

Bleeding, and Putting It Out There: Tim Mahoney, March 13 at Augustana College

Written by Jeff Ignatius

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If you watch a lot of MTV, there's an excellent chance you've heard the music of Tim Mahoney, who will be performing at Augustana College on Friday, March 13.

He also has a video airing in Life Time Fitness locations in 18 states. And he has a partnership with Miller Genuine Draft.

That might sound like selling out, but the Minneapolis-based Mahoney said last week that it's simply a matter of survival for an independent musician.

"This is how you stay alive I think these days in the music business," he said. "It's that any-and-all-and-kind-of-outside-of-the-box theory. ... It takes so much more to get it to people."

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It's not hard to figure out why these relationships are mutually beneficial. Mahoney obviously gets exposure and royalties, and his heartfelt music is a good fit for these gigs because it goes down easily and makes for a pleasant, unobtrusive musical backdrop. The songs are hooky and catchy, he's adept at everything from piano ballads to power pop, and there's nary a rough edge to be found. His voice is warm and expressive and earnest.

Mahoney seems a bit naked in his ambition, in that his current album, *Stay/Leave*, has songs titled "Theme Song" and "Big Hit Song." These songs aren't as bald as the names suggest, but they still appear to reflect a desire for fame and fortune.

"Theme Song," though, is actually quite clever, as it describes an oblivious narcissism and suggests the subject wouldn't even register the song's barbs: "In your head, you ain't doing nothing wrong / Maybe this could be your theme song."

At the center of the album are "Stay" and "Leave," and the juxtaposition effectively captures the contradictory impulses of love; the sentiment of "I want you to go but please *stay*" in the next song becomes "Leave, if you're honest." It's a simple pairing that works tremendously well.

There's not much musically distinctive here - there's so much polish that the textures are obscured - but there are worse sins than being a workmanlike songwriter crafting and performing sturdy tunes. Mahoney has two songs in the finals of the [International Songwriting Competition's People's Voice contest](#), and he has a number of awards to his name, including one win in a contest sponsored by Ray-Ban, *Rolling Stone*, and MySpace that got him in the magazine's pages.

It was a win in the [We Are Listening](#) contest that got Mahoney's music on television. "You need someone in between, almost like a broker," he said. So when he won a round of the We Are Listening singer/songwriter contest, he asked for TV placement. "You can really shape your own prize," he said.

He was put in contact with somebody who dealt with 15 television shows, Mahoney said, and over the past six months, they've been able to get on most of them.

"The reality is some of the shows are not that cool," Mahoney said. "But they pay pretty good." He estimated that he'll make between \$5,000 and \$8,000 off his MTV exposure so far.

Mahoney said that he mostly scouts the contests and opportunities himself. "It's pretty much just me," he said. "Bleeding in your songs and putting 'em out there."

He added that he hopes to put them out there even more in the future. He's planning to release a new single in the coming months, and he still has dreams of an opening slot on a major tour, or a major-label deal. "Sometimes you need some of that power and juice still to make some things happen," he said.

Mahoney's approach to music might not do much for his street credibility, but he said he's not a starving artist, and he last had a day job in 1996: "I make a very good living."

Tim Mahoney will perform at 8 p.m. on Friday, March 13, at Augustana College's Brew by the Slough, on the fourth floor of the Thomas Tredway Library, 639 38th Street in Rock Island.

For more information on Tim Mahoney, visit TimMahoney.com or MySpace.com/timmahoneymusic