

LEAP OF FAITH FROM AUDIENCE TO STAGE

By Tony Tedeschi

To the question: "Oh, you play guitar?" Invariably, my answer has been: "Badly."

To: "You sing?" I'd replied: "I have a range of an eighth of an octave."

Nice quip, the latter, but a copout. Protection. Lower expectations and you can only go up from there, when you do make the leap from listener to presenter. O.K., so no matter how much I practice, I'm never going to play guitar like _____ [fill in the name of your particular virtuosic favorite]. But, practice, practice, practice can bring you to some acceptable level of proficiency. And the voice thing? Well, I think Dylan settled that question years ago.

"I write songs," so goes the latest refrain, "I'm not a performer."

Well, you know, folks, if anyone is ever going to know how goes that killer song you've written, you're going to have to perform it, play it, present it . . . call it what you will.

I once interviewed an engineer for a book I wrote on the communications satellite revolution. He was a theorist, a pencil-to-paper guy who designed one of the most innovative components for Early Bird, the first really functional communications satellite. When the head of the lab flipped over the design, he said to the engineer, "Go build it." The latter replied, "Who, me?" His boss answered, "If not you, who?"

This lengthy lead-in is just another one of my delaying tactics. If I can manage to keep talking, I won't have to act.

Except that at The Spot on April 17, the evening's card was a player short. I had gone to support, **Tim Huss, Suzanne Ernst** and **Pedro Pereira** of ISS. So Tim, who was hosting that night, came over to me and said, "Tony, do you want to do a few tunes?" "Who, me? . . . Er, ah, I didn't bring my guitar." "You can play mine," Pedro said (and I thought the guy was my friend). Two more coaxes later and Tim was introducing me.

The good thing about circumstance simply tossing you into the water is you really don't have time to think about all the negativity. The bad thing is a lack of prep. A former colleague who did a lot of public speaking once told me whenever you attend anything where people will be going up to a podium, always assume – not matter how unlikely – that you may be called upon, so have something in reserve.

WHEN INSPIRATION FADES

How to get it back

By Pedro Pereira

I had one of those happy accidents a few months ago that makes me glad I ever picked up the guitar and started writing songs. I was sitting in my favorite couch strumming my favorite guitar, thinking I was playing the chords to a song I wanted to learn.



It turned out I had changed the progression unwittingly and ended up with something considerably different. But it sounded way too good to discard, so I tweaked the progression, came up with some verse chords and added words that I thought complemented the pleasant melody to which the chord progression lent itself.

In about 20 minutes I had a song that I liked. I've played it out a couple times and received some compliments.

That's what I call a successful writing experience. But as anyone who has ever set words to music and music to words knows, these enlightened moments of inspiration are hard to come by. Since finishing this ballad, I have yet to write something that gave me the same sense of accomplishment. I had two or three numbers in the works as I wrote this, but couldn't settle on a progression or melody. Everything sounded like something else I've done.

So I started messing around with minor-seventh, major-seventh and sixth chords, switching keys within songs and trying new rhythms. (My wife is questioning the appeal of the bossa nova direction I've been taking.) Problem is, none of those new rhythms and key changes seemed to fit the lyrics I already had.

What to do? Throw out the lyrics? Never. And this is an important point. Always save all unfinished songs, half verses and orphan choruses. They might not fit anything you are working on now, but may lend themselves to a melody down the line. That second or third verse could come to you in flash of inspiration as you sit at a stop light or shop for

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ISS Workshops: Five Towns College, Dix Hills, 7:30 p.m. first Monday of every month, run by Sonny Speed. **July 7, August 4.**

Songwriters in the Round: Barnes & Noble, Commack, 7:30 p.m. second Thursday of every month: **June 12, July 10.**

ISS at The Spot sessions are off for the summer months, June, July and August. We'll be back in September.

LEAP OF FAITH: MAKING THE MOVE FROM AUDIENCE TO STAGE

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Fortunately I do have a dozen songs I have written and I did three that night.

Was I at my best? No. Did I survive? I'd have to say yes, based upon the listeners' reactions. Granted, most were ISS colleagues and spouses, but it's a fairly easy read when people are just being kind to you. I stepped off the stage with my musical persona still in one piece, despite distractions like the Labrador retriever that kept running up and down the adjacent hall during my performance, despite a very temperamental pre-amp in Pedro's guitar, which went ape at one point, but played beautifully through the audio system for most of the three-song set.

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As most of you who have performed have already figured out, it takes doing this on-stage thing to sharpen your game, to go from survivor to performer. So, I decided to do the open mic at Borders two weeks later. That presented a whole different scenario, which needed to be dealt with. I'd been to the Borders thing numerous times and had become a fixture as part of the audience, while other players, most of them regulars, did their thing. In an odd way, all this scoping out time didn't make it any easier to go from the back to the front of the room. It's almost like . . . "What's he doing up there? Sit down and drink your latté."

Fortunately, **Bill Ryan** creates a very accommodating atmosphere at Borders, very player-friendly. Nonetheless, when the large contingent of students from Hofstra showed up, I got to second-guessing, feeling my '60s-influenced repertoire might not play on this particular evening. But when they turned out to be an a cappella group and did their trio of oldies, the atmosphere settled back into its comfort zone.

I felt OK with my spot, later in the evening. That night, performing was . . . well, almost fun. Not only that but ISS's **Walter Sargent** covered a song I had written, "Sci-Fi Movie Blues," which he had asked me if he could work on, and had crafted it into a different version of the original. That was downright flattering and it was great fun to experience what an accomplished performer can do with your material.

Of late, I've relapsed a bit. Scoping out other venues, multiple times, inadvertently setting up that difficult

audience-to-stage leap once again. Man, you really do need to keep doing this. Maybe for some people it's about ego but for me it's become a matter of simply staying on my game. I don't have any starry-eyed ambitions about turning myself into a performer beyond gigs at these wonderful local venues on Long Island, but as someone who has written prose for a living for many years, I enjoy, very much, interacting with people, with my material as the conduit.

If you are writing songs, you are declaring you have something to share. And sharing means standing – or sitting – up there at the mic, with all the sense of nakedness and vulnerability that entails. Deal with it. For the near term, I'll probably limit my performances to the friendly, familiar confines of ISS venues, but those bad-guitar-player, low-octave comebacks I once was wont to use have been exposed for what they were: simply lame excuses.

When he's not practicing or performing his songs, Tony Tedeschi writes freelance articles and edits a travel web site, www.naturaltraveler.com. Check it out some time.

♪ WRITER'S CHOICE by Gerry Dantone

Tim Huss makes it two in a row

When an ISS songwriter wins two Writer's Choice awards in a row, we declare that this person is on an official roll. Be it so declared: Tim Huss is on a roll!

Yes, with his usual clear vision and compelling performance abilities, Tim delivered yet another rousing tune that was not to be denied. Although the inspirational genre extolling courage, truth and the American way is often fraught with clichés, Tim managed to dodge enough of them to avoid self-parody.

Tim sang, "Ain't no doubt about it, this ole life can be tough/There's ups and downs throughout it/Just stand tall to get it done/No, no, no it ain't easy." Add just the right musical touch to put it over the top and voila! We have a winner.

Coming in a strong runner-up was Walt Sargent, webmaster to the (would-be) stars, this writer included. "Helpless" was masterful and well-crafted as usual, and included a part that Walt hummed in lieu of lyrics, something not unlike what McCartney might do. It went, "I am helpless/Everything is senseless when you're near/(hum...)/I am not helpless/At any other time or place/You know I am not afraid/To face the world alone/And make it mine..." Nice job!

Gerry Dantone is helpless to stop writing this column!

Online Music News

APPLE'S iTUNES STORE: 2 MILLION DOWNLOADS AND COUNTING

By Walter Sargent



Apple claims it has sold an astonishing 2 million downloads since it launched its groundbreaking iTunes Music Store on April 28. According to Billboard Magazine, the race is on to bring the service to PC users.

About 27 minutes later, Microsoft announced that its online music service is not quite ready yet, but it will “support a couple of business models” and “unlimited (tethered) downloads.” Someone please check my pulse...

For the last word on copy protection, we turn to renowned Internet Security expert Bruce Schneier. His recently published report explains why DRM (digital rights management) is futile in authoritative detail.

“Digital files cannot be made ‘un-copyable,’ any more than water can be made not wet. The entertainment industry’s ... attempt to turn computers into an Internet Entertainment Platform destroys the very thing that makes computers so useful. We need business models that respect the natural laws of the digital world instead of fighting them.”

William Shakespeare said, “First thing we do, let’s kill all the lawyers.” Tempting, but we have other options.

Copyright vs. ‘Copyleft’

Sal Randolph, the New York-based artist behind Opsound, is being featured at the Creative Commons for embracing the concepts of open source and “copyleft,” and adapting them to music production. Opsound invites musicians to contribute sounds to a “sound pool” licensed under a Creative Commons public license.

“Many artists ... are afraid that giving away some of that (copyright) protection will diminish the value of their work, but it is my experience that allowing your work to be used and shared more freely actually increases its value -- certainly its social value, and under the right circumstances, its financial value. A lot of the Opsound effort will be to educate artists about copyright and how sharing can help them.”

No discussion of the anti-copyright crowd could be complete without mentioning culture-jamming pioneers, Negativland. “Deathsentences of the Polished And Structurally Weak” (CD with 64-Page full-color book) is the group’s first full-length release since 1997. Described as “a meticulously-layered, ever-shifting electro-acoustic

soundscape created to accompany the pages of the book. No bass lines, no melody, no dialogue, no singing, no beat. [It is] the sound of Negativland’s studio being destroyed in a car wreck.”

You may buy their CD, or download freebies from the group’s web site. “Don’t worry,” they say. “We’ll make more.”

From the Twilight Zone

A fiendish device that upends the familiar can be found at pianographique.com, an online musical instrument that plays like a toy synth but produces sounds *and* graphics. Or if you always wanted to cross your Stratocaster with a Battlebot, check out Eric Singer's GuitarBot and Sonic Banana. Mr. Singer will be presenting at NIME’03, the New Interfaces for Musical Expression convention in Seattle. Once the Sonic Banana gets out there, you know there’ll be no stopping it. It’s just one of those things. Everybody will want one.

For further reference:

Microsoft Prepares Reply to iTunes: http://news.com.com/2100-1027_3-1009794.html?tag=fd_lede1_hed

The Futility of Digital Copy Prevention:

<http://www.counterpane.com/crypto-gram-0105.html#3>

PianoGraphique: <http://www.pianographique.com/>

NIME ’03:

http://www.music.mcgill.ca/musictech/nime/nime03_home.html

Creative Commons:

<http://creativecommons.org/learn/features/opsound>

Opsound: <http://www.opsound.org/opsound.html>

Negativland: <http://www.negativland.com/>

FIGHTING HUNGER WITH MUSIC

World Hunger Year is partnering with The New School University’s Media Studies Program on from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. June 17 to present the second annual Harry Chapin Awards Forum and Ceremony: Journalism Meets the Grassroots. The forum and ceremony will take place at the New School University, Tishman Auditorium, 66 West 12th St., New York.

Journalists, direct service providers, educators and activists will share their experiences from the frontlines in the war against hunger and poverty. Eric Schlosser, author of “Fast Food Nation” and “Reefer Madness” is scheduled to open the event. Other forum participants include Pulitzer prize winner Clifford J. Levy of The New York Times and Tom Chapin, two-time Grammy award winning artist. To register, visit

http://www.worldhungeryear.org/programs/forum_2003.asp

WHEN INSPIRATION FADES

fresh produce. Hey, it happens.

Forcing yourself to play chords you usually avoid is good protection against having all your songs sound the same. Moving the capo up and down the neck and trying new keys may also work, but of course you must keep in mind your vocal range. Some folks are quite adept at trying alternate tunings, but this is one of the exercises that still intimidates me. I am barely comfortable with standard tuning as it is, so trying to figure what fret produces which note with an alternate tuning is pretty much out of the question. For now.

Other inspiration-seeking techniques I've been trying include mixing up picking patterns and trying new rhythms and tempos. Listen to your favorite artists and you might notice that some of them use the same strumming pattern and tempo for a lot of songs. This happens to a lot of songwriters. I got so comfortable with a 4/4 up-and-down strum that I wrote a lot of songs that way. I actually have to force myself to use a different strum if I'm writing a song. Repetition is beginning to happen with my picking too, so I've started working on that. Some folks recommend playing to a drum machine or metronome to get rhythm ideas. I discovered waltz time by turning on the drum machine in my keyboard.

Though working on your rhythms and patterns may seem incongruous with finding inspiration for lyrics, the opposite is often true. When I started to learn pick-and-strum country and bluegrass patterns last spring, I wrote a couple of country songs. When I forced myself to use my fingers and start picking, I came up with sappy songs that I would have never guessed were in me. Well, you still won't catch me writing "baby, I love you" kinds of songs, not unless I can say it in different words.

The added bonus of learning new playing styles is that sometimes you can go back to older songs and apply what you just learned. For instance, I've just rearranged a song I wrote two and a half years ago called "The Island" from a sloppy strummer to a finger-picked ballad. I am also trying to apply to an even older song the major-seventh and minor-seventh mixes with which I've been experimenting. In the process, I've started to rewrite some of the lyrics.

I also took a dreamy progression that I was messing around with but for which I had no words to ISS member **Tony Tedeschi**, who is twisting it and wringing it to add some lyrics. So, there's another cure for the no-inspiration blues: collaboration. Try it.

So, ultimately, I guess inspiration hasn't entirely abandoned me. It's just that I haven't been able to finish the songs I wanted to finish. So I focused my energy in other directions. The important thing is to keep working at this songwriting deal.

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

Here's your chance to test out your songs in front of an audience of fellow musicians, who provide constructive feedback on how to make improvements. The workshop is at **Five Towns College, Burrs Lane** 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: *July 7, August 4.*

Songwriters in the Round

Barnes & Noble, Commack, hosted by either **Sonny Meadows** or **Tim Huss**, second Thursday of the month. Starts at 7:30 p.m. Upcoming gigs: *June 12, July 10.*

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: *June 5, July 3.*

Starbucks, Main Street, Huntington, 7:30 p.m. Mondays.
Ruby's, Oakdale Ave, Port Jefferson, 8 p.m. Wednesdays.
Starbucks, Long Beach, 7:30 p.m. Wednesdays.

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