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Mountain's Majesty

BODY COULD GET gray hair just following the 75-year-old Ralph Stanley around. This isn't merely a figure of speech: I've got gray hair and I've been following the 75-year-old Ralph Stanley around. On Memorial Day weekend the mountain-music patriarch sang as well as I've ever heard him at his annual festival in Virginia. The following weekend I caught up with him at an RV park in Connecticut. This week, to

promote his new CD, he flies to L.A. to do Jay Leno, then to New York for a concert and CBS's "Early Show." Then it's on to Louisville to rehearse for this summer's "Down From the Mountain" tour, with Emmylou

Harris and other

usual roots-music suspects.

Most of this is happening because of Stanley's 3-minute 21-second a cappella performance of the traditional "O Death" on the platinum-selling "O Brother, Where Art Thou?" soundtrack. It got him a surprise Grammy this year for best country vocal, a six-year, sixrecord deal with Columbia and the promise of a role in the upcoming film version of Charles Frazier's novel "Cold Mountain." He's also got gigs well into next year with his own handpicked band, the Clinch Mountain Boys, who are really the best interpreters of his music. He's still got one album to do under his contract with Rebel Records—probably a

gospel set. And he and producer T-Bone Burnett are talking about their second Columbia CD—probably a collection of Carter

Family songs. But
Stanley's got some
long-range plans
as well. "I want
to do a show
on my 100th
birthday," he
told me and
my 90-year-old
father backstage
in Connecticut. We
said we'd be there.

O BROTHER: Stanley

-DAVID GATES