

MUSIC

March 30-April 5

ALBUM REVIEW RATINGS

★★★★ EXCELLENT / ★★★ GOOD / ★★ FAIR / ★ POOR

backbeat



Tom Stahl is one of Buffalo's most creative and clever songwriters — but he downplays the meaning of his music.

MEANING OF SUCCESS

Songwriter Tom Stahl
stirs the soul
with new song

BY ANTHONY VIOLANTI
News Critic

Every once in a while a performer comes up with a song that can change a career. It deserves to happen to Tom Stahl for the track "Are There Angels" off his new CD, "Shut Up and Smell the Coffee." The soft song is layered with emotion, featuring these lyrics:

"Angels don't belong down here on earth, they're gone before you know it and when they're gone it

bursts/So treasure every moment from the moment of their birth/cause you know angels don't belong down here on earth.

"Where there're angels, there is hope/So when you feel you just can't cope and the world around turns cold and gray and your angel's far way/Well don't you cry, angels don't die."

This is one of the best local tracks I've heard in years. The last time I was so moved by a song was when the Goo Goo Dolls released their breakthrough single,

"Name" in 1995.

"Are There Angels" exudes a spiritual, melancholy quality with a universal message. It's the kind of remarkable record that deserves to be played on local radio, even in a tight broadcast market like Buffalo.

"Angels" would be perfect for a country, pop or light vocal radio format. Stahl has provided Buffalo radio with the rare opportunity to break out a national hit from a local record.

It's about time local radio took advantage of such an opportunity because the song has the potential to be a Top 10 hit. But don't hold your breath waiting for that to happen.

Stahl recently sang the song at a church service for a group of people mourning the loss of children.

"It was very heavy the way the people responded to the song," he said. "I think of it as a healing song, and I was touched by the reaction. They wanted me to talk afterward, but it was so emotional, I had to leave."

Stahl is one of Buffalo's most creative and clever songwriters — but he downplays the meaning of his music.

"If you listen carefully, I don't really say anything," said Stahl, who has been singing and writing for six years and recently released the CD "Shut Up and Smell the Coffee." It will be available at a release party Saturday at 7 p.m. in Nietzsche's, 248 Allen St.

Stahl, of course, is being modest.

His sound is a robust combination of folk, rock and country, and it enhances a writing style that offers hope dosed with some wide-eyed cynicism.

Consider the opening track on his CD, called "Shut Up." It's an answer for those looking for music's next big thing.

"And everybody's listening for a brand new sound/If you want to find it here, you best get out of town." Later, he adds this lyric: "If you read what I wrote, then you read old news, and I sound like Dylan, like that could be bad, if that's all you're bearing then man you've been bad."

The new CD is the fourth of Stahl's career and his first in nearly two years. It's available at Tom Catt Records, PO Box 417, Hamburg, N.Y. 14075. The Web address is: www.hipknowsys.com/stahl. ●