

WRITING THE SONG

A Dissertation of the Enduring AABA Song Form

May 2006

By David Warner Cook

Monthly Workshop

The next ISS songwriting workshop is scheduled for June 5 at Five Towns College. See you there.

ISS Members in the Studio

Walter Sargent and Gerry Dantone are planning to release new CDs before the year is out.

More on page 3

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The AABA song form is one of the most enduring and popular from the 20th century. It's extremely useful for a songwriter to understand the differences between the AABA form and the verse-chorus form.

Often we begin to write a song and it naturally tends toward one form or another. When we know which of the standard forms our song is similar to, we can understand it better, and avoid making the mistake of forcing our song to fit a form that is unnatural for it.

There are two parts to the AABA song; the verse, which is labeled A, and the bridge, which is labeled B. In practice, most AABA songs repeat the bridge more than once, and the number of verses between the bridges may vary from song to song.

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But the important point to recognize about this form is that there is no chorus. The verse in an AABA song performs the function of both verse and chorus combined. It is a verse that has a hook line that is repeated every time the verse comes around, even though all the rest of the words in the verse change. One of the most popular, and perfect, examples of this form is the song "Somewhere Over the Rainbow."

"Somewhere over the Rainbow" has three verses, each verse starting off with the phrase that gives the song its name. It is the hook, the memorable part of the song. (Often the hook is the same as the title of the song, but not always). The phrase "Somewhere over the Rainbow" shows up in the same place in each verse, while all the other words are different from verse to verse.

Keep in mind that the defining factor here is that the verses in the AABA song are one section. You wouldn't call the phrase "Somewhere over the Rainbow" a chorus because it's too short, and it doesn't stand alone. It's part of the whole verse melodically.

Somewhere Over the Rainbow

Music by Harold Arlen, Lyrics by E.Y. Harburg

Verse 1 Somewhere over the rainbow
Way up high,
There's a land that I heard of
Once in a lullaby.

Verse 2 Somewhere over the rainbow

Continued on page 2



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Writer's Choice

By Gerry Dantone

Sometimes a song comes along at a workshop of the Island Songwriters Showcase that everyone can agree on in some way.

Winner: Mark Hussey

Last month, it was clear that **Mark Hussey's** "New Hampshire Springtime" had a wonderful melody. Fortunately, it had interesting lyrics as well, making it a relatively easy winner for Writer's Choice.

Sung in an almost falsetto voice, and almost out of Mark's vocal comfort zone, the melody reminded some attendees of Joni Mitchell, others of Neil Young. And in the opinion of this writer, if a full band could tackle this tune, Coldplay would be the band with its flying melodic lines and interesting chord structure.

Lyricaly it centered on the experience of one Captain Carson, of the Air Force on what seemed like a near-religious experience over the New England landscape. It had a few listeners floating with the captain.

Coming up from behind and receiving honorable mention were **Sonny Meadows** for "I'm Givin' in to Greed" and **Vinny Crici**

Continued on page 4

Continued from page 1

Skies are blue,
And the dreams that you dare to dream
Really do come true.

Bridge

Someday I'll wish upon a star
And wake up where the clouds are far
Behind me.

Where troubles melt like lemon drops
Away above the chimney tops
That's where you'll find me.

Verse 3

Somewhere over the rainbow
Bluebirds fly.
Birds fly over the rainbow.
Why then, oh why can't I?

This is quite different from the verse-chorus song in which the words in each verse are different, and the words in the chorus are the same. In a verse-chorus song, the two sections can stand by themselves, separately.

When we have a verse that has a repeatable hook, in order to turn it into an AABA song, all we have to do is find a bridge. It doesn't need a chorus.

Some popular AABA songs are: "Yesterday," "Hey Jude," and "Lady Madonna" by the Beatles; "Just the Way You Are" by Billy Joel, "Your Song" by Elton John; "Every Breath You Take" by Sting; and "Tears in Heaven" by Eric Clapton. If you examine these examples you'll see that they're all variations on the AABA form, the differences mainly being where the hook is placed.

Contrast: Making Songs More Dynamic

Although many successful songs have been written in which the chorus sounds just like the verses — "Runaway Train" by Soul Asylum being a good example — it is good practice to use melodic, rhythmic and harmonic contrast between the verses and the chorus.

Making the melody higher in the chorus tends to produce good results. It's a common device often heard in pop songs. When writing, try to make the chorus as high as you can within your comfort zone.

Another useful device is to use different rhythms in the verse and chorus. For guitarists, this can be accomplished by changing the strum. From a melody perspective, you can make the rhythm for the chorus melody eighth notes if the verse is composed of quarter notes, and that will add a nice dynamic to the composition.

A good example of a song that employs contrast between different sections, in this case between the verses and bridges, is "Somewhere Over The Rainbow," the song analyzed in the article above.

New CDs From ISS Members To Be Released This Year

By Pedro Pereira

ISS members **Walter Sargent** and **Gerry Dantone** are keeping busy in the studio, pushing to get their new CDs out before the end of the year.

Walter is working on his second CD, which will follow his first one, Dunderhead "Songs of Dunder," released about a decade ago. Gerry, meanwhile, is working with his band, Universal Dice, on its fourth CD.

Walter said the working title of his CD is "14 Fish." He explains the title and the project's theme, or lack thereof, thusly: "There is no musical theme other than writing a song is like catching a fish: You never know what you're going to get. The songs are as diverse as the fish I catch on any given day: a crab, a flounder, sea robin, a bottle or a blackfish."

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—*Walter Sargent*

Of course, Walter points out, if he records more songs: "I may have to revise the title." And that means, the title ultimately may be "15 Fish" or "16 Fish" or... well, you get the picture.

Walter has been working on the project for almost three years with Huntington-based producer **Dave Cook**, an ISS member and talented songwriter. (Check out Dave's story about the AABA song form on Page 1.) The instrumentation is primarily guitar and vocals, though there are some keyboard parts thrown in for good measure, according to Walter.

Gerry, meanwhile, has been working on Universal Dice's upcoming CD since August. "It will have about 12 new tunes, including title cut 'Welcome to the World,' plus 'Danielle,' 'My Hands Are Tied,' 'I Wanna Be Normal,' 'Man Enough' 'If We Care,' and 'Skin in the Game,'" Gerry said.

"The songs are deliberately more like singles that you might hear on the radio although there will be no compromise in the challenging lyrics that you'd expect on one of our CDs. The theme is emerging: songs about what one might expect in life, perhaps from the points of view of a father and a son - in other words, "Welcome to the World."

Gerry says he is handling production duties and working with lead guitarist **Bob Barcus**, bass player **Ed Canova** and keyboardist **John Fallon**. The band is using real drums for the first time.

"In the past we've programmed drums or used Acidized files of real drum loops which are pretty good, sometimes better than the real thing, sometimes not," he said. "But nothing replaces real drums to give a band an identity and now that we have not only the recording equipment but also a room to do it, real drums are in."

As reported in last month's newsletter, several ISSers are in the studio, in addition to Walter and Gerry. They include ISS director **Sonny Speed**, **Vinny Crici** and **Tim Huss**, as part of Tornado Alley; **Tony Tedeschi**, **Bill Goldsmith** and myself.

Who Played What

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

Bill Goldsmith

Coffee Break Hotel

Estelle Henrich

Doing What I've Got to Do

Vincent Crici

An American Treasure

Paul Cama

The Crawling Eye

Sonny Meadows

Giving Into Greed

Fred Blumenaner

Angry Young Man

Mike Svezia

Hell Can't Keep Me Away

David Bailey

Learn to Fall

Hank Stone

Put the Gun Down, Danny

John P. Hillman

Every Day

Suzanne Ernst

My Doranne Gray

Mark Hussey

New Hampshire Springtime



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 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: June 5

Writer's Choice: Mark Hussey Wins

Continued from page 2

for "American Treasure." Sonny's tune was a typically satirical look at all-too-common forms of greed, while Vinny celebrated the music of America in a beautifully melodic song that will be a staple of his band, Tornado Alley.

Gerry Dantone is working on his band UniversalDice.com's fourth CD, which could be completed this year.

Open Mics

The ISS Open Mic at Borders Books, Jericho Turnpike, Syosset, hosted by Bill Ryan or Vincent Crici, first Friday of the month. Sign-up at 7:30 p.m. *Next gig: May 5*

Bartini Bar, 124 North Carl Ave, Babylon, 9 p.m. Mondays. Sign up at 8:30

Trinity Restaurant and Bar, 190 Jericho Turnpike, Floral Park, 8 p.m. Mondays

O'Reilly's Pub, 927 Sunrise Highway, Oakdale, 9 p.m. Tuesdays

Cool Beanz, 25A, St. James, 8 p.m. Wednesdays

A-D Bar, 30 New Street, Huntington, 9 p.m. Wednesdays. Sign up at 8:30

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