

# IN THE STUDIO

## Recording 'Small Things with Great Love'

February 2006

By Suzanne Ernst

Almost two years ago I finally decided to record some of my songs for a CD. I used to pose for my album cover in my mirror in the 1970s, so it was almost 30 years later and about time to get it done.

From late winter 2003 until late summer 2005, I spent a total of about 40 or so hours in **Vinny Crici's** studio. Over that period of time his studio's name changed, the studio was completely renovated, I received my first ever speeding ticket on the way to his studio, and I continued writing songs and adding them to the CD as it went through its various stages.

The first stage was singing each song, accompanying myself on guitar.

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I decided this would be easier and faster than putting voice and guitar on separate tracks.

I was right. I had decided to experiment with one of the last songs I recorded, so I put the guitar track down first, and then I sang on a separate track.

That was the hardest session. As with many singer/songwriters, my style of performing is such that the voice and guitar are woven together.

When I separated the two of them that day in the studio, I discovered that it required a greater level of attention to hear when I should start singing at the start of each new stanza. I also felt a little lost without my guitar to harmonize with.

The second stage was listening to "dry" versions of each song.

My husband Doug provided a critical ear, listening to the rough cuts of all the songs.

We discussed what adjustments to make and what should be left as is.

One of the major guidelines that we decided to follow was to make sure that each song had the voice out in front and the words as clear as possible.

This really helped me give the songs a musical thread to tie the CD together.

The third stage was adding harmony and/or other instruments (such as bass, keyboard, flute, harmonica and percussion). I wanted to sprinkle these into the songs without changing the song presentation too much.

After each session Vinny would give me a CD with the songs we worked on. I would listen to the music either in my car or at home and harmonize to the songs or practice other instruments (not while I was driving!) and at the next session put these additions down on a new track.

The instruments were fun to add. I had two Native American flutes I had wanted to include on some of the songs, and they fit right in. Vinny later

### Monthly Workshop

The next ISS songwriting workshop is scheduled for March 6. With any luck, it won't snow.

### New Open Mic at Bartini Bar

Open mic-ers are converging once again weekly in Babylon. A new open mic kicked off last month on Monday nights.

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### Find Us On the Web

Keep up with what's going on at ISS and the Long Island songwriting community. Visit our web site, [www.islandsongwriters.org](http://www.islandsongwriters.org)

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# HANGIN' IN BABYLON

## Open Mic at Bartini Bar Debuts with a Bang

by Pedro Pereira

Local performers until last spring knew if it was Wednesday, it was open mic night at the Pisces Café. But things have been quiet in Babylon since the weekly event was discontinued as a result of dwindling participation.

Now, the Babylon scene is back in full swing. On Jan. 23 a new open bar kicked off in town, just a block or so away from the old Pisces location, this one at Bartini Bar, 124 North Carl Ave. The Bartini open mic is scheduled for 8 p.m. Monday nights.

The debut was a tremendous success, with more than a dozen performers signing up to play. Host **Dave Drew**, a local singer/songwriter, was warm, welcoming and brimming with enthusiasm as he ushered each performer to the microphone

Performers were a mixed bag, some playing originals and others sticking with covers of well-known songs.

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**Where:** Bartini Bar  
124 N. Carl Avenue, Babylon  
**When:** Starts at 8 p.m. Monday nights

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Even though bars often provide less-than-ideal settings for open mics, the event at Bartini went over well. The microphone and sound equipment are set up in a room separate from the bar area, and since the noisier crowd tends to hang out where drinks are being served, it was possible to hear the performers.

I was sixth or seventh on the list and I played three numbers, thoroughly enjoying myself. By the time I left at around 11 p.m., the list still had plenty of performers waiting to play.

Dave, the host, is an old hand at running open mics; he also emcees a weekly event on Thursday nights at the Mojo Café, 191 Higbie Lane, West Islip.

As part of the open mic arrangement with the owner of Bartini, Dave has secured some paying gigs there. He is hosting "Dave Drews' Rock 'n Roll Showcase" on Fridays every other week at Bartini. Shows start at 9:30 and there is a \$5 cover charge. Dave's plan is to invite open mic participants for slots in the showcase.

The first showcase is on Feb. 3 and the list of scheduled performers already includes the following: **Media Crime, Dave and Magge Drew, James Bocchieri** and **Dan (The Man) Magee**.

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### Writer's Choice

By Pedro Pereira

This month's winner is one of ISS' newest members and a huge songwriting talent, **Fred Bredfry**. Fred takes the Writer's Choice award with his haunting "In the Wake of the Killing Dawn."

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**Winner:** Fred Bredfry

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Fred presented his song to the group with what I've come to identify as his trademark passionate delivery. He moans the words with so much intensity and accents them so skillfully with his guitar playing that his performances turn into a kind of transcendental experience.

The lyrics in "Killing Dawn" are simplicity itself: "You're all I ever wanted girl/Still you turn your back on me/You turn your back on me."

While in less skilled hands such words would sound pedestrian, Fred infuses them with the conviction of a Sunday preacher, which punctuated by a heart-wrenching melody, makes them undeniably irresistible.

Congratulations to Fred for a well-earned win.

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## Recording 'Little Things with Great Love'

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added some doubling effects for the flutes and wove in a flute line off his synthesizer as well.

Vinny and I sat and listened to each song after the harmonies and instruments had been added. We wanted to enhance the voice and instruments in a way that befit each song.

We took reverb off some songs, and added more to others. We knocked off some of the harmony in a song if it didn't do anything for certain of the melody lines.

We cut and pasted a flute line and repeated it somewhere else. (I am not a purist when I am trying to keep to a budget.)

Once the songs had all their harmony and instrumentation, another stage began: the final mix.

I had to listen to each song and decide if it was finished. Did I want to add anything more, or change anything?

I made minor changes and decided the songs were finished.

Vinny went back and adjusted levels, snipped off excess noise or spaces in the beginning and end of each song, neatening up each track — a time-consuming and tedious process.

The next step was the mastering process, which got into even more detail as far as the cleaning and polishing of each song.

Levels were again adjusted to make the overall volume for each song the same so that one track was not louder or softer than another. I believe this is called "radio-ready."

The last few months of recording I sketched some ideas for artwork to be used for the front and back covers of the CD insert. Since the CD is dedicated to my Mom and Dad (both departed), I included a painting I had done called "Mom and Me," and an old photo of my Dad playing his guitar. Credits and thank-yous were typed up, and these and the artwork brought to my two nephews who work in a print shop.

I sent the master to the company that would burn the CDs, and voila, the CD was completed this past December.

Although it took me 30 years of procrastination and a lot of living, it has been very fulfilling to have at last finished "Little Things with Great Love."

Wow, what an experience... I would do it again.

## Hangin' in Babylon

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At Café Mojo, Dave also runs a monthly gig called "Best of Open Mic Saturday Night Showcase." It's the same deal as with the Bartini gigs: Dave invites participants in the open mic for the shows. The gigs start at 9 p.m. and there is no cover charge.

The next gig is scheduled for Feb. 17 and the list of scheduled performers already includes **Dave and Magge Drew**, **Too Hip for the Room** and **Kevin Mahoney**.

### Who Played What

Here's the list of songwriters and songs from last month's ISS workshop:

#### **Mike Svezia**

Get Down

#### **Andrew Kirschner**

Sometimes I Cry

#### **Bil Goldsmith**

The Day Starts at Midnight

#### **Fred Bredfy**

In the Wake of the Killing Dawn

#### **Suzanne Ernst**

Talk with Me

#### **Paul Cama**

I Love Everything

#### **Steve Robinson**

Message in the Rails

#### **Pedro Pereira**

Change

#### **Bob Krummenacker**

If I had a Clue



## What's Doin'

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 workshops attendees can follow along and provide feedback.  
*Next workshop: March 6*

## Writer's Choice: Bredfry Wins

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Fred had some competition, even though his win was pretty decisive. In second place was my song, "Change," a multi-track affair that I brought in on CD.

The song is a dark, experimental number that I wrote several years ago. I just rewrote the chorus in recent months and decided to start recording it. Right before bringing it to the workshop, I realized a couple of guitar tracks were slightly off sync with the drums in a couple of places. I took out the drums to make it less obvious, but I need to get around to rerecording those guitar tracks.

## Open Mics

**Borders, Jericho Turnpike**, Syosset, hosted by Bill Ryan or Vincent Crici, first Friday of the month. Sign-up at 7:30 p.m. *Next gig: March 3*

**Bartini Bar**, Babylon, 8 p.m. Mondays

**Trinity Restaurant and Bar**, Floral Park, 8 p.m. Mondays

**O'Reilly's Pub**, Oakdale, 9 p.m. Tuesdays

**Cool Beanz**, St. James, 8 p.m. Wednesdays

**Café Mojo**, West Islip, 8 p.m. Thursdays

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