

# Entertainment WEEKLY

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## Hill Raiser

**King of Mountain Soul Ralph Stanley cashes in on big *Brother* hype but stays true to his roots**

**B**LUEGRASS PATRIARCH RALPH STANLEY no doubt appreciates the ironic title of his new Columbia album, eponymously named as if the septuagenarian were launching his career, instead of returning to the label that signed him and his late brother, Carter, in 1948. But to many of the 6 million buyers of the *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* soundtrack, Stanley is a newfound artist whose cool factor registers not just in his black leather jacket and shades but also in the purity of his music. On **Ralph Stanley**, coproducer T Bone Burnett, whose new DMZ label is distributed by Columbia, resists any temptation to gussy up Stanley's primitive sound or dry-as-parchment tenor. Sparsely backed by several *O Brother* musicians, including gui-



**Ralph Stanley**  
RALPH STANLEY  
DMZ/COLUMBIA

tarist Norman Blake and vocalists Evelyn and Suzanne Cox, the King of Mountain Soul holds fast to the past, revisiting the desperate hill themes of romantic helplessness, murder, and heavenly redemption, evoking the last on the a cappella "Twelve Gates to the City," which some may quibble too closely draws on his Grammy-winning "O Death." In recording only traditional songs, except one self-penned number and Hank Williams' spiritual "Calling You," Stanley proves once again that everything old is new again. Including, of course, himself. **B+** —Alanna Nash