

January 2006

February Workshop

The next ISS songwriting workshop is scheduled for Feb. 6. With any luck, it won't snow.

Little Toby Walker On a Roll

And it couldn't happen to a nicer guy. The Long Island bluesman is about done recording a new CD and may soon be getting booked for gigs all over the country.

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KEEPING BUSY

ISS Director Finishes One CD, Starts Another

By Pedro Pereira

It will come as no surprise to anyone who knows him that ISS Director **Sonny Speed** is a busy man. In addition to running this organization, he holds down a full-time job, runs a recording studio out of his home in Commack and plays in two bands.

One of the band is the **Defibrillators**, a blues outfit that pokes fun at the travails of aging. The band has been around for more than four years and as of about a month ago, it has three CDs to its name.

A new CD, titled "Triple Bypass," is available for sale at band shows and CD Baby. The Defibrillators' discography also includes "Still Alive at the IMAC Theater," a live recording from October 2004 at the Huntington venue, and the eponymously titled debut CD from 2002.

A "Triple Bypass" release party is scheduled for Sunday, Feb. 12 at the Boulton Center Theater on Main Street in Bay Shore. The event starts at 4 p.m., with ISS member **Steve Robinson** as opening act to be followed on stage by the Defibrillators. Admission is free.

Happy New Year!

Besides Sonny, who produces and plays keys for the band, the Defibrillators also include ISS troubadour **Sonny Meadows**, who sings and writes most of the lyrics, guitar players **Bob Westcott** and **Dr. Max Foreman**, bassist **Bob Catrano**, and drummer **Robert Langley**.

As the Defibrillators CD hits the streets, Sonny Speed already is back in the studio, this time with his other band, **Tornado Alley** (See page 2 for a report by ISS member **Suzanne Ernst** on a recent Tornado Alley show.) The band also includes ISS members **Vinny Crici** and **Tim Huss** as well as the Defibrillators' Langley.

Recording of the Tornado Alley CD started at the end of December and Sonny said he expects the CD to be completed some time in the spring. The goal is to release it around May 1.

The CD will feature songs penned by Sonny, Tim and Vinny, all of whom are accomplished songwriters. Staples of the band's live shows are expected to find their way into the CD, and Sonny said the band is planning to record 16 songs, though no final number of tracks has been set for the CD.

Tornado Alley is working on instrumental rhythm tracks, the recording of which will take the first month or so, and then come the vocals, according to Sonny.

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Tornado Alley Tears It Up At Borders Café Appearance

Writer's Choice

By Pedro Pereira
The man is unstoppable. **Sonny Meadows** once again wins the Writer's Choice award, this time for the song "Angel from the Dark Side of Heaven."

Winner: Sonny Meadows

The prize as usual is a big fat nothing, but Sonny gets to enjoy the recognition of his peers once again.

"Angel," as its title implies, is a dark song. Sonny tackles the topics of sex, betrayal, pleasure and pain with wit and creativity, taking some forays into Biblical turf to drive his point home.

"She kept fillin' my glass to the rim with gin/I let her fingers go walkin' from my knees to my chin," Sonny wrote. "She said the savior's with the sailors out on the sea/Hurricane offshore – no time for you and me."

With writing like that, it's no wonder the man keeps winning the Writer's Choice. This is the second in a row. Will he make it a trifecta?

Congratulations to Sonny for another well-deserved win.

by Suzanne Ernst

Tornado Alley created an exciting and make-yourself-a-memory musical experience for those of us who were lucky enough to be on hand for their featured performance at the Borders Café in Syosset on Dec. 2.

I had seen Tornado perform a few times, but that Friday night at Borders they were all at the top of their performance game. **Sonny Speed, Vinny Crici, Tim Huss** and **Robert Langley** created a positive force that befits the band's name.

The songs the group picked were varied in style, rhythm and lyrical content. Vinny's beautiful "Love Can Learn," sung in dedication to his wife Gail, was touching and as gentle as a breeze. Sonny's cowboy song, "Cowboy Blue," as good or better than many songs from the saddle, made me want to sing harmony around the camp fire.

Tim's ode to life in California titled "California" drove its refrain right into the most layback ear. Robert added his harmonious voice to "Ain't Too Old For That" while providing percussion.

The band performed for about 40 minutes with some relaxed and fun kibitzing between songs and tune-ups. Their ease of presentation gave me a comfortable feeling, and the resounding applause at the end of each tune made me feel like a proud fellow ISS member.

Tornado Alley will be playing again on Feb. 18 at the Folk Music Society of Huntington's Hard Luck Café at the Congregational Church of Huntington in Centerport. Give the band a listen; these guys are good.

ISS DIRECTOR KEEPING BUSY

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Laying the vocal tracks will likely take a fair amount of work, since so much of the band's sound revolves around the three- and four-part harmonies of the Tornado members.

Sonny started the band last year with a specific concept in mind that revolves around the harmonies and the different styles of American music, from blues to bluegrass to folk to breezy California pop. And if that sounds too disparate, it's understandable, but it works beautifully.

Look for more updates on the band's recording in upcoming issues.

Toby Walker on a Roll

Little Toby Walker, Long Island's favorite blues son and emerging international star, has been on a roll. He is recording a new CD with lots of illustrious guests, including **Steady Rollin' Bob Margolin**, who played

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Open Mic Update

PLAYING IN FLORAL PARK

By Tony Tedeschi

Lately, it seems as if open mics are dying all over Long Island. Clearly, most have a lifespan dependent upon player interest, the ability to attract some level of audience, the patience of the venue's owner and the ability of the emcee to get along with the owner.

Recently ex of emceeing my own open mic, I know it's more of a challenge than people realize. So when **Doug Kwartler** e-mailed me that he was starting an open mic at the Trinity Restaurant and Bar in Floral Park, on Monday evenings, I wanted to support this new venue. I had reason to believe this one might have staying power.

For starters, Doug is an accomplished singer/musician/songwriter. Hearing Doug sing and play guitar on his composition "Silver Meteor" at an open mic months ago was one of those light bulb moments for me. It was a song that sucked you into its narrative and wound you around in its music.

"The Hollow Body Studios open mic is a true listening room environment. It's located in its own separate and intimate room within the Trinity Restaurant and Bar, making the space more conducive to nurturing live acoustic music."

— Doug Kwartler

I bought Doug's CD, and listening to it, with its carefully layered instrumentation, all balanced wonderfully, turned me into a fan. It was another piece of evidence, for me, that Long Island harbors an extraordinary level of musical talent. Doug also runs his own recording studio – Hollow Body Studios – and transfers those audio skills to his open mic. Open mics tend to have their own personalities and this one is no different.

"In the tradition of the Post Crypt open mic at Columbia University, The Hollow Body Studios open mic is a true listening room environment," Doug says. "It's located in its own separate and intimate room within the Trinity Restaurant and Bar, making the space more conducive to nurturing live acoustic music. Additionally, both performers and audience get the best of both worlds, since just outside the performance space is the bar and restaurant. So, come early for dinner or drinks and stay for the open mic."

Amplification is via a PA with cable and a tuner. Because of the intimate room size, only slight amping is necessary. The environment is also conducive to performers playing purely acoustic if they desire. While acoustic guitars are encouraged, you can play electric, but it must go through the PA; no additional amplifiers of any kind are permitted. In other words, it's a small room and you can't play heavy metal.

Having said that, I've played electric and the sound is fine. There is a 61-key MIDI keyboard with a sound module for piano and organ sounds that goes through the PA. Because of the small size of the room, only snare drums with brushes or congas, djembes or doumbeks are appropriate.

The open mic is every Monday from 8-11:30 p.m. at the Trinity Restaurant and Bar; 190 Jericho Turnpike, Floral Park, NY; 516-358-5584. For more details go to www.dougmusic.com/openmic

Who Played What

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

Bill Goldsmith

Robot of the Year

Suzanne Ernst

Sparrow's Song

Stuart Markus

Stop Messin' with My Heart

Sonny Meadows

Angel from the Dark Side of Heaven

Pedro Pereira

For the Moment

Mike Gordon

Nothing Gold Can Stay

Estelle Henrich

The Activists

Steve Robinson

Little Rock 'n Roller

Bob Campbell

Thank You for Loving Me



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: February 6

Keeping Busy

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guitar for Muddy Waters for several years.

Other guests include **Buddy Merriam** (mandolin) and **Ernie Sykes** (upright bass) of Backroads, **Bob 'Hooch' Palucci** and **George Christ** on harmonicas. Local singer/songwriter **Martha Trachtenberg**, who lent her voice years ago to the famous Folgers jingle "The Best Part of Waking Up Is Folgers In Your Cup," also does some vocals on the upcoming Toby Walker CD, which he says is due in February.

In other Toby Walker news, he was expecting to sign with McShane Glover of Noteworthy Productions, an agency that does a lot of booking along the East Coast as well as California and the Midwest. "It looks like I'll be putting even more miles on my car," Toby says.

Open Mics

Borders, Jericho Turnpike, Syosset, hosted by Bill Ryan or Vincent Crici, first Friday of the month. Sign-up at 7:30 p.m. *Next gig: February 3*

Urban Coffee, Huntington, 8 p.m. Mondays

Trinity Restaurant and Bar, Floral Park, 8 p.m. Mondays

O'Reilly's Pub, Oakdale, 9 p.m. Tuesdays

Cool Beanz, St. James, 8 p.m. Wednesdays

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