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# Rhyme This: Tricks of Songwriting

BY MARK HUSSEY

Before I ever took up songwriting, circa 2000AD, I'd occasionally hear or read anecdotes like this: Some very well-known artist had written a hit song in a flood of spontaneous inspiration, words and music arriving whole, and at once...virtually pre-packaged. All the artist had to do was unwrap the package in his or her mind, and *voila*, a sparkling new song!

Now, a few times in the last five years I have experienced this and can testify that it is a real phenomenon, not some cock and bull story, or a flight of imagination.

Unfortunately, for most of us songwriters, these fast-track, sudden song births are rare. Much more often it takes a lot of brain twisting, head scratching, chin stroking and chord chasing just to lay down the basic infrastructure of a good song. It takes time and methodical effort.

Now, talking ISS songcraft here: *Just what does one do if the creative process keeps getting mired down in mental quicksand?* What if neither the words or the music are coming easy, even though somewhere in the back of your head you suspect a truly worthy song is gestating?

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## Pereira, DiFalco at Bellmore Library April 12

ISS Newsletter Editor Pedro Pereira and ISS newcomer Maria Elaina DiFalco will be featured this month at an organization event at the Bellmore Memorial Library. The event is part performance, part workshop, and it is scheduled for 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. on Thursday, April 12.

The first half of the event will be a "writers in the round" performance during which Pedro and Maria Elaina will take turns playing original songs. They also will talk about the process of songwriting and how the songs they are playing came about.

The second hour of the event will be a discussion about songwriting that is open to the public. Aspiring songwriters are encouraged to attend and perform original compositions that other attendees and the ISS members present will critique.

The idea, much like in the monthly songwriting workshops at Five Towns College, is to offer constructive input to help budding songwriters take their craft to the next step.

The Bellmore Memorial Library is located at 2288 Bedford Avenue in Bellmore.

**NEXT ISS WORKSHOP: MAY 7**

**ASTA OPEN MIC: APRIL 11**

**BORDERS OPEN MIC: APRIL 6**

## Rhyme This: The Tricks of Songwriting

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In my very amateur opinion, the first thing to do when stuck in these doldrums is to release your obsessive grip on this song, at least for a while. Take the pressure off yourself. Go back to the song later. And have some fun by trying your hand at some songwriting drills.

The crude, insane, brilliantly insightful comic philosopher George Carlin offers some help. In his boo, "Braindroppings," Carlin presents a short list of "Rhymes You Just Don't Hear In Songs Anymore." He lines up about a dozen word pairs that in fact are rhymes, but in all likelihood were never, ever used in any published song. Several from Carlin's list:

- surgery/perjury
- humor/tumor
- nudist/Buddhist
- mobster/lobster
- decaffeinated/decapitated

You get the picture.

So, instead of crying into the hole at the center of your guitar and having a pity party over the song stuck in your subconscious mind, get loose and see if you can make up an entirely new and different song, one that only you will know about, not an actual "performance" number, and enjoy yourself.

Here, someone is feeding you rhymes that should make the writing much easier to manage. And the less seriously you take the challenge, the easier it will be. But easy or not, this is something that can actually improve your lyric writing skills while getting your mind off the stuck song that's bugging you.

So, using Carlin's lunatic rhymes, here's a songwriting drill sample. It took me about 15 minutes or so:

### ***An Evening at Eugene's***

*At a hotel in lovely downtown Toronto  
I befriended a concierge whose nickname was Tonto  
He recommended dining at a bistro named Eugene's  
But warned they didn't serve patrons in blue jeans  
So I changed, went there, bought a huge Maine coast lobster  
And heard the brash words of a finely dressed mobster  
At a table nearby, he was speaking of perjury  
And he gave me a look that said, "You're gonna need surgery."  
Etc. Etc.*

So, yes, this song has no music to it yet, but it does have a rhythm, and that's a start. The lyrics are silly and, so far, they don't really lead anywhere meaningful. But that's the point: It's only a drill.

Friends, when a good song is grounded in your head, take the *Little Bo Peep* approach: "Leave them alone and they'll come home, wagging their tails behind them."

Your song will eventually emerge. A fun songwriting exercise for laughs and relaxation may be just the prescription to success with your serious song. Or, maybe you'll wind up liking the drill song better than the one you were struggling with! Good luck, and may the force, or the farce, be with you.

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*Friends,  
when a  
good song is  
grounded in  
your head,  
take the  
Little Bo  
Peep  
approach:  
"Leave them  
alone and  
they'll come  
home,  
wagging  
their tails  
behind  
them."*

## Writer's Choice: Lois Morton's 'Passing By'

BY WALTER SARGENT

The winning Writer's Choice song for March is "Passing By" written by Lois Morton, who used a passing train as a metaphor for life.

The song evokes images of wistfully watching the train roll by, a feeling probably most of us experience at one point or another when fretting about whether life is leaving us behind.

Lois has a clever twist in the last verse: "And that's a funny thing, I never thought I'd find/I've been on the train all this time." Here's one member's succinct summation of the song: "Very clever."

Hot on its heels were "A Duey Pyle" by Estelle Henrich and "It's Not Mine" by (Suzanne Ernst) which tied for number two. "Pyle" was another delightful example of Estelle's wry humor and deadpan delivery. "Every line a laugh," remarked one member. That's an understatement. This song had us howling.

"It's Not Mine" was a beautiful, soulful blues number with some surprising musical turns. Suzanne's material is always well conceived and delivered, but I think there was a feeling that 'It's Not Mine' pushed the envelope a bit. Great job!

Honorable mentions:

"Steel Umbrella" (Rob Coffin) "Powerful vocals, heart-felt message... Great musical change-ups"

"This Old Town" (Pedro Pereira) "Wonderful imagery... moving."

"If You want It All" (Marie Elanor DiFalco) "Loved the refrain...Very well sung."

"I'm Alright" (Denise Romas) "Reminiscent of Joni at her best... stunning."

"Treat Me Right" (Vince Gangi) "Blues-rock at its irreverent best."

## Denise Romas at Finch Mountain Concert Series

ISS member Denise Romas will be playing a set Sunday April 29 at the Finch Mountain House Concert Series. She will be opening for Michael Smith, writer of the song "The Dutchman," which was a hit in the 1970s for Steve Goodman.

Denise's set is slated to begin at 3 p.m., following a pot luck supper that kicks off at 2 p.m. Michael Smith will take the stage after a short break following her performance.

The concert series takes place at the home of Jack and Karen Finkenberg in Babylon. It is necessary to reserve a seat for the show by calling 631-661-1278 or e-mailing [finchconcert@yahoo.com](mailto:finchconcert@yahoo.com). With the reservations, you will receive the directions to the house. Tickets cost \$20, \$5 of which will be donated to a charity designated by Michael Smith.

## Who Played What

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

### Bill Goldsmith

Let's Take Out the Hudson

### Maria Elaine DiFalco

If You Want It All

### Lois Morton

Passing By

### Pedro Pereira

This Old Town

### Bill Mega

Live for Today

### David Bailey

All These Kisses

### Estelle Henrich

A Duey Pyle

### Suzanne Ernst

It's Not Mine

### Walter Sargent

We Stand Taller

### Tim Dillon

Time

### Denise Romas

It's All Right, It's OK

### Vince Gangi

Treat Me Right

### Rob Coffin

Steel Umbrella

### John Pagliarulo

Love of Angelo

### Joel Levine

Learning Lessons

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See us at

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

## ISS Open Mics

**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. Signup is at 7:30 p.m and the music starts at 8 p.m.

The **Asta Wine Cafe and Art Gallery**, 334 Main Street, Huntington, open mic is April 11. Sign up is at 7 p.m. and the music starts at 7:30 p.m. Look in this space in future issues of the ISS Newsletter for news about the Asta open mic.

### *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](mailto:mcspeed@optonline.net) or 631- 462-3300.

To submit items for publication in the newsletter, contact Pedro Pereira at [pedropereira@verizon.net](mailto:pedropereira@verizon.net).

Visit our web site at [www.islandsongwriters.org](http://www.islandsongwriters.org).