

portland songwriters association

Great Songwriter
Fall 2006 Newsletter

www.portlandsongwriters.org

CONGRATULATIONS
TO OUR WINNER!

Ernie Birney



Photos by Paul Kwitek
PSA board member



PSA
talent. local.

Road to the Bite

Congratulations to Ernie Birney, winner of our 2006 Road to the Bite competition, along with finalists Gil Reynolds and Nicole Sangsoree! The winners of this event not only performed at the Bite of Oregon in August, an event was aired on PDXposed, but they split a \$1000 guitar package from Fearless Guitars.

Special thanks to Lisa Lepine, the Promotion Queen, for all of her work in coordinating this event and working with PSA to bring in amazing mentors throughout the showcase series. And continued thanks to the Bite of Oregon for including PSA in this great event that benefits the Special Olympics of Oregon.

Sincere appreciation to all of our illustrious judges for this year's competition: Lisa Lepine, Artistic Director for the Bite of Oregon; Dean Baskerville of Baskerville Studio; Jeff Cumpston, West Linn HS Music Director; Julie Joachims, Production Manager for PDXposed; Jon Olson, Host PDXposed; Kyle O'Brien, Oregonian Writer; Jackie Butler, Music Industry

continued inside...

GIVE IT A GOOD

TITLE

Remember this. The title of your song IS your song. People remember you by your name and they will remember your song by your song's name. That's why song titles are so important. The title of a song should clearly define the song. Even without having ever heard the song "Sixteen Tons", the title tells you that it is most likely a workingman's song and not a gentle love song. The title, "I Honestly Love You" gives you a pretty clear picture of what that song is all about. Like "Country Roads", or "Surf City USA", or "The Wreck of the Edmond Fitzgerald".

Someone should be able to listen to your song one time and tell you the name of the song. It should be obvious and in most cases, should be either in the chorus or the end line of each verse of a A-A-B song. Now we all know that there are some notable exceptions to this rule, but keep in mind they are exceptions. It's best to have the song title prominent in the song and repeat it, repeat it, repeat it.

An interesting exercise (which is what some songwriters always do) is to write a song from scratch starting with only the title. I've had pretty good success with songs that I have started this way. And it really requires the 'ol imaginative juices to flow baby flow. I guarantee that if you start a song with just the title, when you're done with the song, and play it for someone for the first time, there will be no doubt in their mind what the title is.

It's best to keep titles short and concise because they are easier to remember. Think of "Shout!", "Ruby", "Misty", etc. Not everyone can get away with "Itsy Bitsy Teeny Weeny Yellow Pokka Dot Bikini" (but that's a great title). Even the Otis Redding song "Fa-Fa-Fa-Fa-Fa (Sad Song)" is pretty concise and tells you about the song, and once you've hear it, your definitely remember the title. When that song was first released, the title on the 45 didn't include the (Sad Song) part (does any one remember 45s???)

Your song is your baby. Give it a good name.

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Road to the Bite

continued... the Final Performers



Finalists and performers at the Road to the Bite, from left to right:

Photographer, Owner of MOSS, the online music magazine; Mike Moore, Producer Engineer & Operator of Dead Aunt Thelma's Studio; Keith Greeninger, Award Winning Singer Songwriter; Chance Walte, Owner of Fearless Guitars; Peter Vaughn Shaver, entertainment attorney; Tim Ellis, esteemed guitarist and producer; Dick Weissman, author and musician.

Congratulations to our excellent semi-finalists: Dale Jones, Chris Kokesh, Willy Barber, Richey Bellinger, Brandy Lyn, and Jason Fellman. The competition was high this year, with so many quality performers and songwriters. Many, many thanks to Fearless Guitars, PDXposed, and Oil Can Henry's for sponsoring this successful event! And thanks to everyone who performed and participated in the Road to the Bite showcase series this year.

Finalist
Nicole
Sangsuree



Finalists
The
Gil Reynolds
Trio

Many
thanks to
our
Finals Judges



Photos by Paul Kwitek
PSA board member

THE Art of Phrasing Lyrics

by Tom Arnold

those great songs, cinematic and mysterious, where you find yourself asking - wait a minute. What just happened there?"

Fairest of them All by Ana Egge

Frances Baker was a red-eyed woman
She was wanted in fifteen states
Her dress was torn around at the shoulder
Resulting from her escape

She wanted love, she wanted fame
She got it all, even her name
In a concrete star on the corner of the street
Where real lives and the movies meet
Real life and the movies meet

Chorus:
Oh let me be in the City of Angels
Yes, this is what I want
To put on my dress and some red, red lipstick
Let all the people watch me as I walk

Off to Vegas where the neon screams
Loud as the traffic in her nylon seams
She ran away to the circus, circus
She wears high heels like in her dreams

Down the catwalk with her long cigarette
Hanging from her pretty pouting lips
She's gonna be famous, she's gonna be rich
Rockabye baby, rockabye bitch
Rockabye baby, rockabye

Chorus:
Oh let me be in the City of Angels
Yes, this is what I want
To put on my dress and some red, red lipstick
Let all the people watch me as I walk

In the lamp light of her motel room
She writes home to the moon
Say goodnight to my old bedroom
I'll be home to visit someday soon
I'll be home to visit someday

Now she knows she's got it all
She does her cocaine in the hall
No more hiding in the bathroom stall
She is the fairest of them all
She is the fairest of them all

First, all of the verses start with clipped, shortened phrases. They are abrupt and a little startling, calling your attention to them in an immediate way. Lines like "Off to Vegas where the neon screams" and "Down the catwalk with her long cigarette" grab you with their unexpected abruptness, and lead you to focus on the rest that follows. The abruptness enhances the dramatic images, and contributes to their surreal quality.

The chorus creates a strong counterpoint to the verses, adding insight, poignancy and balance. The words are spoken slowly and softly, deliberately lengthened and held, creating a dream-like languor and speaking to the interior desires of the song's troubled protagonist. The world she would like to own and embrace rather than the disturbing, surreal world she inhabits in the verses.

Here are some specifics I hear in Cleaves' phrasing of the song. Take the line: "Oh, let me be in the City of Angels"...

When we hear the word "city", we may think of crowds of people, traffic, stress, over stimulation, crime, excitement, choices. When we hear the word "angel", we may think of heaven, virtue, redemption, transcendence. In this case, Cleaves chooses to foreshorten the words "city of" and lengthen the phrasing of the word "angel". This strengthens the imagery of the second word over the first. It alludes to the desires of the protagonist in what she is seeking. Had Cleaves given equal weight to each of the syllables in phrasing "city of angels", we might simply have seen Los Angeles. The words might have lost their connection to the protagonist's inner state.

In other lines, lengthening or accentuating certain words heightens a particular visual image the words create.

Take a second look at "Down the catwalk with her long cigarette". On the basis of the flow of the melody, a logical phrasing choice would be to give relatively equal weight to each of the syllables in the two words "long cigarette". Instead, Cleaves hangs on "long",

Thoughtful phrasing of lyrics and melody can strengthen an individual image, provide nuance in meaning or intent, or reinforce one image over another in a series of words.

In my own writing, once I have a song in draft form and am able to practice it in a smooth flow, I try to discern distinctions in imagery and meaning that I have achieved, and to see how alternate phrasings of the material might enhance what I have already written.

Slaid Cleaves, whether writing as sole author, in collaboration with his friend Rod Picott or other authors, or covering material, consistently chooses exceptionally well written songs with finely wrought lyrics and strong, character driven stories.

His ability to shape and phrase the lyrics with thoughtful choices in how he places and accentuates words against the cadence of the melody to imbue additional meaning is easily illustrated in a song called "Fairest of Them All", written by Ana Egge. Egge is one of the authors on his latest release "Unsung", which covers unknown writers, people below the radar of the music industry who perform open mikes for handfuls of people, and who work for a living.

Here is what Cleaves wrote in his liner notes about Ana Egge, the author of the song I have elected to dissect:

"I first heard Ana when she was playing open mikes and I was doing sound. Still in her teens, she was making a big impression on people all over town. I was intrigued but not quite convinced until I heard this one. It's one of



Tom Arnold submitted this article in response to PSA's first call for member submissions. For more information on submitting yourself, please see page 8. Tom has penned 50 songs in a variety of genres. Along the way he has covered tunes, performed, recorded and studied guitar. He is currently writing country songs and co-writing hip hop tunes with a friend. Fascination with the guitar has led him to play finger style folk, flat picked bluegrass, rock and roll and classical music on the instrument. Prior to that, he played trumpet for ten years. He has led performing bluegrass and rock and roll bands, appeared in two Pentacle Theatre rock musicals and played and performed classical guitar. At the moment, he is listening to Slaid Cleaves a lot.

lyric contest

PSA's quarterly

WINNER

as long as is practical without foreshortening "cigarette" into something awkward. It enhances the mental picture of the young woman with the Virginia Slim dangling from her mouth.

Similarly, on the chorus "To put on my dress and some red, red, lipstick", there is an emphasis on lengthening and hanging on the two "reds", and it reinforces the picture of her lipstick.

Finally, Cleaves phrasing sometimes serves to accentuate the meaning or intent of the words.

In the couplet: "I'll be home to visit someday soon; I'll be home to visit someday" dropping the word "soon" in the second line serves notice that the intent to visit may not be heartfelt.

Cleaves effectively reinforces the implicit lack of real intent with his phrasing. In the first line, he leaves a significant pause between the words "visit" and "someday", which implies that the protagonist's resolve to visit may not be strong, or that she may have something in her mind that would prevent this from happening. In the second line, he moves quickly to the word "someday" on the heels of "visit", which allows him to extend the word "someday". This creates a dreamlike quality that someday is a distant and uncertain reality. The two lines phrased together in this manner drive home the point made by the initial word choices.

Another couplet achieves a similar reinforcement of the initial word choices. "Rockabye baby, rockabye bitch; Rockaby baby, rockabye".

One of the strengths of this song is the creation of a character that is at once sympathetic for her circumstances and desire to transcend them, and unsympathetic in her self-absorption and transgressions. The word "bitch" is a clear barb thrown at the protagonist. The word "rockabye" is sympathetic toward her. Cleaves accentuates the dichotomy in his delivery of "bitch" as a quarter note, and the second "rockabye" in the second line as a whole note tied to a half note. The former cements the first word as a barb; the latter cements the second word as sooth for the character.

Find a well-written song that you like sung by an expressive singer you admire. Listen and discern not just how the singer has shaped the lyrics, but seek to understand why they have chosen and what they may be attempting to convey in their phrasing. Whether you are a beginning songwriter or a seasoned pro, you may gain a deeper understanding of how to most effectively present your own material.

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HONORABLE MENTION

Cowboys are My Weakness by Kate Mann

She said I know there's something deeper here
I'm supposed to discover
But all I really want tonight
is to find myself a lover
Cowboys are my weakness
so won't you buy me a drink
Whiskey is my poison
that way I don't have to think about it

Chorus:

Easy come and easy go
if you don't try you'll never know
sometimes it seems like it depends
on which way the wind decides to blow.

One night turned to two, it turned to three,
it turned to four
Mornings find their clothes entangled
strewn across the floor
But we all know how these things go
Less isn't always more
She laid her cards out on the table
and he had one foot out the door.

He said "Woman, you make me want to
be a better man,
but darlin', I don't really think that I can.
You see, I've spent years and years perfecting
my womanizing ways.
I promised myself I'd be like this
til' I reached my grave."

He stayed true to his word, now she's sleeping alone
The circumstance reminds her that
her house is not her home.
She always saw it coming,
he never told a lie,
but the saddest thing is that he never said goodbye.

Cowboys are my weakness
so won't you buy me a drink
Whiskey is my poison
that way I don't have to think about it (2x)

Nice Girls by Carol Weliky

When the rain's falling 'round my head
And I know
I've got to get out
Of a bad situation

When the pain's flashing red
I know
I've got to run or fight
But there's my reputation --
Because

Chorus
Nice girls don't scream
Nice girls don't shout
Nice girls take knives
And cut their own hearts out

Once somebody said to me
You're so sweet and I need the heat
Can I steal your fire?
I said, I've got heart enough for two
So take it
What could I possibly desire?
You know that

Chorus

Bridge

When pleasing yourself's unheard of
Pleasing someone else ain't just hard
It's murder

There's a small bird hovering
Over my shoulder
Singing sometimes to fly free
You've got to be
Willing to go where the air is colder
Because

Chorus

Now! Enter Online at
www.portlandsongwriters.org

PSA MEMBERS THROUGHOUT OREGON

Would you like to start a workshop in your area?

One of the best and most important parts of this organization is the free monthly workshop, currently held in the Portland area, where members and non-members alike can come to an open forum and present songs in the works for friendly group critique and suggestions from fellow songwriters. If you haven't attended a workshop, join us for the next one on the third Saturday of the month.

We've been thinking... we are officially called the "Portland Songwriters Association," but we have many members in other parts of the state, who occasionally make their way up to Portland for a showcase, seminar, or workshop. In the interest of serving our members throughout the state better, we'd love to extend the free monthly workshop opportunity beyond the Portland Metropolitan area (at least 40 miles from Portland). So we're looking for volunteer coordinators. This is an excellent opportunity to connect with PSA members and build a peer group of songwriters in your area, to hone your skills as a songwriter, and to have fun in the process!

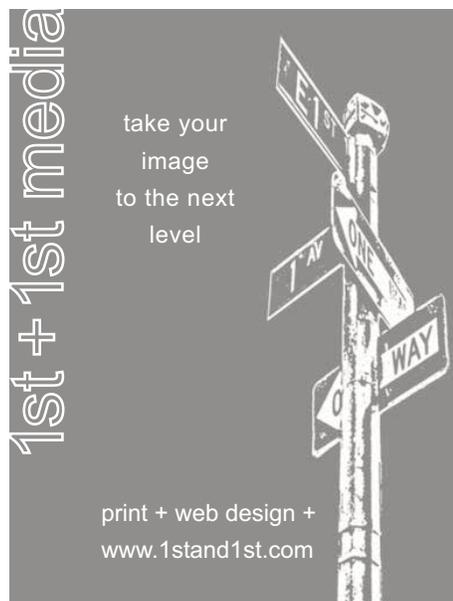
Organization of the workshops is fairly simple: you need a public location with seating for about 10-15 people where songs can be played either live or from tape/CD; a portable stereo to play said tapes/CDs; and a commitment to guide the workshops once a month at the designated time (we recommend a Saturday from 11am to 2pm or a weeknight from 6 to 9pm). Guiding the workshops would mean greeting people, starting off the workshop with an explanation of the guidelines, and providing a positive example in the critiquing process. Beyond that, getting the workshop started will likely require some creative public relations efforts to get the word out to your community. We can help with some ideas for that and of course promote it on the PSA website, in email, and in our newsletters.

The guidelines for people who attend the workshops are:

1. Bring at least 15 lyric sheets and type lyrics exactly as they appear on CD or tape. You may perform your song live, if you prefer. (If you bring a tape, que it to the beginning of the song.)
2. Avoid lengthy intros and instrumental solos. Because time is short at the workshops, we ask that your song be no longer than 3 minutes. Feel free to omit solos, intros, and outros.
3. Focus your feedback on the lyrics and melody of the song. (Production comments may be noted on the lyric sheet and returned to the writer)
4. Be constructive, helpful, friendly, instructional in your critique of others' songs. A positive and encouraging atmosphere makes these workshops fun for everyone. Be honest, be considerate. Everyone is encouraged to speak.
5. Be open-minded to the feedback you receive from others. The goal is to help make everyone's songs that much better.

If you would be interested in starting a PSA free monthly workshop series in your area, we'd love to hear from you.

Contact us anytime at info@portlandsongwriters.org. We will help you to get the ball rolling and be a resource for promotion and related materials. Workshop coordinators receive free membership in the PSA.



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tidbits from the
U.S. Copyright Office

Ownership of Copyright

Initial Ownership: Copyright in a work protected under this title vests initially in the author or authors of the work. The authors of a joint work are coowners of copyright in the work.

Works Made for Hire: In the case of a work made for hire, the employer or other person for whom the work was prepared is considered the author for purposes of this title, and, unless the parties have expressly agreed otherwise in a written instrument signed by them, owns all of the rights comprised in the copyright.

Contributions to Collective Works: Copyright in each separate contribution to a collective work is distinct from copyright in the collective work as a whole, and vests initially in the author of the contribution. In the absence of an express transfer of the copyright or of any rights under it, the owner of copyright in the collective work is presumed to have acquired only the privilege of reproducing and distributing the contribution as part of that particular collective work, any revision of that collective work, and any later collective work in the same series.

Transfer of Ownership: (1) The ownership of a copyright may be transferred in whole or in part by any means of conveyance or by operation of law, and may be bequeathed by will or pass as personal property by the applicable laws of intestate succession. (2) Any of the exclusive rights comprised in a copyright, including any subdivision of any of the rights specified by section 106, may be transferred as provided by clause (1) and owned separately. The owner of any particular exclusive right is entitled, to the extent of that right, to all of the protection and remedies accorded to the copyright owner by this title.

Involuntary Transfer: When an individual author's ownership of a copyright, or of any of the exclusive rights under a copyright, has not previously been transferred voluntarily by that individual author, no action by any governmental body or other official or organization purporting to seize, expropriate, transfer, or exercise rights of ownership with respect to the copyright, or any of the exclusive rights under a copyright, shall be given effect under this title, except as provided under title 11.2.

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
					september 1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	board meets 13 5:30pm showcase 7pm Mississippi Pizza	14	15	workshop 16 11 am Waverly Heights United Church of Christ
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	annual song contest submissions postmarked by today 30
october 1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	board meets 11 5:30pm showcase 7pm Mississippi Pizza	12	13	workshop 14 11 am Waverly Heights United Church of Christ
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31	november 1	2	3	4
5	6	7	board meets 8 5:30pm showcase 7pm Mississippi Pizza	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	quarterly lyric contest submissions due today 16	17	workshop 18 11 am Waverly Heights United Church
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30		

the great songwriter

Tom Arnoldcontributor
 Gil Reynoldscontributor
 JC Tubbscontributor
 Kelli Caldwell ...design & layout

psa officers

Dan Lowe.....president
 Dan McIlhennysecretary
 Gil Reynolds.....treasurer

board members

Kelli Caldwell
 Viki Parker
 Greg Thelen

extra, extra...
 you can now
 enter the PSA
 Annual
 Song Contest
 online at
sonicbids.com



what's happening every month?

PSA SONGWRITING WORKSHOP

When: 3rd Sat of the every month
 Time: 11:00 am
 Location: Waverly Heights United
 Church of Christ
 3300 SE Woodward St., Portland

PSA SONGWRITERS SHOWCASE

When: 2nd Wed of the every month
 Time: 7:00 pm
 Location: Mississippi Pizza
 3552 Mississippi Ave., Portland

did you know?

all psa members
 are welcome to
 attend board
 meetings

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

PSA's quarterly newsletter is accepting article submissions from its members. If you have a songwriting experience that you'd like to share, would like to submit a review of a good songwriting book, website, or other source, or other ideas that would add to the enrichment and enjoyment of our songwriting community, we would love to hear from you!

Portland Songwriters Association was established to:

1. Provide educational and networking opportunities for its membership
2. To develop the songwriting talents of its members
3. To support members in their quests to become great songwriters

If you have an idea for an article or would like to suggest a source, please contact us at info@portlandsongwriters.org. PSA is a not-for-profit organization, so submissions are unpaid. Articles would be included online, as well as in any printed versions of the newsletter, but authors retain rights. Thank you!

ADVERTISING INFORMATION: discounts available for multiple ads. PSA members receive a 20% discount. contact info@portlandsongwriters.org

full page \$150 - 1/2 page \$100 - 1/4 page \$50 - 1/8 page \$25

join the portland SONGWRITERS ASSOCIATION

membership entitles you to free admission to monthly workshops and discounted admission to PSA sponsored events. you can join and pay online at www.portlandsongwriters.org or send payment and this handy form in to:

portland songwriters association
p.o. box 42389
portland, oregon 97242-0389

name _____

address _____

city _____ state _____ zip _____

\$50 membership renewal

