

September 2009

www.islandsongwriters.org



**Next Workshop**  
October 5 at Five  
Towns College.

**Borders  
Open Mic**

The next show is  
Friday, October 2.  
Hosted by Vincent  
Crici.

**Writer's Choice**

Find out what song  
won on Page 2.

# A New Chapter

## Director's Log: What Should We Change?

BY WALTER SARGENT

As the ISS begins a new chapter, my thoughts have been about direction and change. What's really working for us? What's not working?

The simple answer seems to be that the ISS is basically working and "if it ain't broke, don't fix it." But is it working as well as it could be? Is there room for improvement? Just as we might examine a song to see what makes it tick, we might also examine the workshop and see what makes the workshop tick.

Consider:

- Songwriting skills – What can really be taught and learned in a workshop?
- Peer review – What makes these positive or negative experiences?
- Creativity – What blocks it? What fuels it?

Improving one's songwriting skills would be the natural goal of any songwriting workshop, but what can really be taught and how to teach it is not so obvious. In "The Craft of Lyric Writing," author Sheila Davis writes, "The craft and technique of lyric writing most assuredly can be taught." The more we use the language of objective songwriting principles in our feedback on songs, the less need there is for value judgments. Value judgments, even well-intended ones, are less valuable than skillful assessments.

At its best, peer review not only informs us, but it also inspires and motivates us. Inspiration and motivation can be just as beneficial as skill development. The downside is that it can be discouraging, draining – even damaging. I see the Writer's Choice award, for instance, as a mixed bag. I am sure it has inspired some healthy competition, but the truth is – as fair and positive as I've tried to make it – the award ignores far more songwriting achievements than it recognizes. How can there not be room for improvement?

The creative process might seem to be a highly subjective, solitary, or even mysterious business. Yet, as with songwriting, specific concepts can be taught and learned. For example, how does perfectionism block the creative process? Julia Cameron, author of "The Artist's Way," says, "Perfectionism is not a quest for the best. It is a pursuit of the worst in ourselves, the part that tells us that nothing we do will ever be good enough – that we should try again." The ISS workshop is not a workshop on creativity, but understanding the creative process can create a safer environment, increase our artistic options and encourage risk-taking.

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## A New Chapter: What Should We Change?

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The ISS has a tradition of keeping discussions about ISS "business" during the workshop to a minimum. The goal is not to exclude members from the process, but to stay focused on becoming better songwriters by sharing our music. This is an excellent tradition, but a little group discussion now and then could go a long way. I might think I have good ideas, but everyone's experience is a little different. The workshop could benefit from a little group discussion now and then.

## Writer's Choice: 'Winter's Spring Fever' by Mark Hussey

BY WALTER SARGENT

No one who was at the August workshop can deny this killer ballad had it all. Topically, it was meaningful and moving. Musically, it was inventive and rich. Lyrically artful, its execution was exquisite thanks in part to the vocal artistry of ISS member Suzanne Ernst. Am I over the top? No. You had to be there. Here's what other members had to say: "Great lyrics! Melody fits like a glove. A++... It has everything... Sweet... Your best tune yet. "

The runner-up was a close one. We had record attendance. We heard 21 songs and several ballots were split, but I'm calling it for "Roger's Wine" by Tim Huss. This song was superbly conceived, constructed and executed, members had little to say except "loved it... lots of good songs ... tough choice."

But wait, there are still more votes and praise to go around:

"Cowboy Blues" (Sonny Speed): "All good elements - melody, lyrics... just a great feeling."

"Inside the Rain" (Tim Dillon): "Very moving, straight from the heart... Beautifully delivered."

"George Costanza" (Denise Romas): "Beautiful and funny at the same time."

"Diet Is Cast" (Lois Morton): "Perfect, hilarious... a gem."

## Who Played What

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

Steve Lieberman: "I Wish I Was Hot;" David Anthony: "I Am Alone;" Denise Romas: "George Costanza;" Gerry Dantone: "Honesty;" Vince Gangi: "You Take Me There;" Mark Hussey: "Winter's Spring Fever;" Jim Baron: "Someone;" David Bailey: "Gates of Graceland;" Tim Huss: "Roger's Wine;" Estelle Hendrich: "The Night that I called 911;" Suzanne Ernst: "Oh So Many Years;" Bobby Catrano: "The Return of Mr. Green Genes;" Steve Robinson: "Little Rock and Roller;" Frank Gambino: "Pavement;" Lois Morton: "the Diet is Cast;" Andrew Kirshner: "Thank you for the Dream;" Ken Krumenacker: "Time With You;" John Finerty: "Malcontent;" Tim Dillon: "Inside the Rain;" Sonny Meadows: "Tolerance"

## 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 Walter Sargent at [waltersargent@optonline.net](mailto:waltersargent@optonline.net). 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).