

November 2009

www.islandsongwriters.org



Next Workshop
December 7 at Five
Towns College.

**Borders
Open Mic**

The next show is
Friday, December 4,
Hosted by Vincent
Crici.

Writer's Choice

Find out what song
won on Page 2.

**Defibrillators
Play Plainview**

The blues band will
play December 11
starting at 7:30 p.m.
at the Plainview-Old
Bethpage Public
Library, 999 Old
Country Road,
Plainview.

Keep It Simple

In Songwriting, Complexity is the Enemy

BY PEDRO PEREIRA

I am by no means a songwriting expert. I've written a few songs, some of which I have been very happy with. Some have earned me a plaudit or two from listeners. I am always extremely grateful for that.

I am a writer, and writing is all I ever remember wanting to do from an early age. As a teen I was learning fancy multi-syllabic words and trying to work them into intelligent-sounding sentences. You can probably guess that some of those sentences turned out unreadable, but at the time they sounded great... to me.

It took many years of reporting and getting beat up by editors for it to sink in: Simplicity is the essence of beautiful writing. It's a maxim I as an editor and occasional tutor have tried to instill in other writers. It isn't always welcome. The ornate and complex have a strong pull.

It takes a certain amount of experience, of trial and error, to arrive at the conclusion that simplicity is beauty. Indeed, it is a process I continue to go through as a songwriter. Most songs start out way too complex, and as I refine the words and plug them into a melody, they gradually become more polished. It's the polish of simplicity that gives them their final shine.

This process is by no means mastered. And I expect it never will. That is as it should be, for once you reach the top, where to go but down?

I have been fortunate that as I refine my craft, I have had the opportunity to work with a handful of other songwriters along the way, either by writing together or taking turns at finishing the same song. From them, I always learn something, even if that something is their process doesn't work for me. But more often, it's the little nuances in approach that deliver the lesson. It's figuring out where to throw in that major 7th chord or how to make the chorus more effective by sticking with a one-line refrain.

Whatever the setting, whether I am typing lyrics into my laptop as they pop into my head, trying to fit words to music as I strum the guitar or sharing ideas with fellow writers on the phone or e-mail, my guiding principle for a song well-written is simplicity. And even where the melody or the subject matter gets complex, it's important to still find a way to make it sound simple. Some Beatles melodies are relatively complex but they are accessible because they "appear" simple to the ear.

Remember to keep it simple. But keep in mind that simplicity takes work.

ISS Celebrates 20th Anniversary in January

The January 2010 workshop will be the ISS' 20th anniversary. Please join us on Jan. 4 to commemorate two decades years of helping songwriters.

ISS

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We're on the Web!

See us at

www.islandsongwriters.org

Writer's Choice: 'Middle of the Choir' by Sid Cherry

BY WALTER SARGENT

Exhilarating. Like a sleigh ride, Sid Cherry's "That Voice in the Middle of the Choir" has movement, momentum and enough bumps in the key to keep me hanging on to every note. The lyrics are about the loss of a real person, but they make her universal. Everyone knows someone who is more humble than necessary, and loved all the more for it. This is a song that knows where it's going and how to get there.

We had so many split votes from members who couldn't decide. "Too many great songs." I'm calling it a (no kidding) "seven-way tie for second." It's an ISS first:

"My Old Mandolin" by Vinny Crici: "Very refreshing song and lyrics. Catchy and memorable."

"Wilson's Old Tree" by Sonny Meadows: "Bravo! What a great story, great descriptions. Very authentic."

"Fall Drive" by Susan Cohen: "Very picturesque. Lovely voice."

"Don't Know Where I'm Bound To" by Frank Gambino: "Entertaining and warm. Complex."

"I've Got Wheels" by Howard Pavane: "Passionate and moving (no pun intended!)"

"Be Healed" by David Anthony: "Therapeutic and healing. Lovely guitar work."

"Down By the Pond" by Walter Sargent: "Very uplifting and inspiring. Powerful."

This is what you get for voting for multiple songs. Please keep it up.

Who Played What

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

Pedro Pereira: From Now On

Jules Jacob: For the First Time

Gerry Dantone: I Love It When They Hate It

David Anthony: Be Healed

Vinny Crici: My Old Mandolin

Mike Svezia: Last Night At Your Window

Susan Cohen: Fall Drive

Ken Krumenacker: Black Cat

Sonny Meadows: Wilson's Oak Tree

Estelle Henrich: Chew A Bacon Sandwich

Joe McEnerney: Not What I'm Hopin For

Frank Gambino: Don't know Where I'm Bound To Go

Walt Sargent: Down By The Pond

Howard Pavane: I've Got Wheels

Sid Cherry: That Voice in the Middle of the Choir

Mark Hussey: History's Hidden Door

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, visit our web site, www.islandsongwriters.org. To submit items for publication in the newsletter, contact Pedro Pereira at pedropereira@verizon.net.