



AP FILE PHOTO

Fans of Elliott Smith (seen here in 1998) will find footage of a 1999 concert worth owning.

## A stark glimpse of a troubled troubadour

**"Elliott Smith — Olympia, Washington"** isn't your garden-variety pop-music DVD. There's no scintillating backstage footage, no revealing interview segments or arty quick-cut editing. Editing isn't really an issue when you're dealing with 40 minutes of videotape that's as raw and unvarnished as the subject himself. Smith, who died at the age of 34 last year, was a gifted songwriter and a troubled person, and both of those qualities are plain during this 12-song set, performed at the 1999 Yoyo Ago Go Festival in Washington. It's just Smith, his acoustic guitar, and a roomful of young, pierced devotees — all of whom, including Smith, seem to be trying really hard to make it through the songs and their lives without falling apart. It's painful, poignant viewing, and I found myself spending much of it willing him to hit the high notes. The film's rare cinematic flourishes — i.e. close-ups — are of Smith's fingers, with the nails bitten to the quick; his face, which is fixed with a look that falls somewhere between sweetly smiling and about to cry; and faces in the crowd, which are clinging to every lovely lick and pained phrase. The set list, mostly taken from "XO" and "Figure 8," features some of his best songs (among them "Son of Sam," "Division Day," "Easy Way Out," and "Stupidity Tries"), and they're stripped to the bone. The film, which follows closely on the heels of Smith's posthumously released recording "From a Basement on the Hill," won't answer any of the many questions that remain about his life and his death. But for Smith's fans, it's something to hang on to. (MVD, \$16.95)

**Home Entertainment**

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