

## SONGWRITERS IN THE ROUND IT'S A DIFFERENT KIND OF GIG

By Pedro Pereira

Two years ago on a Thursday night I walked into the Barnes & Noble in Commack to peruse the shelves. That night **Sonny Meadows** was hosting Songwriters in the Round, a monthly ISS event that showcases our members playing original songs and discussing the writing process.



That was my introduction to ISS. A couple of months later, I started attending the organization's monthly songwriting workshops. Last month I had the privilege of participating with **Bill Goldsmith** in a Songwriters in the Round. The event was hosted by ISS member **Tim Huss**, who alternates hosting duties with Sonny, who stopped by anyway to watch us play.

For those of us not quite comfortable with getting in front of crowds, the mic provides a protective buffer from the people you hope will not sit in judgment of you, but rather, be entertained.

This is definitely a different kind of gig. It is part seminar, part performance. The setting is intimate; the audience sits at the same level as the performers and there is no amplification.

This experience made me realize that the microphone isn't just there to boost your voice. For those of us not quite comfortable with getting in front of crowds, the mic provides a protective buffer from the people you hope will not sit in judgment of you, but rather, be entertained.

Bill got us started with a rendition of his song "Here Comes Robert Johnson," with Tim backing him up on guitar. Then my turn came and I launched into a song that in the past has proven to be a good starter, "Little Girl." Not this time. Preoccupied with the less-than-crisp sounds I was getting off my Martin, as my fingers fumbled, I nearly missed my cue to start singing and my voice never quite got to the level it should have been.

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**ISS Workshops: Five Towns College**, Dix Hills, 7:30 p.m. first Monday of every month, run by Sonny Speed. **Sept. 8, Oct. 6.**

**Songwriters in the Round: Barnes & Noble**, Commack, 7:30 p.m. second Thursday of every month: **August 14, Sept. 11.**

## THE WORLD-WEARY JESTER

Bill Goldsmith goes for world domination

By Pedro Pereira

**Bill Goldsmith** had been playing guitar for about five or six years when it dawned on him he could start writing songs. He hasn't stopped since.

"The Beatles hit when I was nine and anyone who lived through that will tell you what an explosion they caused," recalls the ISS member. "I started guitar lessons a few months later but didn't start writing songs until I was 15 when it occurred to me that I could try."

Two hundred songs and three CDs later, Bill continues to look for the clever turn of phrase and the catchy riff that will lend themselves to another song. The result is often surprising, as in the case of "Woodland Marauder," a protest song from the perspective of a tree, or delightfully clever, as in "Crawl Over Here and Slap Me" and "This Rave's a Bore."

The ISS' self-described world-weary jester has a penchant for taking oddball lyrics and laying them atop infectious melodies with a soothing, memory-sticking quality. If you've heard "Woodland Marauder," "Anyone Can Snap" or "Days and Weeks" a couple of times, chances are you won't forget the melodies and find yourself humming them from time to time.

The songs usually start with a clever title. While not an unheard-of approach, it is rarer than, say, coming up with a melody or chord progression to which you add words.

"Some weird phrase will pop into my head like, 'Crawl over here and slap me,' or 'I'm voting for the slumber party' or 'She looks like Cinderella after midnight.'" Other times, a song like "Biohazard Team" will spring out of something Bill has been thinking about, in this case biochemical attacks.

"Other titles, such as 'I've Bought Another Day' and 'I Don't Want It to Be Now' are basically the whole message of the song," Bill says. "I also like to mix things up by having other people write the lyrics, as was the case with my friend Rick who co-wrote 'Drowning Man' and 'Two-Tone Headless Male Mannequin Blues' among others."

To keep things fresh, Bill occasionally strays from his usual melodic pop to experiment with different musical genres. A flirtation with the blues produced "Here Comes Robert Johnson." A foray into folk resulted in "A Cold Wind Blows," and another into Latin/Brazilian bore "What Is

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## ♫ WRITER'S CHOICE by Gerry Dantone

### Newcomer grabs the spotlight

Though **Debra Lynne** is not exactly a beginner in the absolute sense, she is a beginner with the ISS. Hey, if Hideki Matsui is a rookie, this month's winner of the Writer's Choice is as well!

On her first time at an ISS workshop Debra presented pretty much a completed product with her tune "The List," which compiled the attributes of men she may have known, such as "infant with issues."

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Turn to page 4 for Editor's Pick, a new feature we are introducing in this issue.

ISS member **Andrew Kirschner** thought the song was "effective, evocative and funny," while **Sarah Haddock** added, "All women can relate on some level. A great blend of sincerity and sarcasm. Also, the speed of the song makes the lyrics whiz by, adding to the entertainment value." **John Blom** made reference to the song's "country flavor (which was) flawless. And being a country singer myself, I'm partial to the music."

For more on Debra and her music, log on to [www.rockmusiclist.com/debralynne](http://www.rockmusiclist.com/debralynne). Congratulations to Debra for a win on her first time out at an ISS workshop.

Honorary mention must go to the Master of Melody, **Vinnie Crici**, for his moving tribute to his father, "The Greatest Gift." The typically beautiful (for Vinnie) melody carried a message that managed to avoid terminal sweetness because of its obvious sincerity. All of us parents should aspire to be as deserving of such a tribute as Vinnie's dad.

*Gerry Dantone will now go out and play catch with his son and read a book with his girl.*

### ISS MEMBERS TO PLAY NORTHPORT SHOW

"Happenings on Main" on August 8 in Northport will feature ISS performers **Sonny Speed**, **Frank Gambino**, **Sonny Meadows** and **Tim Huss**. "Happenings on Main" is a street show at the entrance to the park on Main Street, and it is scheduled for 6:30 p.m. to 8 p.m.

## IT'S A DIFFERENT KIND OF GIG

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Fortunately, my fingers and my voice got better with each song.

It didn't hurt to have two very capable performers sharing the bill with me. Tim as usual delivered rousing performances on numbers such as "Men's Lives," one of my favorites, "It Ain't Easy" and "Dear Lord." The latter, he explained, came to him as a result of reading the morning papers, when all he can think to say is "Dear Lord." Regardless, the song has an undercurrent of optimism and rousing quality that coupled with Tim's passionate delivery, gives you some hope that we may not be doomed after all.

Bill played some of his performance staples, such as "Anyone Can Snap" and "Days and Weeks," but he closed with a song he wrote when he was 17, "Let's Take Out the Hudson." It is among a batch of about 10 of his older songs that Bill still plays occasionally. I have seen Bill perform many times, and this time I had the pleasure of providing some harmonies on such numbers "Days and Weeks" and "Anyone Can Snap."

Sharing the stage with guys like Bill and Tim who have been doing this for many years was a distinct honor. Tim and Bill are among the artists whose songs I look forward to hearing at ISS' monthly songwriting workshops. I try to take tips from Bill's sense of hooky melody and phrasing, as well as Tim's delivery and playing, to help me improve my performance and songwriting.

Overall, Songwriters in the Round was a pleasant experience. Throughout the evening, more than 20 people stopped by, some pausing to listen for a few moments, others staying for several songs, and yet a smaller group hanging around for the duration. A little girl shook our hands at the end of the night, saying she had enjoyed our music. That alone made the whole experience worth it.

It's funny. When I started attending ISS workshops, I had no intention of performing in public. I was content with writing my songs and committing some of them to tape for the exclusive consumption of a close circle of friends. Then last November we had a performance workshop, the group's first, and I decided to give it a shot. A few months later I started playing at our open mic at Border's in Syosset. I've since performed at The Spot at SUNY/Stony Brook and played at the open mic at Starbucks in Huntington.

And now I've done Songwriters in the Round. In a way, it feels like I've gone full circle, considering the Barnes & Noble event is what drew me to ISS in the first place. But with any luck, this is just the beginning.

Don't miss the next Songwriters in the Round, scheduled for 7:30 p.m. August 14.

## ISS' World-Weary Jester

# BILL GOLDSMITH RECORDS FOURTH CD, EYES WORLD DOMINATION

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Charisma," which Bill says will be in his next album.

But it is that melodic pop that qualifies as the Bill Goldsmith trademark sound. Part Kinks, part Beatles, part Dylan, part Goldsmith, Bill's songs come at you as if they were the whirring engine of a passing car that you glimpse just as it passes you by and then fades. Just as the image materializes before you and you start to take it in, it's gone. But the memory stays.

There's a cadence to the songs that combines with repetitive chord structures and lyrics to make a lasting impression. In less skilled hands, this kind of approach might result in monotony, but Bill makes it work.

"As far as repetition is concerned, if I'm lucky enough to come up with anything that works I'm going to ram it home. I'm not one of those people that can write seven-part songs. I have trouble coming up with something else for the middles. You have to work within your limitations," Bill says.

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**'The music I think is more important than the message because you can always write a poem or essay if you've only got words. What makes a song powerful is the combination of music and words, or even just the music itself.'**

— *Bill Goldsmith*

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So when does he reach the point at which he knows he has a complete song? "I don't consider something a song until I've come up with something compelling musically. If I write a phrase that sticks in my head, then I know it's something I can use. Unfortunately, inspiration only goes so far, so to finish anything takes a lot of carpentry and tinkering. It's easier to already have lyrics to hang the music on but if I get some music first I get it down for future reference."

Then there are those times when a new melody fits lyrics already written. "Some music I came up recently just happened to fit some words I already had for the new song 'Cloud of Smoke,'" Bill says.

"I've found that when I'm working on words and music together that the music tends to run ahead of the lyrics. I think that's because your brain can come up with a 15-note music line easier than a 15-syllable line that makes any sense.

"The music I think is more important than the message because you can always write a poem or essay if you've only got words. What makes a song powerful is the combination of music and words or even just the music itself."



Bill attributes his songwriting approach to his early musical influences, artists who dominated the pop charts when he was coming of age. He set about studying the styles of the Lennon-McCartney songwriting team, George Harrison, Dylan and the Kinks' Ray Davies to come up with his own. "I learned basically everything I know about writing from studying their work," Bill says.

After the writing and the polishing comes the performance. For prolific writers with extensive repertoires, it can be challenging to decide which songs to play. But sometimes those choices are made for you. "Since my two most requested tunes are 'Anyone Can Snap' and 'Days and Weeks,' I feel I can cruise through them and they'll go over OK. Since you can be very insecure about playing it's always nice to stick with what you think will go down the best."

In the meantime, Bill is working on a fourth CD. As with his previous releases, the new CD will come out under the band name The Sideways, for which he is the primary songwriter. Expect some surprises in the new disc, which will have what Bill called a couple of rambling tracks. But we are also sure to get another dosage of his steady-beat, melodious songs.

The CD should be ready for a fall release, and the band is toying with the names "Cloud of Smoke" and "Superheated Sunshine." Sideways CDs are on sale at [www.cdimp.com](http://www.cdimp.com).

With four CDs soon under his belt, what else does the World-Weary Jester hope to accomplish? Selling a song? Having a hit?

"I'm going for world domination completely on my own terms, but it's OK if it doesn't happen," he says in typically wry fashion. But he adds, "I consider something I write a hit if it comes out good. I'm not much of a salesman or a plugger so I don't know if I'll ever sell anything.

"It would be neat to get a song into a film, which some ISSers have done, or have someone do a cover of one of my songs. Making any money these days would be a neat trick since the music most of us do is considered pretty much on the fringe at the moment. The main reason anyone keeps writing is because you always hope the next song will be the big one — and some song somewhere will be."

## ♫ EDITOR'S PICK

July Workshop



Two songs stood out at the last workshop: **Frank Gambino's** "Ballad of Noah's Brother" and **Sarah Haddock's** "Pedestal in Pieces."

Both songs were lyrically fresh and melodically inviting. Frank laid his cautionary tale about ignoring signs of impending disaster atop a funky blues rhythm that has become something of a trademark for him. With a wink or two, Frank delivered lines like, "How did everything get this crazy, how did everything go so wrong? \Were we all just being lazy, did we come off way too strong?" The song makes references to "thunder clapping, but cautions, "That ain't applause."

Now there's a pedestal in pieces  
And I'm looking straight at you  
I find your pedestal in pieces  
I've been waiting for a better view

—Sarah Haddock

Turn to page 2 to find out who won *Writer's Choice*

How easy it would be to simply apply the message in "Ballad of Noah's Brother" to current events, and it would surely fit. But upon further contemplation, one realizes that the song resonates with event after event in the history of humanity. Disaster is always on the horizon and some of us always seem to be predisposed to ignoring it.

Sarah's "Pedestal in Pieces" tackles the all-too-familiar sobering theme of seeing a person for what he/she really is once the initial daze of infatuation wears off. It is a sobering realization, which Sarah tackles with sarcasm-laced lyrics that leave no doubt where the protagonist stands. "From the corner of my eye I saw you tumble from the wall \I don't mind the bitter taste of your humanity," she sang.

ISS *At the Spot* will be on again in September. Look for details in next month's newsletter.

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## 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](http://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: *Sept. 8 (Sept. 1 is a holiday), Oct. 6.*

### Songwriters in the Round

**Barnes & Noble, Commack**, hosted by **Sonny Meadows** or **Tim Huss**, second Thursday of the month. Starts at 7:30 p.m. *August 14, Sept. 11.*

### Borders Showcase

**Borders, Old Country Road, Westbury**, hosted by **Rich Stein**, third Friday of the month. Starts at 8p.m. *August 15.*

### 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. *Sept. 4, Oct. 2.*

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

**City Deli, New York Ave., Huntington**, 8 p.m. Thursdays.

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

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

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