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A Chance to Make History at Dowling

BY PEDRO PEREIRA

Olivia Marie, of Dowling College, attended the ISS workshop in February to issue a challenge to members: Write an anthem for the college this month so it will be ready for graduation.

The contest offers local songwriters an opportunity to become part of the school's history. Whoever writes the winning song also will get a cash prize of \$200.

In addition, Olivia is lining up a professional studio in the area to record the winning song.

To make the anthem ready in time for graduation, Olivia is shooting to present a demo by March 20 to the college's president and board.

More information on the Dowling College anthem writing opportunity is available at the ISS web site, www.islandsongwriters.org. You may also contact Olivia at 516-446-2585.

The new Dowling College anthem will be performed during graduation May 22 at the Nassau Coliseum.

The Open Mic Experience

BY SUZANNE ERNST

When I go to an open mic, I take my usual trepidations about performing in front of others, but I go also with the anticipation of people listening to something I created – lyrics that reflect an experience or a feeling, an idea or point of view – and music that I hope is interesting and/or pleasing to the ear.

I attend an open mic hoping to be “heard” – not just the words and music, but heard also as a fellow human with strengths and flaws.

When I get to the open mic venue, my intention usually is:

- To share what I have worked on, and get a sense of people's reaction to the song
- To listen to other people's music, and notice my own reactions to their songs

The open mic is an opportunity to get a peek into the inner workings of fellow songwriters.

I know I may be about to hear something that will affect me both musically and

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The Open Mic Experience

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and humanly, not that either of these can really be separated.

Open mics are a unique experience every time I attend one.

Each venue, on each night, with any group of performers is never the same. Even if one performs the same song one did at the last open mic, the performance will always be different, guaranteed.

That's part of the fun and the draw, I believe.

If I have the opportunity to hear a recording of my performance, I can probably hear how I breathe, or if I am smiling when I sing, if I flub a note on the strings or keyboard, or if I forget the words of a song I have sung dozens of times.

At a live open mic performance, I have the chance to experiment, to let go of inhibitions, to let the music flow, to make mistakes and move on.

Sometimes when I change something at an open mic, it gives me an idea for changing how I perform other songs, or how I will perform the song differently, if and when I record it.

When I watch other performers at the venue, I have the opportunity to experience what the audience is feeling toward the performer – to see how I feel when people do the same things that I do when I am “up there”.

Some people can make jokes about the words they forgot and we, the audience, laugh. Other people make a joke, and it falls “flat” – no audience response. Hey, we can't all be standup comics *and* musicians.

Sometimes the feedback the audience gives at an open mic is obvious: loud applause.

Other times, the “feedback” is more subtle: louder talking, less attention to the performance. Well, maybe that's not so subtle.

Occasionally, someone may compliment the performer or give some constructive comment on the performance.

That makes the whole evening worthwhile...or it makes one's thoughts busy for the rest of the night!

Perhaps there are things that are unexpressed by the audience. Subtler experiences that the audience cannot telegraph with the clapping of hands.

Assuming, correctly or incorrectly, that I am affected by the performer the same way that I affect the audience, I may have these thoughts:

Do I like the vocal but not the instrumentation? Or vice versa?

Does the performer sound unsure, confident? Depressed, upbeat? Giddy? Angry? Too self-effacing, too pushy?

Is the sound system too loud, too bassy, too muffled for the performers' words to be heard?

Is the instrument in tune? Why is the mic feeding back?

I can't hear the second singer. The volume of the instrument is too low or too high.

The performer is drowning himself out by pounding on the instrument.

I can't hear the performer when she sings in her lower range. (I stole this one from Frank Gambino.)

The best open mic for me is when I go, I sing, I relax and listen and enjoy a beverage and some conversation with friends...and I don't think about all of the stuff above this sentence.

Other times, the “feedback” is more subtle: louder talking, less attention to the performance. Well, maybe that's not so subtle.

'Girls Night Out' at the Eclectic Cafe

ISS member Denise Romas will be sharing the bill with Lora Kendall at the Eclectic Cafe on Saturday March 10. Dubbed "Girls Night Out," the show kicks off at 7:30 with an open mic, which will be followed with performances by Denise and Lora.

"Lora and I will be performing on our own for some portion of the evening, and then together for some, along with Robert Langley on percussion and some other surprise guests," said Denise, who plans to perform originals and do interpretations of songs by well-known artists.

Lora is a member of the band Tornado Alley, founded by ISS Director Sonny Speed, and of the country band The Red River Ramblers.

"Lora and I put together a song a while back for an open mic, but other than that, we have not performed together before. It was the Eclectic Cafe organizers that thought it would be a fun billing and have even called the evening 'Girls' Night Out,'" Denise said.

Eclectic Cafe events take place at the Unitarian Universalist Society of South Suffolk, 28 Brentwood Road, Bay Shore. More details about the show are available at www.eclecticcafe.org.

Writer's Choice: A Friendly Song

"A Good Friend" is this month's winner of the Writer's Choice award for February. "Friend" is a smart, smoky jazz number by George Bouchard.

The rich chords and voicing really set this song up well. One member summed it up: "a nice, professional jazz piano tune - perfect for a sultry chanteuse."

"Righteous Song" by Mark Hussey is the night's number 2. As usual, Mark gave us an original concept, strong sense of composition and fine delivery. One member wrote, "excellent - I loved it."

Honorable Mentions:

"In The Moment" by Denise Romas

"Live Your Life With No Regrets" by Maria Elaine Di Falco

"You" by Andrew Kirshner

"Sea Of Time" by Mike Keopper

Pereira to Rock Cool Beanz Cafe

ISS Newsletter Editor Pedro Pereira is going to rock the house at Cool Beanz in St. James on March 10. He'll be performing originals, including some tracks from his upcoming CD, "Last Man on the Planet."

Oh, yeah, four other performers are on the bill: Claude Margouleff, Carla Lange, Russell Amundsen and John Wacaster.

Organized by Bob Krummenacher, the show starts at 8 p.m. Cool Beanz is at 556 Route 25A, Smithtown.

Who Played What

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

John Pagliarulo

Fog and Euphoria

Maria Elaine DiFalco

Live Your Life with No Regrets

Denise Romas

In the Moment

Pedro Pereira

Cobblestones

Mike Svezia

War Song

George Bouchard

A Good Friend

Estelle Henrich

There's Always One More

Andrew Kirshner

You

Michael Koepper

Sea of Time

Mark Hussey

The Righteous Song

Lois Morton

Change of Address

A usual, Mark gave us an original concept, strong sense of composition and fine delivery.

iss

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Steve Robinson

Frank Gambino

We're on the Web!

See us at

www.islandsongwriters.org

The Open Mic Experience

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Oh, one more thing... Thank goodness for open mics, and for those who take the time to drag those heavy amps and speakers to and from the open mics.

...And thanks to those of you who sit behind the amp and twist the dials that help us to sound our best.

Don't forget: The next open mic at Borders Cafe, Route 25, Syosset, is April 6. This gig is monthly, on the first Friday of the month.

Monthly Workshop

Test out your songs in front of a crowd by playing them for fellow musicians who will provide constructive feedback with the goal of helping you improve as a songwriter.

The ISS workshop takes place the first Monday of every month, except if it falls on a holiday, at Five Towns College, off Burrs Lane in Dix Hills. Run by ISS Director Sonny Speed, the workshop starts at 7:30 p.m.

Bring a guitar if you wish to perform your song live, or you may bring a

recording on CD or tape. A piano is available for those who write their songs at the keys.

Be sure to bring 25 copies of your lyric sheets so the other workshop attendees can follow along while listening to your song. It is much easier to provide constructive criticism when people can read the lyrics.

The ISS workshop is at the center of the organization's mission to help songwriters perfect their craft. Many performers on Long Island got their start at ISS.

General Information

For general information about ISS or how to join the organization, contact ISS Director Sonny Speed at mcspeed@optonline.net or 631- 462-3300.

To submit items for publication in the newsletter, contact Pedro Pereira at pedropereira@verizon.net.

Visit our web site at www.islandsongwriters.org.