

They Write The Songs

By Judith H. Bernstein

There's no question that the music business is competitive. Although musicians consider themselves artists, when money enters the picture, things can get competitive and, sometimes, downright nasty.

And while the music scene in Huntington can certainly be termed competitive, there also is help for those who write words and music.

The Island Songwriter's Showcase, according to its co-directors, is a noncompetitive organization that aims to help and educate the experienced tunesmith as well as the novice.

As they readied a second floor meeting room before the start of one session, Rob Baranello described the group as educational. His co-director, Todd Suprina, said the Island Songwriter's Showcase offers a workshop-like atmosphere while providing support for its songwriting members. The group meets the first Monday of each month at the Huntington Library.

Those attending can bring in songs — either works in progress that they're struggling with or finished pieces they want critiqued — and seek input, ad-

vice and suggestions from others in the group. The songs come on cassette tapes or sometimes musicians perform them live, accompanied by an instrument that they've toted along. Musicians also bring copies of their lyrics so the others can follow along with the words while the song is performed.

The directors also invite speakers, such as lawyers who specialize in music or song publishers, to offer advice.

Mr. Baranello said the group started meeting in early 1990, and "made lasting friendships right away. There were four to five people at the first meeting, and they remain at the core of the group," which draws membership from all over Long Island.

Members of Island Songwriter's Showcase seem careful to offer support as well as precise nuggets of criticism that's backed by the basics of good music. At the meeting, it was obvious that despite a songwriter's often intense feeling about the work, he or she could take the criticism because it was delivered in a helpful spirit.

"There's no fear of giving an honest reaction to a song," said Mr. Suprina about interaction among the members. "We offer constructive criticism a songwriter can't get anywhere else."

SEE SONG WRITERS, PAGE 16

Leaving The Competition Behind

SONGWRITERS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 15

Mr. Baranello thinks participants are getting something at the meetings that's just not available anywhere else. "The music business is highly competitive and cutthroat ... I just woke up one morning and I didn't want to see that happening to other people."

Those who showed up that Monday evening ranged from Patricia Shih, a Huntington vocalist, guitarist and writer who has two albums to her credit, to several people who seemed new at the game. They sat quietly, only speaking up to ask what certain technical music terms meant.

One member who brought a tune to be critiqued was Kevin Barry. He said he'd written the song because he was "feeling bad about something. This came out — boom! The tune came first, then the words." He handed out photocopies of the lyrics to the group, and a cassette was popped into the recorder so everyone could hear it.

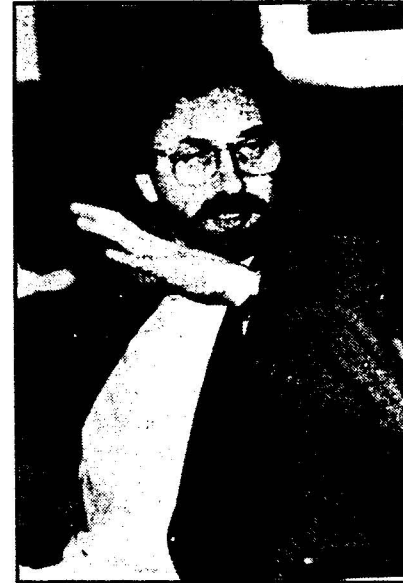
After the tape ended, Mr. Barry looked around at the group and smiled. "That last chord kinda hits you in the head ...," he said, and described how he had come to write the song.

"There's so much feeling in the lines," Mr. Suprina said. "Great imagery."

Other people had some problems with the song, though. Mr. Baranello, discussing the marriage of lyric and music, said, "Trying to impose words on top of melody — sometimes it sounds forced."

Ms. Shih was concerned about what she termed clichés in Mr. Barry's song. "When I'm writing a song," she

Record Photo By TINA PALMQUIST



Rob Baranello

said, "I try to think of a new way to express a feeling. Writing a song is like putting a frame around something. If it's that important, try to find a different way to say it."

But after another few moments of discussion — as if in tribute to the kind of atmosphere Messrs. Suprina and Baranello have tried to create — Mr. Barry responded good-naturedly to his critics. "I don't agree with any of you people," he said. "I felt great about the song. I feel really comfortable about this song — it flows right out of me."

Members mixed it up even more later in the evening when Ms. Shih presented a song she was working on that she felt lacked a bridge — a musical passage linking two sections of the song. At one point, one of the group's members stood at her side, lyric sheet in hand, and she sat with her guitar as the two went over and over the song until they did find a bridge.

Also available at that meeting, along with the professional advice of a music business lawyer and the opinions and guidance of fellow members, was information on a *Billboard* magazine songwriting contest; a coupon for the Nashville Red Book, a trade directory for songwriters; and an article from *Keyboard* magazine on "power lyric writing tips."

The next meeting of the Island Songwriter's Showcase is Monday, March 4, at 7:30 p.m. at the Huntington Library, 338 Main Street, Huntington. Admission is free, and all are welcome to attend. For information, call the showcase at 673-6658. ■