

People

July 29, 2002

Ralph Stanley

Ralph Stanley (DMZ/Columbia)

It took nearly 200 albums for the rest of the world to catch up to Ralph Stanley, the devout Baptist from Virginia whose vocals on "O' Death" helped the *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* soundtrack win the Album of the Year Grammy. Stanley's voice is nasal and thin, but his banjo-playing is nimble and delicate, as vital to bluegrass as B. B. King's guitar is to blues. The rootsy songs here, mostly traditionals and devotionals, include Hank Williams's hymn "Calling You" and the Carter Family's "Girl From the Greenbriar Shore." With a studio quartet, harmony vocals by Suzanne and Evelyn Cox and production by *O Brother*'s music mastermind T Bone Burnett, the sound lives up to Stanley's reputation for authenticity, musicality and lack of pretension. **-R.N. Bottom line: True to his own rich legend**