

WILL THEY LISTEN?

Coping with the Chronic Terror of Performing

June 2006

No July Workshop

The ISS is skipping July for the monthly workshop, but we resume on August 7. See you then.

Back in Bellmore

After the success of the first Writers in the Round session at the Bellmore library, the ISS has been invited for another session on June 22. The event kicks off at 7 p.m. with a performance by **Blacklisted and the Banned**.

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.island songwriters.org

By Suzanne Ernst

I have been singing and playing guitar in front of an audience since I was a teenager. That was back in the 60s.

I still get the jitters, the butterflies...the FEAR of getting up in front of a live audience and performing.

My first thoughts after getting a gig are

- Do I have enough time to get ready (even if I'm preparing one or two songs)?
- Who will be there?
- Will they like me?
- Will they like my songs?
- Will they bother to listen?
- Why should they listen? They may be coming to chat with friends. I shouldn't get involved with whether they're listening!

And on and on.

While I'm driving to the performance, the closer I get to the venue, the more nervous I get. And the size of the audience corresponds directly to the population of butterflies in my stomach.

When I arrive at the location, my nerves do lovely things such as erasing people's names from my memory. If I'm really nervous I will press the wrong frets on my guitar while tuning it.

If I am very, very nervous, I will make polite conversation while sharing something so personal about myself that the listener can only respond with confused silence.

All this because I want to do well, I want people to enjoy the music, and at the same time I would like to go somewhere and hide.

I'm scared.

So one might say to me: Go to the performance and just enjoy it! Have fun! Pretend you are in your room playing for yourself.

That sounds like good advice. But many times when I practice at home, I imagine an audience is present and listening to me. I even imagine the thoughts they are having as they listen.

Imagining an audience while practicing, motivates me *to practice*, and to play the song with a purpose: I want to share what I'm expressing in the song in the clearest way possible.

Imagining the audience prepares me for performing, but it can also make my actual performance less real if I'm trying to get a reaction from them.

This reaching and expectation takes me away from letting the words and music stand on their own.

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Coping with the Chronic Fear of Performing

Writer's Choice

By Gerry Dantone

It is this writer's opinion that writing love songs is the most difficult of all songwriting chores. First of all, it's the No. 1 topic for songs so one might think

Winner: Walter Sargent

that every possibility has been covered, and covered to exhaustion! Worse, however, is the fact that many writers are clueless about what it is they are trying to say – just like everyone else.

Understanding love and relationships is no easy task, and when one considers the divorce rate and number of broken hearts in the world, obviously few of us have a real command of the subject.

That is why a good love song is transcendent; "Yesterday," "Something," and other Beatles songs are not the miracles they are for nothing!

That brings us to last month's Writer's Choice winner, **Walter Sargent** for "Don't Cry." Though no one is claiming this modest tune is in the class of the great love songs of all time, it set a realistic goal for itself and achieved it.

The end of a love affair is the seed for many songs such as this but Walter

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The reaching comes, I believe, from the fear of performing.

My best practices are when I'm not worrying about the way I'm playing the song.

I'm just playing.

That may not happen until about the tenth or twentieth time I've practiced a particular song.

So why don't I *just play* at every performance?

But let's face it: I perform because
I need the energy of an audience.

Remembering is the key. Remembering to ask myself why I perform.

Then I go sing with a purpose that keeps me focused and not thinking so much about whether the audience likes me or not.

So, let me refine my purpose for performing: I want to share what I'm expressing in the song in the clearest way possible, without expectations (as much as possible) for the audience's response.

But let's face it: I perform because I *need the energy of an audience.*

That's why they call it Performing Arts. I need the audience. They are a part of the whole experience. Without them, I might as well stay in my room and just practice for the four walls.

But I don't stay in my room. I am driven to put myself out there for an audience, asking them to listen, even though I am afraid that they won't listen, won't like, won't share.

And sometimes things go well, and sometimes they don't.

The beauty is...that I can be afraid...and still sing, and play, and share.

ISS to Participate in Folk Extravaganza

The ISS will have a booth at the Huntington Folk Festival scheduled for August 12 at Heckscher Park in Huntington. The booth will be open from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. and will have the participation of ISS members, who will have a chance to perform unplugged and sell their music CDs.

The event, which is intended to become an annual show, will feature various performances, including a headlining appearance by famous blues artist John Hammond. Other performers scheduled to appear are local favorites **Martha Trachtenberg & Tom Griffith**, as well as **Mike Soloway, Michele Monte, Steve Tepe** and **Paul Helou**.

Mastering: The Important Final Step to Making a CD Sound Good

By David Warner Cook

In the music biz, the term *mastering* refers to the processing that is done to music after it has been mixed. Mastering is the final step in audio recording.

Usually a song starts out as a multi-track recording, with anywhere from four to more than 100 tracks. Then it gets mixed down to stereo, and that is referred to as the "final mix," or stereo mix. (We'll ignore surround sound for this article). Mastering is the part that happens after the final mixes; so what is mastering? And why do we need it?

First, if you're doing an album, mastering adjusts all those separate mixes so they sound good together. The mixes may be different from one another. One may be louder, one may have more bass. In the process of mastering you can line up all your final mixes and adjust them so they all sound like they belong on the same album.

If we have our CD well mastered, at least we can avoid having our listeners touching the controls between the different cuts on our CD, leading to a pleasant and uninterrupted listening experience.

The second reason is that there are some enhancements that are better left till the mastering stage, either because these adjustments can be done better in mastering, or because it gives you the option to make multiple versions of the same mix.

We've all had the experience of different CDs that play at different volumes...and then we're reaching over to the CD player and turning the volume up and down. What a pain. Or one song might have really loud bass, so it makes your car speakers distort, so you turn the bass down and then the next song sounds thin... Again, what a pain.

Unfortunately we sometimes have to deal with that when playing different CDs by different artists because there is no universal standard for music levels. But, if we have our CD well mastered, at least we can avoid having our listeners touching the controls between the different cuts on our CD, leading to a pleasant and uninterrupted listening experience.

Parameters that are commonly changed in mastering are volume, compression, limiting, and EQ. Sometimes stereo wideners and saturation processing are added. The compression and limiting are used to set the dynamic range (the range from the loudest to the softest areas) and the overall volume of the CD. These days loud CDs are very popular. But you have to give up dynamic range when you get the CD to very loud levels. It's a tradeoff, and a good mastering engineer should help you choose what's right for your music.

Mastering, at a dedicated professional facility, probably starts at \$1,200 to \$1,500 per CD, and that's a minimum figure. Smaller studios, on the other hand, often master their own work, offering a much more affordable solution. You can learn a lot about mastering just by listening to albums, reading the credits, and comparing for yourself.

*David Cook is a Huntington-based ISS member, musician, songwriter and producer. He is currently working with ISS member **Walter Sargent** on Walter's new CD.*

Who Played What

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

Bill Goldsmith and James Lefante

The Whole World Is Opening Up

Paul Cama

Swing Swing Without a Sing

Andrew Kirschner

Twentieth Birthday Song

Steve Bregman

Instant Message

Estelle Henrich

Dead Wild Turkey

Tim Huss

The Way Back Home

Mike Svezia

Same Time Next Love

Frank Buddine

A Life Brand New

Fred Blumenauer

Come Down to the Edge of the River

Vincent Gangi

Al's Blues

Pedro Pereira

Take It Away

Mark Hussey

Ice Cream Man

Walter Sargent

Don't Cry

Denise Romas

Passing the Torch

Howard Pavane

I Know I know



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: August 7

Writer's Choice: Walter Sargent Wins

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keeps things so simple and so economical that he doesn't fall into the abyss of sentimentality and cliché.

In four short verses he realizes that she'll forget him, that life will never be the same and painfully that he still loves her and will miss her. No where is there a delusion that he is the best thing that ever happened to her or that some mistake is being made.

Perhaps it's the lack of those stupefying love-song pitfalls that made ISS voters appreciate Walter's short and bittersweet love story. Whatever it was, it was the easy winner for this month's Writer's Choice.

Gerry Dantone knows better than to write a lot of love songs!

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: July 7.*

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

McCoys, Commack Road, Commack, 9 p.m. Wednesdays. Sign up at 8:30

ISS Staff

Director: Sonny Speed

Webmaster: Walter Sargent

Writing Coach: Mel Glazer

Newsletter

Editor: Pedro Pereira

Contributors: Tony Tedeschi, Walter Sargent, Gerry Dantone, Suzanne Ernst, Tim Huss, Steve Robinson, Frank Gambino, Sonny Meadows, Mike Svezia.

For general information about ISS or how to join, contact, Sonny Speed at mcspeed@optonline.net or 631- 462-3300.

To submit newsletter items, contact Pedro Pereira at peddi@optonline.net.

Visit our web site at www.islandsongwriters.org.