

# Local Songwriters Showcase Their Talents

By Lauren Wennerod

The public will have a chance to hear up and coming performers, who could be the stars of tomorrow, perform at Fast Eddie's in Huntington on June 28. Island Songwriter's Showcase (ISS), a creative workshop and networking coalition designed to cultivate excellence in the field of songwriting, will present many of its members for an evening that ISS co-founder, Rob Baranello, says should be fun for everyone.

The group holds its meetings on the first Monday of the month at the Huntington Village Public Library. Founded in 1990 by Robert Baranello and Todd Suprina, it provides an environment where artists can air their original compositions in an impartial atmosphere and receive feedback. Members also benefit from the sharing of trade secrets, finding help networking their songs, and the always present mutual support; they also get the opportunity to hear from guest speakers, such as one from the Songwriter's Guild of America who examined a standard contract with the group. The non-competitive atmosphere of the group is important. Baranello admits that keeping competition out of the picture isn't always easy, but he is proud of the rapport group members have established, and the fact that they can share trade secrets freely.

Between the two of them, Baranello, who is music and film editor at *New York/Long Island Update* Magazine and



ISS members at Fast Eddies in Huntington, where they will perform on June 28, from left, are: Jeanne Wiggins, Numa Salsella, Cathy Kreger, Peter Kanelous, Howard Emerson, Janet Ross and Paul Blondl. Front: Hiro Keltora and Tom Zona.

Suprina, a speech teacher, have written over 150 songs. Even though Baranello says they no longer have aspirations of song writing as a career (he gave up the idea in 1989), they wanted to use what they had learned over the years to help others. "We didn't want to throw it all away," he said.

Most of the members of ISS have performed in public, including Howie Emerson, a country blues guitarist who

has toured with Billy Joel and Eric Anderson and Flying Fish recording artist Patricia Shih, a Huntington performer with two albums to her credit. Those members who aren't professional musicians are somehow connected with the music world. Member Vin Kelly is a staff writer for a major publishing firm, but has played local clubs.

The relationships built up by group members are important, Baranello says.

Some have studios to produce an album right in their homes and can be of help to another member in need of that technology. Lasting friendships are often formed, and some members have even begun dating.

"Nothing brings us a greater joy, says Baranello, "than seeing two members of our group meet and collaborate on a song."

A criteria that Suprina, Baranello and ISS members use for judging their songs is "did it move us?" This is a criteria for all art forms, Baranello said.

He describes what he calls a "fleeting ingredient" that record companies look for in songs. They try to keep focus on the artistic side of the music, and not let the business side overshadow it. "You have to remember," he said, "that even if you don't succeed commercially you still have to look at yourself in the mirror in the morning."

ISS was inspired by the idea of a group started by Harry Chapin in the mid 1970s. The late singer/songwriter who was known for philanthropic endeavors began a group which met at his house in Huntington Bay. Baranello is a former member of the group.

The evening at Fast Eddies, beginning at 8 p.m., will highlight performers Howard Emerson, Patricia Shih and a three-woman vocal group called Mares-Eat-Oats, whose sound has been compared to Indigo Girls.