

December 2008

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Next Workshop

January 5

Borders Open Mic

The show is cancelled for December. The next one is Jan. 2.

Dog Show

Open mics get cancelled all the time for different reasons, but usually as a result of low participation. But on Nov. 19 at Cool Beanz, the weekly Wednesday open mic was cancelled after a dog "drove" a van into the shop... through the window. No one was hurt, and the open mic was to resume the following week.

Happy Holidays!

Songwriting

Inspiration Where You Can Get It

BY PEDRO PEREIRA

I wrote a lot of lyrics sitting on the morning train to Manhattan when I used to commute. For some reason, the early hour combined with the rocking of the train triggered some creative element for me. I wasn't always able to marry the lyrics I would jot down on the train to workable melodies or chord progressions, but I still managed to complete the occasional song.

These days my commute is a 20-second walk down the stairs, so I no longer get the train-induced inspiration. Perhaps as a result of that or because I am writing a lot more for my day job (you can only write so much), I am not writing nearly as many songs as I did some years back.

Inspiration is a little harder to come by. Having tackled most themes I care about, topics are harder to find. And having gotten a little better at the guitar, though not much, I am pickier about crafting the song.

Watching movies and seeing other performers live often trigger ideas for songs.

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Writer's Choice: Tim Dillon's 'I Will'

BY GERRY DANTONE

That was easy. Tim Dillon's victory in the November 2008 Writer's Choice Sweepstakes, that is. His tune, "I Will," was a melodic and well-crafted song about trying to understand life, love and even one's own decisions. The song outdistanced the competition easily.

A pretty fingerpicking style accentuated a sensitive and thoughtful lyric that focused on a lost love and the indecipherable journey we take through life. Tim's deft playing and singing added to the landslide that politicians and ISS songwriters usually only dream of.

Tim's victory illustrates another lesson for songwriters (and politicians, too): The presentation is all-important.

While many advise songwriters to keep their presentations simple and spare, the truth is that most persons, including music industry decision-makers cannot imagine the possibilities of a particular song unless the possibilities are given to them on a silver platter. It is the rare person who recognizes a great song when the performance is mundane or ordinary.

So on all counts, performance and material, Tim Dillon scored big. Well done!

Gerry Dantone envies fingerpicking singer/songwriters.

iss

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Getting Inspiration Where You Can Get It

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One good example is my song "Baggage," a ballad whose lyrics and melody came to me in a rush after watching the movie "Once." The themes of melancholy and hope in the movie recalled a couple of lines I had toyed with for months, even years, but that I hadn't been able to develop into a full song until then. Once the credits rolled, I sat down with a guitar, and 15 minutes later the song was done.

Another song, "Stars" resulted from a line in a book I was reading. The protagonist muses that if humans could reach the stars, they would probably pull them down for selfish purposes, hence the lines in the song, "If you could reach the stars.../Would you pull them down/spread them on the ground/And sell them by the slice/For the highest price." Fortuitously, the lines fit well with a chord progression I had been messing around with.

These are happy examples. For every song whose completion quickly follows inspiration, I have three or four that are still waiting for that missing line, the right chorus or the killer bridge. As frustrating as these can be, it's best not to rush them. Leonard Cohen takes years, even decades, to complete one song, and he's done all right!

The trick is to stay alert, jot down cool lines and record ideas as they come to you. They tend to vanish forever as quickly as they come to you. Whatever you do, don't waste the inspiration, and get it where you can.

ISS Open Mic

The next open mic at **Borders Cafe**, Route 25, Syosset, is Jan. 2. There is no show in December. This gig is monthly, on the first Friday of the month, hosted by Vinny Crici. Signup is at 7:30 p.m and the music starts at 8 p.m.

Who Played What

Here is a list of the performers and songs from last month's ISS workshop:

Steve Lieberman: First Diaspora: Egypt; Sal Weeks: Joe Completely Commonplace; Gerry Dantone: The Prophet; Tim Dillon: I will; Marguerite Cassell: What Do You Say?; Suzanne Ernst: Sweet Hollow Road; Sonny Meadows: She's Got Jesus; John Finnerty: Death and Taxes; Mike Svezia: Part of the Team; Pedro Pereira: Blindness; Estelle Henrich: Roy G. Biv; Lois Morton: Moon Food; Vince Gangi: I Got It Bad for You; Mark Hussey: Culture Shock; Cousin Steve: Held a Ray of Sunshine

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.