

Arts & Life in Somerville

New Toast Poetry with a folky flare

By Catherine Rogers

A former Miss Teen Hawaii and current Somerville artist will step in as the newest organizer of the Somerville News' poetry readings at Toast lounge in Union Square. At the Dec. 16 Somerville News contributors' meeting, Ingrid "Chiemi" Schroffner revealed her vision for an integrated performance of music and poetry.

She hopes to arrange for music, poetry, and an open microphone segment on the Toast Lounge stage every second Sunday of the month.

But music groups beware: Chiemi seeks solo performers with a gentle, folky twang.

"Folk music is about people and what connects them to the human experience," she said. The medieval Bardic tradition of storytelling serves as a model for these productions.

Illustrative storytelling also lies at the center of both her professions. A native of Hawaii, Chiemi works as both a family probate lawyer and folk singer-songwriter.

In the courtroom and on the stage, Chiemi has a knack of playing to her audience. "As a lawyer, I tell stories about people's lives and the dynamics unique to each

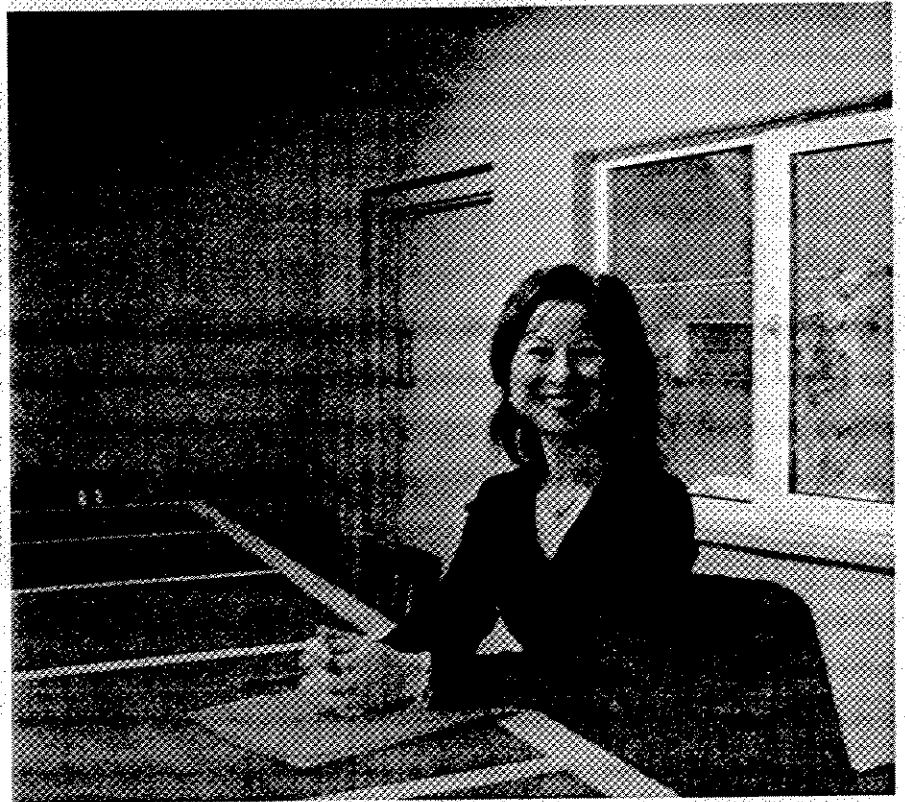
family," she said. "And when I sing, I tell stories about people I know," she said.

Given the choice of her two careers, Chiemi – without hesitation – said she would opt for music. "I was a songwriter before anyone taught me how to do anything. My music is just more natural to me," she said.

Fortunately, Somerville's artsy atmosphere prevents Chiemi from having to choose between one career and the other. "There are lots of venues in Somerville that are friendly to what I do," she said, noting that has been difficult to break into the Newton art scene since she moved there in 2000.

"Newton is a staid community. It's not as open there, maybe because the older residents like things a certain way," she said. Despite Newton's insularity and Chiemi's own commitments, Somerville's performance spots such as the Burren afford Chiemi the opportunity to write, sing and perform to a welcoming audience.

When she was 9, Chiemi played the viola and violin and had composed her own songs by the age of 12. In 1987, Chiemi was crowned Miss Teen Hawaii and traveled the state singing and raising money for charity. While attending



Chiemi will host Somerville News poetry nights at Toast this January.

Photo taken by George P. Hassett

Boston College, Chiemi sang with the Wand'ring Mistrisals and even taught herself to play the guitar, carefully watching the movements

of other players.

In law school, there was not a lot of time for songwriting, but Chiemi returned to the music

scene in 2003. "If you love something, you make time for it," she said.

With a new host 'Toast' on the rise this winter

2006 is yet another new year for Toast Lounge, a hip venue in Somerville's Union Square. Beginning in February 2006, founder of the Somerville Poetry Series @ Toast, Douglas Holder, will hand the hosting mic over to me, Chiemi. Said Holder: "Chiemi has been a regular at the Toast Series since its start. She is opening the series to music as well." The performances anticipated are "of lyrics with instrumentation by other musicians as well as readings."

In Fall 2005, Augustine J. Russo, Jr. came on board for Toast Lounge as its new general manager. Since he began, Russo has worked behind the scenes to orchestrate the hotspot into a place with a new touch and even a little more flash, while still retaining what Paula Kelley called its "swanky medieval dungeon" atmosphere.

That Holder, the founder of the Series, was featured in the last 2005 event this December, was fitting. I felt things had come full circle when I had the honor and pleasure of writing about Holder as a featured act December 11th.

I am supremely excited by the advent of having two different, yet complimentary features every month, continuing in but yet expanding the bardic tradition begun here with the infusion of notes and song. The response has been spec-

tacular – scintillating with talent and possibilities to break new ground.

Fickel, who attended the December event, says he is excited to play in the "great space" that is Toast, and most of all, to "play in a context where people are actually listening to the lyrics." Guests for 2006 also include Boston University Professor Tracy Strauss, Juliana Bures and Cheryl Devitt, and John Sood (folkonrecords.tripod.com), founder of the local independent record label, Folk On Records and radio show host at WMFO 91.5 FM out of Medford. It is my hope that this newly augmented Series at Toast will offer that and more...

Since 2004, when I began providing music for each event, I have been stunned by the talent and variety walking through the doors.

The line-up for 2005 was: Jan. 7: James DeCrescentis and Richard Wilhelm; Jan. 28: Regie Gibson and Ryk McIntyre; Feb. 18: Janet Cormier and Chad Parenteau; May 8: Marc Widershien and Lo Galluccio; June 12: Joe Torra and Jim Dunn; July 10: Susie Davidson and Doug Holder; Aug. 14: Juliana Bures and Irene Koronas; Sept. 11: Poets from New Renaissance Magazine; and Oct. 9: Ann Carhart and Philip Burnham.

Submitted by Chiemi, Host, poetry series @ Toast.

Somerville Poetry Series @ Toast 2006

Jan. 8, 2006

Iris Gomez
Yafe Graziano

Feb. 12, 2006

Colleen Houlinan
Jaques Fluery

March 12, 2006

Jason Fickel (www.jasonfickel.com)
Natasha Schneider

April 9, 2006

Lisa Locke (www.lisalocke.net)
David Surette (www.davidsurette.com)



Somerville resident Lisa Locke performed recently at the Abbey Lounge. She has signed on to the