

As War Rages On TV, Musicians Turn To Internet To Voice Views

By Pedro Pereira

It took a war to get 1960s and 1970s hit maker Cat Stevens to return to his pop music roots. The singer/songwriter, who changed his name to Yusuf Islam, rerecorded his 1971 hit "Peace Train" and is distributing it through www.catstevens.com in MP3 format. Islam recorded the new version of the song, as well as a new one called "Angel of War" in response to the War in Iraq.

John Mellencamp, whose long list of hits includes "Pink Houses (Ain' that America)" released "To Washington" through his site, www.mellencamp.com. The track, written in the folk protest-song style Dylan made famous, shoots a handful of barbs at the Bush administration and the war.

With access to the airwaves increasingly difficult, artists young and older for years have been turning to the web as a vehicle for their music. Therefore, it is no surprise that they would use the Internet for anti-war songs. The web has become a vital medium for the anti-war movement, which was underway long before the first shot was fired, and long before the mainstream media acknowledged its existence.

Other artists using the Internet for anti-war salvos include REM, with "The Final Straw" at www.remhq.com; Billy Bragg, with "The Price of Oil" at www.billybragg.co.uk; and the Beastie Boys with "In a World Gone Mad" at www.beastyboys.com. Anti-war songs are likely to continue sprouting all over the Internet, especially if they can't get airplay on the radio and music channels.

But potential lack of airplay hasn't stopped David Bowie, Avril Lavigne, Paul McCartney and a host of others from contributing songs to a CD to raise money for Iraqi children. "War Child: Hope," slated for an April 21 release, will contain 17 songs, including "Peace Train" and Lavigne's rendition of Dylan's "Knockin' on Heaven's Door."

Though the web has figured prominently in this musical anti-war movement, some artists also are resorting to video. System of a Down's "Boom" is getting some play in music channels. Web surfers may view it at writer/filmmaker Michael Moore's web site, www.michaelmoore.com. Moore, who won an Academy Award for the anti-gun documentary "Bowling for Columbine," directed the "Boom" video.

One song that has made the rotation in some stations is Fleetwood Mac's "Peacekeeper," which features the powerhouse duo of Lindsey Buckingham and Stevie Nicks. "Peacekeeper" is the first single off "Say You Will," the first

MUSIC AS MATHEMATICS

New Technology Analyzes the Calculus of Music to Manufacture Hit Singles

By Pedro Pereira

In case you thought **Vinnie Crici** was getting too technical during the last songwriting workshop when he mentioned that some purists frown on rhyming even plural with singular words, consider this: A Spanish software developer has created a program that analyzes the underlying mathematical patterns in music to figure out whether a particular song will make a hit.



What!?

You read that right. Polyphonic HMI of Barcelona is now aggressively marketing this software to record labels. So if you thought the labels already were slaves to commercial music, brace yourself for this. How would you like to have a song you poured your heart into run through an unfeeling software program that couldn't care less what the song means to you or should mean to an audience?

Because, you see, what this super-advanced technology, which Polyphonic has dubbed Hit Song Science, analyzes is a combination of pitch, chord progression, beat, harmony, octave, fullness of sound and brilliance. The application then compares those patterns with an electronic bank of millions of songs to determine whether a song matches the patterns of hit songs.

"The characteristics we measure have been identified in user testing to be the ones that produced the strongest reaction in testers," so goes the marketing spiel on Polyphonic HMI's web site. "Our technology takes the analyzed data and overlays extra parameters relating to the commercial success of the music. These parameters are data such as total sales, highest chart position, date of release and others."

Polyphonic's technology purportedly taps into that certain *je ne sais quois* that produces the emotional response corresponding to liking a particular song. The response is a subconscious activity that supposedly we cannot articulate,

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ISS Workshops: Five Towns College, Dix Hills, 7:30 p.m. first Monday of every month, run by Sonny Speed. **May 5, June 2.**

Songwriters in the Round: Barnes & Noble, Commack, 7:30 p.m. second Thursday of every month: **April 10, May 8.**

ISS at The Spot, SUNY Stony Brook, 8:30 p.m. third Thursday of every month: **April 17, May 15.**

♫ WRITER'S CHOICE by Gerry Dantone

Huss wins with Texas-sized song

Sometimes choosing a Writer's Choice winner is just too difficult a choice to make. Once in a while, however, it's easy. This is one of those whiles.

Tim Huss's tune "Texas" had all the ingredients: melody, story, lyrics and performance. The story involved the doomed fighters at the Alamo and the story gave the characters some humanity to hold on to, a story with tension, and a melody that soared and inspired. As we all know, this does not happen in every song.

'And this here is Texas
And we are free men
'Cause right here in Texas,
Freedom's carved in the land'

— *Tim Huss*

There was an additional element of authenticity: The tune sounded as if it belonged in Texas as well, and the chorus was as big as, well, Texas. It went, "And this here is Texas, and we are free men/'Cause right here in Texas, freedom's carved in the land/ And where we are goin', well, I really don't know/But I hear they need a few men at the old Alamo."

One of the more fun aspects of the monthly workshops is not only hearing Bill Goldsmith's new tune for the month, but also the picture or other visual aid he supplies with his lyric sheets. This month's tune, "Nightmare Ward," was aurally clever as usual, but the photo included was a picture of Ward Cleaver of "Leave it to Beaver" fame and the effect was complete. Bill is this month's runner-up.

Gerry Dantone gets spooked at just the thought of "Leave it to Beaver."

ARE YOU READY FOR AN AUDIENCE?

Want to see how your material plays before a sympathetic audience? ISS hosts an open mic at Borders, 425 Jericho Turnpike in Syosset, the first Thursday of each month. The next gig is May 1. Also, don't forget we host a monthly songwriting workshop at Five Towns College in Dix Hills. Turn to page 4 for details.

Visit the ISS web site:

www.islandsongwriters.org

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save for some vague remarks on melody, vocals, beat, rhythm, or what have you.

With Hit Song Science, "new releases, potential releases and even unsigned acts can be compared with the database to allow a record label to see how well it fits into the current market and to identify potential hits. As the market changes, the system reflects this by finding new patterns in the hit clusters and applying these to the process."

According to the New York Times, several major labels, including Sony Music, RCA, and Universal UK, are considering or already are using Polyphonic's hit-single detector. Tracie Reed, vice president of the North American office of Polyphonic, told the Times the original intended use of the software was to offer CD shoppers recommendations based on their favorite songs.

But when executives at the company loaded every song in the Billboard Top 30 over the last five years into the program, they discovered that "lo and behold, they all had something in common," Reed said. "We empathize with the people who buy a CD and only like two songs. Let's get better music on more CDs."

Of course what she means by "better music" is music that appeals to more people. And by that, she might mean Britney Spears, Eminem or Boyz II Men. I can see the artistry in Eminem's music, but the other two? Besides, does the world need any more Eminems? For that matter, does the world need more Bruce Springsteens or Dixie Chicks? How about something new instead?

Dylan, the Ramones, Nirvana and the Beatles became stars because they broke new ground — lyrically, musically or both. And while no artist is immune to influence, mere imitators who add nothing new to the art form are hardly worth listening to. But then again, if everyone thought so, we wouldn't have had the legions of Pearl Jam imitators that are still clogging up air waves all over Radioland.

And let's not forget image. While Madonna and Cindy Lauper imitators abounded in the 80s, how many of them do we still remember? The trendsetter usually is the one who remains in people's recollections. Certainly one could argue that fabricating an image to go with the carefully manufactured hit music shouldn't be too hard. But just as with the music itself, the originality would be nonexistent.

Regardless, Polyphonic will likely turn a decent profit with its hit-single technology, considering the state of radio. And what that means is that pop music, which already sucks for the most part, will suck even more.

Online Music News

MUSIC INDUSTRY'S NEW WEAPON: 100-HOUR RECORDABLE DISCS

By Walter Sargent



The CD is dead; long live the CD.

The Music industry has another new technology to fear: super-sized recordable discs that hold between 30 and 100 hours of music.

Ironically, the product is being introduced by Sony, whose pre-recorded music division is being slammed by the worst downturn of CD sales since the format was introduced.

Is the CD dead? Nah. CD Sales are way up at CD Baby. On their fifth birthday, CD Baby's sales hit the \$3 million mark. What's best is the trend:

- Three and a half years to hit the first \$1 million
- Nine months to hit \$2 million
- Only four and a half months to hit \$3 million.

Independent musicians are asking, "Slump? What slump?" Lawmakers are wondering why piracy and illegal file-trading aren't hammering them, and the record industry is looking for someone to sue.

The music and film trade associations recently sent a six-page brochure to Fortune 1000 corporations with a direct threat: Stop workers from stealing copyrighted materials, or be sued.

One can imagine workers who, not wanting to lose their jobs, would seek out legally free music, possibly from independent musicians who are not threatening to sue them. One can imagine these workers finding something they like and buying it from places like CD Baby.

High-tech Music News

An experiment in soundless music has revealed how people's emotions are affected by noises they cannot hear. The study, carried out at Liverpool's Metropolitan Cathedral last September, explored the effects of "infrasound," sub-audible tones which have been used by organists in cathedrals for at least 250 years. Basically, it makes happy people joyful and unhappy people mad.

Meanwhile, a revolutionary, laser-like sonic projection technology is on the horizon with potential applications ranging from concerts, to advertising and warfare.

From the man that gave us the sonogram, Woody Norris claims that, with HyperSonic Sound (HSS), he is able to

direct "sound bubbles" at individuals hundreds of feet away. Could be good. Could be evil. Or it could be really annoying.

The major labels have announced a new technology that uses artificial intelligence to help determine the hit potential of music. This will almost certainly be very annoying. Will we be hearing more of the same, only more so? If computers can actually anticipate which songs have the most appeal, will artists use the same program to write the most unappealing, anti-pop music the world has ever heard?

Will the majors use the sound laser to drill irresistible music and ads into our heads as we walk by the record store? Will anarchists use computer-assisted soundless music to inspire revolt? I don't know – I'm in the market for a pair of ultra high-tech ear plugs.

For further reference:

100 hour disks: <http://www.newscientist.com/news/news.jsp?id=ns99993490>

Record Industry Hackers: <http://212.100.234.54/content/6/28842.html>

Infrasound: <http://icliverpool.icnetwork.co.uk/0300whatson/0800events/page.cfm?objectid=12647919&method=full&siteid=50061&page=2>

HyperSonic Sound:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2003/03/23/magazine/23SOUND.html>

Artificial A&R: http://mi2n.com/press.php3?press_nb=48160

TAKING WAR STANCE ON THE WEB

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studio Fleetwood Mac album to feature Nicks and former paramour Buckingham in 15 years.

Ironically, though the song is being perceived by some as anti-war, Buckingham wrote it two years ago as a personal commentary on the state of the world. A pro-war listener could easily interpret Buckingham's sardonic lines, such as "Peacekeeper don't tell why/Don't be afraid to fight," as favoring war.

The song is available for download for \$1.49 on AOL and www.fleetwoodmac.com. The download is part of a massive marketing web and print campaign to hype Fleetwood Mac's new album, slated for release April 15.

WHAT'S DOING

This Month

ISS members are always out and about. Check your local listings for appearances live, on the radio or even on TV. Also check www.islandsongwriters.com for gigs and links to member sites with information about CD releases, shows and MP3s. Here's what's happening in the coming weeks (*Remember to check with the venue first because dates and times may change*):

ISS Workshop

Five Towns College, Dix Hills, run by ISS Director **Sonny Speed**, first Monday of the month. Starts at 7:30. Bring a guitar to perform your song live, or play a CD or tape. A piano is available for keyboardists. Bring 25 copies of your lyrics so other workshops attendees can follow along and critique your work. Upcoming workshops: *May 5, June 2, July 7, August 4.*

Songwriters in the Round

Barnes & Noble, Commack, hosted by **Sonny Meadows**, second Thursday of the month. Starts at 7:30 p.m. Upcoming gigs: *April 10, May 8, June 12.*

ISS Hits The Spot

The ISS monthly gigs at The Spot in SUNY Stony Brook resume this month and will continue for the foreseeable future. Here are the dates for upcoming shows: *April 17, May 15.*

The Spot is located at the Fannie Brice Theater Building at the Stony Brook Campus. Directions to The Spot: Take the LIE (or Route 347) to Exit 62, Nichols Road north for seven miles to the South Entrance to the Stony Brook Campus. Go left into the South Entrance. At the first full intersection, Forest Drive, take a right and continue to the third stop sign. Turn left. The Spot is in the Fannie Brice Theater Building on the left. Enter through the door by the loading dock. The Spot is on the second floor.

Buy CDs from local artists, including the Defibrillators, Little Toby Walker, Jackalope Junction and Debra Lynn, at www.cdpimp.com

Open Mics

Borders, Jericho Turnpike, Syosset, hosted by ISS Webmaster **Bill "Scoop" Ryan**, first Thursday of the month. Sign-up starts at 7 p.m. Try to get there early to guarantee your spot. Upcoming gigs: *May 1, June 5, July 3.*

Starbucks, Main Street, Huntington, 7:30 p.m. Mondays.

Ruby's, Oakdale Ave, Port Jefferson, 8 p.m. Wednesdays.

69 Wall Street, Huntington, 8:30 p.m., Tuesdays.

Starbucks, Long Beach, 7:30 p.m. Wednesdays.

Director's Message

ISS workshops are increasingly popular and we want to ensure all members get enough time for comments. If you want your song heard but don't want critique, please save the debut for the showcase. If you want feedback, **please remember to bring 25 copies of the lyrics sheet** (or be prepared to pay a hefty fine – just kidding!)

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