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Inspiration and artistry continually outpacing each other, May 6, 2003

Reviewer: [Phil Rogers \(see more about me\)](#) from Ann Arbor, MI United States

The amazing thing about 'Gaining on You' is that Mr. Scheuren doesn't just recapitulate, but resurrects the style of 70's country-pop and pop-rock - he ups the ante at every turn. His melodies keep on going and growing, becoming more enriched at each supple, sinuous turn.

As for Tony's song lyrics, they map various emotional life situations in some of the usual ways, but do it better than average, sometimes way better. Each song slips in a metaphor or two that flavors the text with an aspect of the numinous/spiritual, throwing the listener off balance just enough for the meaning to grab hold inside, and begin to sprout. The way he sings himself into his texts, and how the melodies and lyrics cohere, can at times be breathtaking. The energy of transformation is in nearly every bite of this musical meal - it can really change you if you listen carefully, and with heart.

Mr. Scheuren served as his own recording engineer, and was very good at it. The mixes, the use of guitar and other effects, the way he captured all the nuances, vocal and otherwise, is definitely above average. One very minor caveat here: on the songs that feature only vocal with piano accompaniment, Tony's voice sometimes slightly overloads the microphone that he was using. He wasn't over-singing - it was a studio monitor problem - it's tricky/difficult to set up the perfect headphone mix while you're recording yourself singing over a rollicking barroom piano.

Here are some highlights from the songs:

"Lucky Star" In an unassuming manner, this up-tempo country pop tune sets the tone of what's coming with its tasty guitar (smooth, articulate riffs; flavorful tone settings; innovative chord changes/inversions). Throughout, the energy never lags.

"Freewheeler" Starts out sounding a bit like vintage (pre-syrupy) James Taylor, i.e. from the 'Sweet Baby James' era). Then again, Tony's rhythmic sense is subtler; plus the ornamentation/phrasing of his vocals displays a plenitude of artistry. There is beautiful melodic development, and his singing fills those melodies with sumptuous soul. And the barroom piano swings nicely.

"Heart by Heart" Tony starts off with a gutsy flanged guitar introduction, then launches into a Bob Seger sound-alike vocal that leaves me speechless. His backup vocals at the bridge/chorus grab you in an Eagles sort of way (remember when two of the Eagles sang backup on Seger's "Fire Lake"). Scheuren harmonizes with himself amazingly well, singing 'in different voice' than his lead part. Once again, he really keeps the energy of this terrific melody moving - gently, relentlessly enlivening all of the accompanying instrumental parts as well. His gift for harmony and counterpoint is rare among pop composers, and more amazing, he makes it sound like he's doing it on the fly. In a way, it's like watching those sped-up videos of flowers opening up.

"Feels Like Sunday" is blessed with such sweet-sounding vocals and well-developed melodic progressions that it's easy to forget to listen for the meaning of the words.

"Firefly" More country pop style à la Carole King (etc.) - here's yet another beautifully poetic vignette. Then at the end, the sound dies out quickly, like the light of the firefly.

"You're the Light" A seemingly pedestrian, quick-paced ballad with King/Nyro style piano accompaniment is resuscitated by Tony's usual soulful singing, along with breathlessly appealing vocal pyrotechnics/ornamentation.

"American Flyer" The first wide stereo spread/mix on the CD starts with another flange-effected guitar intro. The overall sound plus Tony's vocal timbre and phrasing seem to have anticipated part of the sound of [alt-rock band] Better Than Ezra's debut album ('Deluxe': released 2 years after Tony passed away), especially their song "Coyote", which itself may have been paying homage to the Eagles.

"Angeline" Tony's vocal packs itself snugly into the dense-sounding arrangement - by this time it's no surprise how stunning is the interplay between his singing and instrumental accompaniment, as well as how the vocal re-enters the mix after each riff and break. It hits you right in the heart.

"Play to Win" The way the pieces of this song fit together, everybody will love it - it would probably make a good first single off the CD. Haunting electric guitar riffs display themselves throughout, and Tony the engineer dials in a great echo effect for the vocal. Once again, the lyrics, singing and chord changes are great, as is the way the inventive melody fits into its companion harmonic structure.

"Goodbye Takes So Long" This guy's so full of heart that it almost hurts. Lovely and wise, lyrics and singing FULL of feeling . . . the song moves along relentlessly, wonderfully for 6¼ minutes. It grabs you in the gut - and just plays you! By the way, this is one of three waltzes on the CD. I imagine couples dancing in a thousand honkytonks across America - eyes peering into each other - hips joined, gently rocking, close to the rhythm and melody, and to each other. Surreal? Maybe, maybe not.

"Gaining On You" This one's a wet-eyes song for sure - no one will have any doubt. I could envision groups of friends maybe getting together, listening to this CD, and all quietly crying during this, the last song. Tony Scheuren and the family and friends he hung out with must surely have had a wonderful life together . . .