

# THE SUN

## **Sounds of the Southtowns: Quick wit with a danceable beat in solo singer-songwriter Tom Stahl**

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HAMBURG — In 1995, Mary Lou Stahl told her husband not to come home from the Nietzsche's open mic in Allentown until he sang. Now, 20 years and over 100 songs later, Tom Stahl is a household name in the Southtowns and Buffalo area.

Stahl's wife has always been a driving force for him and his music, according to Stahl. "When I started out, we lived on LaSalle in Kenmore," he explained. "My wife pretty much made me go out and play."

After performing at a couple open mics, Stahl got to know other notable artists like Mike Meldrum, Alison Pipitone and Katie Miller. Meldrum arranged gigs for Stahl, in the area at local colleges and other venues, which got him started.

The musician said that his song ideas come pretty naturally into his head and he just lets the idea "bounce around" for a while before a tune comes.

Hearing stories of tragedy on the radio, or from those who are close to him also inspire his lyrics.

Stahl currently lives in the Hamburg village, which he cites as significant for his gigs in the area. "It's like playing in your own backyard," he said. "If someone asked me to do the same types of gigs too far away, I don't know if I would do it."

He has been playing solo at Bistro in the Square for the past seven months. He said every time he's there, there is a different crowd, which he enjoys.

"They are so nice [at Bistro in the Square]," he said, smiling. "I walk in and put my stuff down and there is already a Guinness on the counter for me."

Family is also a strong supporter of Stahl's music. According to his wife, family members try to make every show.

"I think in song," Stahl said, of his songwriting process. "The hook pops into my head, and if I like it and I like the idea, then I'll build around it."

He added that his process is formulaic, noting that he follows a structure of a chorus and three verses. He said he uses the chorus to tell a story and the verses to support it.

"Sometimes I say, 'well, how am I going to get from the verse to the chorus,' and I think of a bridge that will take in there nicely," he said.

"I'll hear him play a riff, sometimes for a year or two, with no song. Then, all of a sudden, there's lyrics" Mary Lou Stahl said.

She added that if someone tells Stahl that they need a song for a wedding, he has it ready in a matter of days.

Stahl has received many local awards for his music and stage presence, including the 2007 award for Buffalo's Best Entertainer.

"When he's on stage, he knows everybody," Explained Mary Lou Stahl. "It's almost like he's a teacher in a classroom. He has a quick wit and his schtick is just as strong as his music."

Stahl's wit and sarcasm is often drawn from current events and political news. He said his lyrics and themes sometimes contain messages pertaining to social and political issue, but everything is kept "tongue-in-cheek; not too serious."

"He is so generous with his gift," Mary Lou Stahl said. "He sings at Millard Fillmore [Hospital], he sings at Children's Hospital every year, and he gives away copies of ["Are There Angels"]. He never asks for anything, and never wants recognition."

She estimated that since its rerelease in 2001, Stahl has provided about 1,000 copies of "Are There Angels" to those who have experienced loss.

Tom Stahl still plays with his band Tom Stahl and the Dangerfields, as well as solo around town.

He has recently played as the guest artist at Alison Pipitone's open mic at Moonshiners on Camp Road.