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Inside

- A Dillon Christmas 2
- Romas Drops CD 3
- Writer's Choice 3
- Tornado Alley Show 4

Pereira at Borders

ISS Newsletter Editor
Pedro Pereira is the featured act at the Borders Syosset ISS Open Mic Jan. 4.

Next Workshop

The next ISS workshop is Jan. 7

Saved by Music

ISSer fights inner demons with song

BY PEDRO PEREIRA

Steve Lieberman, "The Gangsta Rabbi," may well be the most controversial current ISS member, which was more than evident at last month's workshop.

Typically when he brings a recording of a song to an ISS workshop for peer review, much of the feedback focuses on sound levels, but last month was a little different. The song he presented caused a fair amount of discomfort, and at least one member expressed what could only be described as anger. With lyrics such as, "I wanna die just like he died/in a very public suicide," Steve's song "Public Suicide" was as graphic and disturbing as anything that's been presented in recent memory at a monthly ISS workshop.

It was supposed to be. Though perhaps not entirely evident, Steve had no intention of being gratuitous. Steve's new album, "Shake the Missile Base," is laden with explicit, disturbing lyrics, and the suicide theme appears on other tracks. In the track "Bullycide," Steve confesses in his trademark turbo-charged shout-singing, "I was oppressed by bullies/so bad I wanted to die/ I was oppressed by bullies/ I was a near suicide." In other cuts, such as "The Flagellator" and "I Masturbate," Steve tackles other uncomfortable topics.

While writing the songs for "Missile Base," Steve tells me he was straddling the line of sanity. He was battling with bouts of bipolar disorder so bad that it took heroic effort to put pencil to paper for what eventually became the 22 tracks on his new CD, his 13th.

"I rode that rollercoaster relentlessly, but I wrote as I went instead of writing from memory after returning to some degree of normalcy," he said. "So the songs are running the gamut from love songs to anger to hopelessness. And, you know, writing in extreme states sometimes can produce more shocking results."

Take, for instance, these lines from "The Flagellator:" "Some chick don't accept requests from bands/so I'll beat myself bloody with the back of my hand/Falling down exhausted as they call me lazy/and you're surprised I went so crazy? I'll beat myself with sharp-edged office supplies/so you can prosper as I slowly die."

Bipolar disorder, commonly known in the past as manic depression, is a psychiatric condition characterized by extreme mood swings, from deep depression to uninhibited mania.

Continued on page 2

Happy Holidays

The ISS wishes you and yours a joyous holiday season and a fulfilling New Year full of happiness and achievement.

Lieberman Fights Inner Demons With Song

Continued from page 1

Steve's recent struggle with the disorder is only the most recent in a string of bouts that go back to his childhood. He first broached the subject musically in his "Melancholia Falling" CD, which followed an episode he suffered in 2005 into 2006.

"I suffered from depression from boyhood but that was the early 70s, and such was taboo then," he said.

His first episode was in 1975, he recounted. Things got ugly again at one point in the 1990s and then in 2005. After that latter one, Steve thought he was safe for a while, but this past summer the disorder came back with a vengeance as he struggled with some long-awaited success brought by his music.

"Believe it or not," Steve said, "I became popular in different pockets of the country, you know, the fans, the girls, the groupies. It was unreal that this was happening now at this stage in life, but way too complicated. And it was more deep than I wanted to be so it really made things worse."

Steve missed a number of ISS workshops in recent months, which sometimes he said had to do with exhaustion from the road while other times it was because in the midst of fighting the illness he gave in to self-doubt. "On some months when I planned to go, I had the lyric sheets ready but just felt way too shy at the last minute," he said.

In the last two months, he was able to overcome the shyness and the exhaustion and make it to the workshops. Music, after all, is the salvation.

"The music thing is a life saver, as it is to us all," he said. "I can tell my story, I can get back at people who did me dirty or document an illicit affair."

And that is precisely what Steve does in "Shake the Missile" base. To keep up on Steve's artistic comings and goings, visit his web site: <http://www.gangstarabbi.com>.

Author's note: Before writing this article at Steve's suggestion, I wanted to make sure he was absolutely sure he was comfortable with divulging the information contained herein. Steve's reply: "I want for it to be known of my struggles so maybe it can one day be better for all who suffer."

Tim Dillon to Perform at Holiday Show

ISS member Tim Dillon will be one of the featured performers Dec. 15 at Bob Westcott's 16th Annual Holiday Concert. The concert, organized by the Folk Music Society of Huntington, will take place at the Congregational Church of Huntington, 30 Washington Drive, Centerport.

The other performers are Bob himself, who is a member of the Defibrillators and Blacklisted and the Banned, local songstress Cathy Kreger and multi-instrumentalist Dee Harris. The Defibrillators also include ISS Director Sonny Speed and member Sonny Meadows, who is the lead singer for the Defibrillators as well as Blacklisted.

Tim, who has become a regular at ISS events, began performing in the early 1970s with the acoustic band Full Circle. Influenced by the likes of Bob Dylan and Paul Simon, he has developed a delicate style, which coupled with his trademark emotional delivery, makes him one of the most compelling performers around.

The show starts at 8 p.m. Admission is \$10 for the general public and \$7 for members of the folk society.

"The music thing is a life saver, as it is to us all. I can tell my story, I can get back at people who did me dirty or document an illicit affair."

—Steve Lieberman

CD Release

Denise Romas Gets 'Inspired'

ISS member Denise Romas has just released a full-length CD, "Inspired," an 11-track collection that was a year in the making.

"Inspired" follows a four-song EP, "So Far," released earlier this year, and a single, "Healing Angel," released in 2004.

"Inspired" was engineered by Patrick O'Rourke, with mastering and additional mixing by Larry Moser. With those two sharing soundboard duties, Denise said her sound was in good hands.

The CD features 10 songs with an additional bonus track. Seven tracks are originals written by Denise and the remainder are her interpretations of traditional and popular songs.

Covers include the traditionals "The Water is Wide" and "No More A-Roving, as well as The Zombies' "She's Not There." Originals include "Teacher," "I'm Alright" and "Letting Go."

Adding creative touches to some of the songs are Patrick O'Rourke on guitar and percussion, Robert Langley on percussion, Lora Kendall on fiddle and Larry Moser on hammered dulcimer. Some backing vocals were provided by the ever-famous Me, Myself and I Sisters.

CDs are available for purchase at performances, and at www.cdbaby.com/cd/romas3. Visit www.deniseromas.com for more information.

Writer's Choice

Tim Huss Wins with 'Feels Like Rain'

BY WALTER SARGENT

The Song of the Month for November was "Feels Like Rain" by Tim Huss. Members gave it lots of praise, including: "Really strong lyrically and musically" and "exceptional delivery." "Feels Like Rain" was economical and arresting from beginning to end.

Coming in second by a single vote was "Don't Dream About Me" by Phil Kennelty. "Great country song" and "loved the lyrics," wrote members.

From the House of Unapologetically Self-Promotional Campaigns, the following kick-ass, royal phrases are thus spake:

Hook of the Night: "Standing on the Shoreline" (Mike Capraro/Dennis Westbay). "Very catchy chorus."

Traditional Music Award: "Keep America Singing" (Cousin Steve). "Inspiring melody."

Non-Traditional Music Award: "The Closet (Andrew Kirschner). "Disturbing... as usual."

Best Out-of-the-box: "Turnaround" (Guy Pezullo). "Inventive writing."

Comic's Choice: "Adamspace" (Estelle Hendrich). "Very funny."

Best Revival: "Don't Throw It Away" (Lois Morton). "This song's a keeper," "very clever and funny."

Citation for AAA Radio potential: "You Are my Life (Mike Soloway)." "Great hooky chorus," "great tune."

Best Song Concept Award: "Where the World Began (Pedro Pereira). "Poetic."

Expressionist of the Month: "Rise and Shine (Suzanne Ernst).

Anti-Pop Pick: "Public Suicide" (Steve Lieberman) "Highly controversial."

Progressive Rock Award: "Satisfy" (Bill Mega). "Excellent riffs."

Summer Feel Good Classic: "Long Beach" (Tim Dillon). "Great tune, great rhythm."

Dark Prince of Pop Opera: "What They Said" (Mike Svezia). "Brilliant."

When voting for a song, try to find a few words and say why. We're not looking for generic superlatives, but something about the song that stands out.

Who Played What

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

Steve Lieberman

Publice Suicide

Mike Capraro/Dennis Westbay

Standing on the Shoreline

Suzanne Ernst

Rise and Shine

Mike Svezia

What You Said

Bill Mega

Satisfy

Guy Pezullo

Turnaround

Pedro Pereira

Where the World Began

Tim Huss

Feels Like Rain

Mike Solomon

You Are My Life

Andrew Kirschner

The Closet

Lois Morton

Don't Throw It Away

Tim Dillon

Long Beach

Estelle Henrich

Adamspace

Phil Kennelty

Please Don't Dream

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Suzanne Ernst

Dave Cook

Gerry Dantone

Sonny Meadows

Mike Svezia

Steve Robinson

Frank Gambino

We're on the Web!

See us at

www.islandsongwriters.org

Tornado Alley to Perform at Old Bethpage Library

Tornado Alley, the band founded by ISS Director Sonny Speed, is scheduled to perform Dec. 21 at the Plainview/Old Bethpage Public Library, 999 Old Country Road, Plainview. The show starts at 7:45 and is presented by the Center for Inquiry Community of Long Island. CFI Communities are groups of rationalists, skeptics, and humanists that sponsor local events, activism, lectures and educational programs.

Tornado Alley, which also includes ISS members Vinny Crici and Tim Huss and fiddler Lora Kendall and percussionist Robert Langley, will play a one-hour set. The gig will be filmed for an upcoming public access show.

The library is across from Shop-Rite. Find more information on the band at www.tornadoalleyband.com.

Sargent's 'Beautiful' Scores in Dallas

ISS Webmaster Walter Sargent's song "Beautiful," off his CD "14 Fish, Two Bottles and a Shoe," finished third in the Dallas Songwriters Contest pop-rock category.

Roy Elkins, president of Broadjam, a web service for musicians, published his reviews for his nine top picks for the grand prize, and had this to say about Walter's entry:

"After the first listen, this song was not in my cut list. It has worked its way up steadily with each listen. Everything about the lyric is simple. Everything about the melody isn't and they work well together. When listening to the melody, especially in the chorus, the second "You're Beautiful" is an unexpected melodic twist. At that point I thought I was going to hear the predictable, but it wasn't. And each time I hear it, it still catches my ear. I have found myself humming the chorus over and over. This isn't the first writer to use "You're Beautiful" in a chorus, but the first to do it like this."

ISS Open Mics

The next open mic at **Borders Cafe**, Route 25, Syosset, is Jan 4. Hosted by Vincent Crici, this gig is monthly, on the first Friday of the month. Sign up at 7:30 p.m.

Monthly Workshop

Test out your songs in front of a crowd by playing them for fellow musicians who will provide constructive feedback with the goal of helping you improve as a songwriter. The ISS workshop takes place the first Monday of every month, except if it falls on a holiday, at Five Towns College, off Burrs Lane in Dix Hills. Run by ISS Director Sonny Speed, the workshop starts at 7:30 p.m.

Bring a guitar if you wish to perform your song live, or you may bring a recording on CD or tape. A piano is available for those who write their songs at the keys. Be sure to bring 25 copies of your lyric sheets so the other workshop attendees can follow along while listening to your song. It is much easier to provide constructive criticism when people can read the lyrics.

The ISS workshop is at the center of the organization's mission to help songwriters perfect their craft. Many performers on Long Island got their start at ISS.

General Information

For general information about ISS or how to join the organization, contact ISS Director Sonny Speed at mcspeed@optonline.net or 631- 462-3300. To submit items for publication in the newsletter, contact Pedro Pereira at pedropereira@verizon.net.

Visit our web site at www.islandsongwriters.org.