch Music: their webs ite is AWOL.

Chondo: Specializes in black music worldwide. "Coming soon."

DigiPie: "Where everybody's a star?" I don't think so. If I can't find myself on this site, how's anyone else going to?

DigitalKiosk: This is an artist-neutral custom CD burner. They simply make your music available to anyone who already wants it.

Who Played What

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

Steven Peppas

You Aint' Fooling Me

Pedro Pereira

The Nod

Estelle Henrich

I'll Brew You a Cup of Coffee

Frank Gambino

Bourbon Again

Steve Robinson

Son of the Night

John Marranzini

The Days Go By

Mike Svezia

Little Lady

Sonny Meadows

Side Effects

Continued on page 4



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: Dec. 5

Online Music News

Continued from page 3

eMusic: Their web site puts me off, but I am hearing good things about them and I need to take a closer look.

Etherstream: My CD is listed and searchable, along with thousands of others. They feature a dozen CDs on their home page. I don't expect them to feature mine necessarily, but it would be useful if they stated their criteria. Are the CDs reviewed. Is it paid placement?

Inprodicon: This is a European business-to-business site. Presumably, they resell your material to others. For musicians, this is like a message in a bottle.

Liquid Digital Media: Hey, it's Walmart! Git'cher music right here for only 88 cents.

LoudEye: Heavily promotes mainstream artists. I don't think it does anything for independents.

MP3Tunes: Far more artist-friendly than most. Check out the artist's cafe.

MPeria: strong, community-oriented, artist-friendly web site, similar to MySpace.

MSN Music: Heavily promotes mainstream artists on the home page. It's hard to imagine getting a foot in the door here.

Music Is Here: "Coming soon"

MusicMatch: Heavily promotes mainstream artists.

MusicNet: A subscription service promoting mainstream artists. Too many to list here! Tune in next month for more info.

Writer's Choice

Continued from page 2

Reason for voting for "Bourbon Again." Frank worked in references to "Mr. Bojangles," Bourbon Street, "When the Saints Go Marching In" and various others to leave no doubt what he was singing about but without ever using the words "New Orleans."

Votes also went to **Sonny Meadows'** "Side Effects," my song "The Nod," **Steve Robinson's** "Son of the Night" and **John Marrantini's** "The Days Go By."

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: Dec. 2.*

Urban Coffee, Book Revue, Huntington, hosted by Scott McDonald, 8 p.m. Mondays (Call to first, it's not on every Monday.)

Nawlins Grille, Mineola, 8 p.m. Tuesdays

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