

# Elmore

SAVING AMERICAN MUSIC

## Hal Ketchum

*Father Time* • (Curb Records)

**T**here are albums on which an artist transcends his or her respective genre, taking things to a higher level of musical awareness. On his latest outing, *Father Time*, country singer/songwriter Hal Ketchum does just this.

Ketchum saw his biggest commercial success early in his career. In 1991, his *Past the Point of Rescue* CD contained the hit "Small Town Saturday Night," coupled with the title track, which was all over CMT and radio. Recent years may have given way to a trendier style of country, but Ketchum's classic storyteller sensibilities have never gone out of style. His lyrical bite just keeps growing stronger. On *Father Time*, Ketchum spreads his wings, content with leaving the hits in the past and turning his focus towards the human element. As he puts it, each song is a sort of "personal folk tale."

The CD, which was recorded live to two-track tape in just two days, exudes a warm living room vibe throughout. The mostly acoustic instrumentation lends itself to the folk-like qualities of the songwriting. Ketchum explores life on death row in "Millionaire's Wife" and a dark sense of promiscuity on "Continental Farewell"—he says it's the sickest thing he's ever written—and touches on the agony of war in the beautifully melodic Civil War tale "Sparrow." Every track is pure heart, and Ketchum's honesty is infectious.

*Father Time* is, as Hal's friend Neil Diamond states in the liner notes, "so real and unpretentious and so much fun to boot." Ketchum is definitely looking at the big picture with this disc, hits be damned. It's refreshing to know there's still a true artist in the country arena.—Mark Uricheck

