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## MUSIC NATION

### Instruments in 54 percent of U.S. households

by Tony Tedeschi

So you are hitting the open mics on the Island and every week there are some new faces. You stop by Guitar Center or Sam Ash on a Saturday afternoon and the place is packed with young and old, male and female, blowing you out of the room with a Strat or a Tele or quietly picking some intricate cascade of notes in the acoustic room. What gives here?

Try this for a stat: according to the latest numbers available from the National Association of Music Manufacturers, 54 percent of U.S. households report that at least one member of the family plays an instrument. Sales of musical instruments in the United States are just shy of \$7 billion a year, according to NAMM. Of those households that do boast a musician, 37 percent say they are active music-makers.

And lest we think things may have reached a plateau, 73 percent of respondents in one survey said they felt children should be exposed to music before age 5, even if it doesn't result in any long-term association with an instrument. The overwhelming majority cites music as an important element in a well-rounded education, in developing teamwork skills, even in helping a student get better grades. The most popular instrument is the violin, clearly the result of all those school music programs. Guitar is in second place.

Two of my three daughters played in elementary school. The elder had a cello she call Mastroiani, as in My Cello Mastroiani; the other played violin, then piano. I recall attending a concert when the featured selection was the first movement of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. Mercilessly, the orchestra stayed with the score only as far as those signature opening four notes, then the kids all went off in their own directions. I guess that emphasis on dissonance was where I got the idea for some of my works.

For those who give playing a shot, then decide theirs is a couple of tin ears, there's always eBay. Log on at any given moment and there will be tens of thousands of instruments up for auction, usually more than 30,000 guitars alone.

### Theory 101: Getting Beyond the Vocabulary

by Rich Stein

For me, one of the best aspects of teaching is the continual re-examination of my delivery *and* the content I teach. In the past few years I've drastically changed my philosophical approach to teaching music theory by re-examining the importance and function of much of the core body of knowledge, in order to become a better composer and teacher.

In the coming months I'll be sharing my thoughts about some of these issues, starting with the subject of music theory itself. As a starting point, take a moment to answer the following two questions:

- 1) What's the lowest note in the C Major scale?
- 2) What are the notes that make up the Key of C?

Both of these questions confront a huge yet basic issue head on: What is music theory? When average people talk of relativity or evolution as theories, they

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### Guest Speaker

Jack Thompson, of  
Broadjam.com, will talk  
at the May 3 ISS  
workshop about  
software that helps you  
promote your music

### Next Workshop

*May 3*

The next songwriting  
workshop is at 7:30 p.m.  
May 3 at Five Towns  
College in Dix Hills.

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## Theory 101: Getting Beyond the Vocabulary

### Writer's Choice

by Gerry Dantone

In what was probably the most closely contested Writer's Choice Award of all time, five writers received multiple votes, and it must

**Winners:** Sonny Meadows  
Vinny Crici

be admitted that if one vote could be deciphered (it looked like hieroglyphics) the vote might be even closer! Ultimately it was veteran craftsmanship that won the day with old-timers **Sonny Meadows** and **Vinny Crici** taking the honors (we think) for this month's Writer's Choice.

Sonny's "Another Bimbo on the Bus" was a tale of a father who got the children he apparently raised. The daughter is the bimbo, with dreams of Hollywood and fame dancing in her head, and junior, with a pierced lip and a Mohawk do, is a rock star wannabe on the road to nowhere. But when dad was a kid, he "had all the answers/To the questions my Daddy never asked/I's a soldier for peace and justice/Left him to battle slimy slugs and creepin' crabgrass." He concludes with "What goes around comes around/What comes around goes around." I wonder what Sonny's kids think of this tune?

Vinny Crici shared Writer's Choice honors with a song that admittedly was not completed. That's how good Vinny is, he don't need to finish his stinking songs! "This House" was typically melodic and tells the story

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acknowledge the difference between the core knowledge/vocabulary of the sciences at any given point in history and the radical departure made by outstanding and inquisitive minds.

Thousands of scientists, engineers, and inventors theorize about issues and then test their hypotheses, and have done so for generations. Sadly, for many people the study of music theory *never* takes on a creative flair. Theory is seen as drudgery, time spent away from the creative process. Why? **Because the vast majority of musicians never get past the vocabulary stage.**

Most people I know (outside of collegiate academicians) refer to theory as "scales, keys, and chords." These are rudiments, or the vocabulary words of written music. They offer little if no insight to the workings of a piece of Western music, and can be downright dangerous to the creative process (more on this later). Is it important to know the core vocabulary? Absolutely, if you wish to converse in circles that use those terms.

Once you get past the vocabulary there's a whole vast sea of possibilities out there. Theory can have a powerful influence on you, if you start theorizing.

For example, I firmly believe that all string players should be able to refer to musical notes by name, not by fingering or fret. It improves communication in musical settings. Knowing what notes makes up a given Major or minor chord is common *vocabulary*, not music theory. Learning the vocabulary takes time, and a thorough rudiments text that covers the basics is a great investment.

Answers to the questions above: if you think creatively, the answers are *not* so obvious, but are very liberating. Keep in mind these are my educated opinions\*:

- 1) The lowest note in the C Major scale is *not* C. C is the name we give this collection of notes because it conforms to a pre-ordained pattern that we find comfortable and easy to disseminate in a handy package. The lowest note in the C Major scale would depend on the instrument you're playing at the moment (or your vocal range). Any note can be the lowest (or highest). Books show the range of the scale as one octave for convenience, not usage, and certainly not theory.
- 2) *Every* note in the chromatic (12-note) universe is a part of C Major. Jazz players know this through chord vocabulary and harmonic extensions. Classical composers harnessed this potential in their pieces as early as the Renaissance, coming fully to grips with its power in the Baroque era and beyond.

Once you get past the vocabulary there's a whole vast sea of possibilities out there. Theory can have a powerful influence on you, if you start theorizing.

\*Check out *Lies My Music Teacher Told Me* by Gerald Eskelin (Stage 3 Press) for many fascinating and enlightening chapters on the misuse of vocabulary as actual theory. I've read and re-read this book many times. In addition to being funny, Eskelin has keen insight to the dangers of bad teaching.

Look for Rich Stein's *Theory 101* periodically in the ISS Newsletter.

### Promote Yourself on the ISS Web Site

The ISS is now offering songwriters *their own web pages* on the ISS web site. Whether you already have your own web site or not, a personal web page on the ISS site brings you closer to the traffic with a polished and professional look. If you don't already have a web site, it is an especially good deal. Prices range from \$20 to \$60 per year with a range of options.

Plus, you are supporting ISS web site development. So if you like the way the web site is going, you can help *keep it going* by signing up. Please see the web site for details: <http://www.islandsongwriters.org>

## News

## Getting Heard: MP3 v. Weed

by Walter Sargent

MP3 is truly *l'enfant terrible* of the "Music meets the Internet" story, if there ever was one. Ushering an era of peer-to-peer madness a la Napster, MP3 technology provoked a frantic scramble on the part of the industry to encrypt, legislate, and sue anything with the word "download" in it. For independent musicians however, MP3s are a cheap and *unstoppable* way to get their music heard. MP3s leveled the proverbial playing field. The problem is the "unstoppable" part.

Some musicians just want to get their music out there and don't care if they make a dime on it. The plan is to get the audience first and make the dime some other way. This makes some sense. The more people are paying attention to you, the more people will pay attention to you. Getting people's attention is good as far as it goes, but if that's the objective, the limitation of promotion via MP3 must be understood. The thing that makes MP3 unstoppable, also makes it *unknowable*. Once your MP3 is out there, no one has any idea where it has gone, how many people have heard it, and whether they like it. From a marketing point of view, this is a major handicap.

Marketers subject virtually all new products and ideas to something called "pre-testing." Before Vanilla Coke was rolled out across the country with a production ramp-up, pre-loading retail shelf space and a national advertising campaign, the soft drink was pre-tested in selected markets. Pre-testing provides empirical data that justifies (or not) additional investment in whatever-it-is.

Whether it's for a particular song, a CD, or for an artist, MP3 is limited as a pre-testing vehicle because only sites that track MP3 downloads can produce the marketing data. Some sites, such as [www.broadjam.com](http://www.broadjam.com), which offers state-of-the-art MP3 promotion and merchandising services, do a very good job of it. The biggest limitation of these server-based solutions is that it is still up to the musician to drive the traffic to the server. No one finds anything by accident on the Internet. You've got to be linked, indexed, ranked as "relevant," or recommended. There's no shortage of places to link with. But there's only one place for all that traffic to go, and guess who gets to do the legwork? Why, the *musician* of course.

Last month, we met **Weed**, the latest in the stampede of online music distribution dreams, schemes and nutty ideas. Weed, however, may be the one that succeeds in the marketplace. If "solving the problem" is a factor, Weed may in fact prove to be unstoppable. Last month, I described how Weed really solves all the problems for the musician and the listener, calling it the "solution with a future." Pre-testing and marketing just didn't occur to me, but Weed solves that problem as well.

There is a reason the ISS web site has no MP3 files anymore: legal liability. No one wants to be sued. People who post or host an MP3 on their web server, P2P client, or even send it as e-mail, had better have the owner's permission — in writing. Better make that an airtight legal agreement while you're at it. Secret, anonymous, restricted file-sharing cripples promotion via MP3 like a pipe to the kneecaps.

Weed does not have this problem. When you have a Weed file, it is already authenticated and blessed by the owner for anonymous and ubiquitous royalty-free distribution — anywhere, anytime. With Weed, the royalty only applies to consumers, which as it turns out, can provide that marketing data useful for pre-testing. So whether the musician cares about the money, Weed royalties produce incontestable empirical marketing data — without making you lead every single consumer to your web site to get it. For musicians considering producing a CD, such information might influence which tracks to put on it, how many copies to print and, at the same time, generate some interest before it's released. Cool, huh?

If you want to promote your music, authorizing and empowering fans, strangers, web masters, entrepreneurs, etc. to *help* allows you to get back to writing, performing,

## Who Played What

The following songwriters brought songs to the ISS workshop in February:

**Steve Lieberman**  
Bonkey on the Donkey

**Mark Hussey**  
Making a You Turn

**Amy Uleis**  
Amazing

**Mike Solomon/Glen Hendrickson**  
River of Life

**Gerry Dantone**  
God Wants Me to Hate You

**John Marrantini**  
Yesterdays

**Bill Goldsmith**  
The New Low Show

**Sonny Meadows**  
Another Bimbo on the Bus to Nowhere

**Frank Buddine**  
Open Your Arms, Welcome Him In

**Estelle Henrich**  
19th Annual Bluegrass Festival

**Michael Svezia**  
Back At My Door

**Bob Campbell**  
Taking It to You

**Rich O'Brien**  
Think of Me

**Vincent Crici**  
This House

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

### ISS Workshop

Test out your songs in front of fellow musicians, who provide constructive feedback. The workshop is on the first day of each month at **Five Towns College, Burrs Lane, Dix Hills**. Run by ISS Director **Sonny Speed**, It starts at 7:30 p.m. Bring a guitar to perform your song live, or you may choose to play a CD or tape. A piano is available for keyboardists. Be sure to bring 25 copies of your lyrics so other workshop attendees can follow along and provide feedback.

*Next workshop: May 3*

### University Cafe

Look who's playing at Stony Brook in coming months:

April 15: **Defibrillators**;

May 20: **Jeff Curtis, Sarah**

**Haddock**; June 17: **Bob**

**Westcott, Vinny Crici**; July 15:

**James O'Malley, Nick**

**Vermitsky**

Don't forget, an open mic follows the featured performers.

in her hands sweet!) and is alone in their house in the aftermath. The song needed lyrics to an already existing bridge to bring it all home, so to speak. Perhaps if Vinny had actually written the lyrics to the bridge and they were sub-par, he might not have won! Maybe that's the secret to winning. Oh yes, and incredible melodies! Honorable mention must be given to the numerous close runners-up, which included Mike Solomon for the Little Feat-inspired "River of Life," Amy Golden Uleis and Erin Ednie for the girl-pop tune "Amazing," and yours truly for the multiply inspired "God Wants Me to Hate You."

*Gerry Dantone is just kidding and wishes everyone else were.*

## Internet Music News

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practicing and producing more and better music. What would happen if musicians spent more of their time and money practicing their craft and developing their art? What would happen if there were a way to try out new ideas without betting the farm? What would happen if musicians got a direct, immediate and tangible response from listeners?

There'd be more and better music, more better musicians and more happier listeners.

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### Open Mics

**Borders, Jericho Turnpike, Syosset**, hosted by Bill "Scoop" Ryan, first Thursday of the month. Sign-up at 7:30 p.m. *Next gig: May 6.*

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

**Book Revue, New York Ave, Huntington**, 6:30 p.m. Thursdays (except first week of the month).

**Pisces Cafe, Railroad Ave, Babylon**, 8 p.m. Wednesdays.

### University Cafe

**Suny/Stony Brook**, hosted by **Sonny Speed**, 8:30p.m. third Thursday of the month.

Featured performers followed by open mic. *Next gig: April 15.*

### Borders Showcase

**Borders, Old Country Road, Westbury**, hosted by **Rich Stein**, 8 p.m. third Friday of the month. March 19: Tim Huss, Walter Sargent.

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Visit our web site at [www.islandsongwriters.org](http://www.islandsongwriters.org).

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## Writer's Choice

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of someone who lost a very sweet woman (birds dancing