

January 2010

www.islandsongwriters.org



Out With The Old!

Clearing clutter in your life and in your songs

BY SID CHERRY

Next Workshop
Monday, February 1st
at Five Towns College.

Borders Open Mic

The next show is
Friday, February 5th,
hosted by
Vincent Crici.

Writer's Choice

Find out what song won
on Page 2.

ISS Celebrates 20th Anniversary

The January workshop
marks the 20th
Anniversary of ISS.
Here's to the next
20 years!

Happy New Year!

*We will open the book.
Its pages are blank.
We are going to put
words on them
ourselves. The book
is called Opportunity
and its first chapter
is New Year's Day.*

-Edith Lovejoy Pierce

At the beginning of each New Year, many people draw up their annual list of resolutions, a well-meaning checklist of everything they hope to improve in their lives. Often found somewhere near the bottom of this list is a reminder to clear out the clutter somewhere in the house or apartment. This goal, unfortunately, usually ends up being rolled over to next year's list, along with diet and exercise. Let's face it, people like their "stuff" and getting rid of "stuff" is never as easy as it might seem. As songwriters, we can be the same way with our words and notes.

Part of the problem is figuring out what, exactly, is the clutter and then deciding what to do with it. The dictionary defines clutter as "A collection of things lying about in an untidy mass". Two years worth of old newspapers stacked in the corner is clutter. Five hundred knick-knacks crammed onto a tiny shelf is clutter. A bunch of filler words inserted to expand your lyric to match the melody is clutter. A bunch of extra words that require a bunch of extra notes squeezed into the melody is clutter.

Why do we need to clear out clutter? Aside from the issue of unsightliness, clutter in the home takes energy to deal with. Even if you think you're okay with a mess of stuff, your subconscious still knows that it's there and it takes up space in your mind. This is true with song clutter. The clutter distracts you from getting to the real point of the song. Many people are afraid of empty space. They believe that every space, no matter how small, has to be filled with something. As songwriters, we can be guilty of that kind of thinking. In truth, empty space is essential to achieving balance in your life and in your songs. Also, according to Chinese philosophy, clearing out the bad and unnecessary makes room for the good, or necessary, to appear.

The rules for clearing clutter in life can easily be applied to songs: Do you love it? Do you use it? Do you need it? If you can't answer yes to at least one of those questions, get rid of it. Take, for example, a fire extinguisher. You don't LOVE it, hopefully you won't USE it, but you do NEED it. That's easy. Other stuff gets tricky. You must look at everything very honestly and objectively with little or no sentiment. You can't use the "I don't need it, I never use it, but I really LOVE it" trick for every piece of junk piled up on your stairs. This is the same with songwriting. Every word and note must effectively serve the meaning of the whole song. You won't often get away with "It doesn't say anything, it doesn't do anything, it isn't great, but I wrote it and I love it" (even less with "My mother/significant other loves that lyric").

So, what do we do with all that clutter? Sometimes, clearing clutter can simply be a matter of organizing your stuff (putting your words and notes in a better order). Or, if you're looking at something that's perfectly good but never used (a good lyric or melody in the wrong song) you can recycle it by selling it on Ebay or giving it away to someone who can use it (use it in another existing song or let it inspire a new song).

Continued on page 2

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Resources

Request a variety of free booklets and DVDs loaded with helpful information about recording and marketing your songs:

<http://www.discmakers.com/request/>

Clearing clutter in your life and in your songs

Continued from page 1

If a thing is necessary but broken (a badly written lyric or melody) get it fixed (rewrite it till it works). If the item in question is truly a piece of junk (really badly written, unfixable lyric or melody) GET RID OF IT! Nobody will miss it when it's gone. And, amazingly, you'll be creating a space in which something good, or necessary, can appear.

Writer's Choice: '20th Century Girl' by Lois Morton

Who Played What

Here is a list of the performers and songs from the December workshop:

Susan Davis - *Summer Nights*
Al Verunac - *It Will Always Be You*
Frank Gambino - *Untitled*
Vince Gangi - *The End Has Long Begun*
David Anthony - *My Guitar*
Susan Cohen - *Fine Times*
Joe McEnerey - *Leaving Me*
Estelle Hendrich - *They Say That I Can't Sing the Blues*
Suzanne Ernst - *Ghost Horse In Her Studio*
Joseph Perricone - *Love Isn't Built*
Bruce Kanin - *Willoughby*
Lois Morton - *20th Century Girl*
Mike Svezia - *Firebug Freak*
Mark Hussey - *The Year I Was Born*
Sid Cherry - *Better Than Today*

Homegrown Music Series Resumes January 9th

The next show in the Homegrown Music Café Series at St. Gerard Majella Church in Port Jefferson Station, organized by parishioner Ralph Antignano and ISS member Pedro Pereira, is scheduled for January 9th. Doors open at 7:30 p.m. and the music starts at 8:00 p.m. There is a suggested \$5 donation at the door, and the proceeds benefit the church's outreach program to feed the needy. Featured this month is artist Katie Pearlman. ISS members such as Frank Gambino and Suzanne Ernst will be performing in coming months.

Editor's Note: Grabbing the Torch

Having just completed my first issue as the new editor of the ISS newsletter, I now know how much work it takes to put together even a two-page publication. That Pedro Pereira did this every month for the last seven years is extraordinary. So, let's all thank Pedro for keeping this going. And, if you see him at an open mic, buy him a beer for his tremendous work (or a latte' if it's at Borders).

-Sid Cherry

Monthly Workshop

Test 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 holidays, at Five Towns College, off Burrs Lane in Dix Hills. Run by ISS Director Walter Sargent, the workshop starts at 8:00 p.m., with performer sign-up beginning 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, visit our web site, www.islandsongwriters.org. To submit items for publication in the newsletter, contact Sid Cherry at sidcherry@optonline.net.