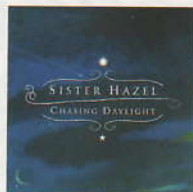


BY HEATHER JOHNSON

SISTER HAZEL



CHASING DAYLIGHT



ALBUM:	<i>Chasing Daylight</i>
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NEW RELEASE SPOTLIGHT SISTER HAZEL

"I'M NOT RIGHT / And I'm not fine," Sister Hazel frontman Ken Block sings on their ubiquitous single "Your Mistake." True, the good-natured lead vocalist/songwriter is not fine—he's ecstatic over the success of *Chasing Daylight*, the band's first indie album since 1996's *Somewhere More Familiar*, which eventually went platinum after the band signed with Universal Records. "So far, opting off Universal was a great decision for us," Block says, just after soundcheck in Myrtle Beach, S.C. "We learned a lot in that process, for sure, but when we looked at opportunities that felt right for us, we decided the indie route would work very well."

The Gainesville, Fla., quintet's newly resumed DIY status certainly hasn't diminished their presence at retail or radio. The album topped *Billboard's* Internet Record Sales chart in its first week, and the lead single, "Your Mistake," can be heard on AAA, Adult Contemporary and Top 40 stations across the U.S.

Inspired by their newfound freedom, the band wrote and demoed more than 70 songs for the new album, then faced the not-so-simple task of whittling that list down to 12. Through a democratic process, the band selected a dozen final cuts that together journey through varying emotions and philosophies on a path littered with darkness. "We wanted 12 songs that work together, that reflect different parts of the band, but still seem like they belong together," Block

says. The leftovers, he says, may also see the light of day in the near future. "There are so many songs that we're hugely excited about, and now that we're indie, the frequency and manner in which we release music is up to us."

The impossibly catchy trio of "Your Mistake," "Come Around" and "One Love," showcases the band's soaring vocal harmonies and accessible, highly singable melodies. Raw, electric guitar solos add an aggressive edge to their organic rock sound, but don't detract from their mainstream appeal. The disc also includes two aching ballads ("Best I'll Ever Be" and "Hopeless"), along with more adventurous, Southern rock-flavored tracks.

While Sister Hazel certainly knows their way around a melody, lyrics remain the band's power card. The organic rockers cover the well-traveled territories of love and longing, but present them with a sense of maturity, self-awareness and emotional depth. "Come Around," for example, inspired by a spontaneous day trip, finds value in living in the present moment. "Some friends of ours watched the sun go down on the west coast of Florida, and made their way to the east coast in time to see the sun come up," recalls Block, the band's principal songwriter. "We expanded on that idea, so it's about someone who's always looking ahead instead of enjoying what's right there in front of them."

Backed by rhythmic acoustic guitar and a

sweeping string section, Block's expressive voice tugs at the heartstrings on "Best I'll Ever Be," a song about "the slow death of youth and lost love," he says.

Songs such as the funk-fueled "Effortlessly" discuss the struggle to release control and "just be," one of the many issues confronted and studied by Block. "I've been a student of the human condition my whole life—my head's really strange!" he says, laughing. "I know when I'm alone I'm in very bad company." Block, who holds a master's degree in psychology, later adds, "Over the years I've tried to learn how to do life better. I work hard at trying to connect with people and trying to find better ways to handle difficult issues—I'm taking life on life's terms."

Sister Hazel has certainly found a way to maintain control of their career without losing their integrity and alienating legions of "Hazelnuts." "We educated ourselves as to how this business works," Block says. "There's parts of it that work and parts that don't fit our personality at all. We tried to take the things that work well and build on them."

This method appears to be a solid one, as they've created one of their finest albums to date. "To find that our music is still relevant and connecting with listeners—both from an underground, grassroots standpoint and a radio standpoint—is really rewarding," Block confides. "We're especially grateful to write songs, sing and play instruments for a living." ■

photo by Kevin Ames