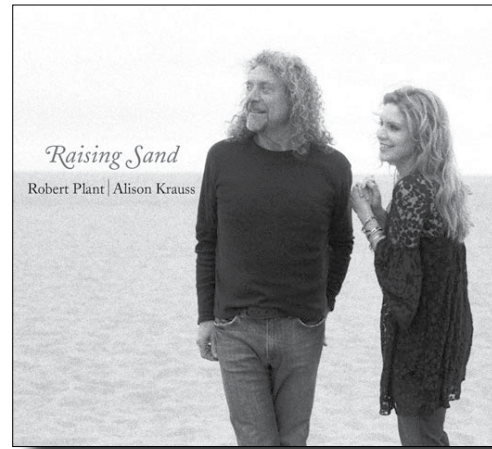


# Music That Matters

By Jeff O'Kelley

As I write this month's column I am surrounded by the sounds of Christmas. My kids are singing *Silent Night*, there is a twisted version of *Jingle Bells* playing on the television and the bells tied around on dogs collar ring continuously. Although I love the holiday season, it can be a bit overwhelming at times. It's usually about this time of the month when I start to look for a diversionary path to lead me back to some sort of non-Christmas sanity. Luckily I didn't have to look far for this year's savior.

*Raising Sand* was released in late October by indie label powerhouse Rounder Records and features the unusual duo of Alison Krauss and Robert Plant. Yes, you read that correctly. Producer T. Bone Burnett combined the angelic voice of Nashville's own bluegrass princess Alison Krauss with the rough rock voice of Led Zeppelin front man Robert Plant. Now on the surface this might seem to make as much sense as bringing Ozzie Osborne together with Alvin and the Chipmunks, but this duo comes together to offer a surprising collaboration. Alison's silky, smooth voice seems to complement Plant's dry and often scratchy style to produce a sound that fits each song. I guess that I really shouldn't be surprised through. In the recent past, Nashville has seemed to beckon numerous rockers to try their hand at something new, with surprisingly good results. Lest you doubt me, you might want to check out "country" releases by hard rockers such as Mark Knopfler (Dire Straits), Kid Rock, Jon Bon Jovi, Bob Welch (Fleetwood Mac) and Michelle Branch to name but a few.



Starting with the classic 80's rock sound of *Rich Woman* and ending with the Carter Family-style *Your Long Journey Home*, Krauss and Plant attacked the tracks on this CD with amazing talent. Mixed into the CD are several standouts, such as Sam Phillips' *Sister Rosetta Goes Before Us*, which weaves a slightly Zeppelinish, gypsy sound that is quite entrancing. On Tom Waits' *Trampled Rose*, Krauss offers her trademark angelic voice that would put a Siren to shame and leaves you breathless. *Gone, Gone, Gone* by The Everly Brothers is an awesome guitar-driven rocker that features a classic duet, which allows Plant to showcase some of his classic rock roots. For a real treat, fast-forward to *Nothin'*, which sounds like old Zeppelin with Krauss playing a mean violin to rival Jimmy Page's violin bow driven Les Paul solos.

For his part, producer T. Bone Burnett didn't just sit back and flip switches. His influence can be found all throughout the songs, in every tremolo guitar, mandolin lick and banjo pluck. In the same way he helped craft the sounds of Elvis Costello, Roy Orbison, Tony Bennett, K.D. Lang, Counting Crows, the Wallflowers, Sam Phillips, Gillian Welch, and Ralph Stanley, he infused this CD with a spirit all it's own. Without his touch, this project could have easily gone another direction.

If you're looking for a new CD to accompany your next weekend outing, *Raising Sand* is an excellent choice. It's a quality collection of great songs, sure to make your ride a memorable one. It just might be the one to save you from another remake of *Winter Wonderland* by some gangsta rap group.

*Raising Sand* is available from Rounder Records through Amazon.com, Rounderstore.com, iTunes.com and other online outlets, as well as many traditional retailers. You can read more at [www.robertplantalisonkrauss.com](http://www.robertplantalisonkrauss.com).

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