Alison Krauss and Union Station are just out with a new CD. “Paper Airplane” is the first new album that the band and Alison have put together of all new recordings since 2004. Alison Krauss, who has a total of 26 Grammy Awards, grew up in Champaign-Urbana. She remembers most fondly, her music teachers, and the Krannert Center for the Performing Arts. She also has a soft spot for Hessel Park, Garcia’s Pizza, Monical’s Pizza, and Jarling’s Custard Cup. Krauss told Illinois Public Media interns, Gabrielle Parsons and Sonie Toe that when she day-dreams, it’s often about where she grew up. Sonie Toe and Gabrielle Parsons interviewed Alison Krauss for a project honoring Champaign’s 150th birthday, “Letter’s to the Future.” Today on the afternoon magazine we’ll hear the interview, and the title cut from “Paper Airplane.”

One of the questions Toe asked Krauss, ‘what does she love most about her work.’ Parsons followed up with a question about, ‘what she loves most about singing.’

I like seeing things, you know come to life. You know you’ll have an idea, and I like the process of getting there. I like working something up, I really like being in the studio and you have an amount of time with a certain piece of music that you’ll never really have again. And when you see something build and grow into something, it comes into life. Something you thought of, or you only imagined, and it’s the process of something becoming something is, it’s a fascinating thing to be a part of.

You’re a great fiddler, and you have all these talents, um why did you choose to stick with singing? What do you love about singing?

You know I played fiddle first, and then started to sing, and I really loved doing the harmonies. And then as I got older, and you know you kinda like the physical aspect of singing, it’s just fun to do. But then as I’ve grown into an adult, I like the experience of, without sounding too cosmic (laughing), I like the experience of you know being in another place. When you’re singing a lyric, and a story you know it can change. The story in your mind, kind-of changes without you making it change. You know I might be singing a verse that’s about you know a relationship that’s gone bad, or that’s suffering. And the first time I sing it, that verse might be about, you know who you’re in love with. And then the next time, you know you sing the verse, it could be about you know , your parent and how that relationship is suffering and the story’ll change without me forcing it to change. Does that make sense? It kinda takes on a life on its own and you become you know, a passenger on that ride.

(Excerpt from song)

What did you do to prepare yourself for this career, and do you feel that the violin was a stepping stone to you becoming a singer? So playing that musical instrument to then using your voice as another?

The violin, it’s kinda a woman’s range. And I’ve heard people say that I play like I sing, and you know, vice-versa. But I know that you’ve got to be, because there aren’t any frets on the violin, you’ve got to be, you’ve got to have your ear focused on being in tune or you’re gonna get fired (laughs). So I, boy that’s a great question. Do I think that it was a stepping stone, I know it was a really good thing to, to have you know, some knowledge of an instrument but some of the best vocalists in the world have never played anything, and what I did to prepare? Boy I just, I know that I play music and for the right reasons. And when I mean that, I did it because I loved it. And not because I was after something. I loved playing music and I love listening to it. And I love knowing why people, what makes them tick when they write. What makes them, what do they love to listen to, what they listen to at night when nobody’s around. What’s the CD they wanna hear? I love the mystery of it. You know what speaks to somebody and what doesn’t speak to them, and why this CD’ll here’s gonna speak to this group of people and why this other one over here *doesn’t at all*. I think it’s mysterious; it’s mysterious like painting is. Why a certain painting can bring somebody to tears and someone else can walk right by it. It’s, it’s the intangible that is fascinating to me, and I enjoy that chase.

And did Champaign provide you with any roots for your career and who you are today, in any way?

Well it provided me with everything. You know when, I still see when I listen to music; it’s Illinois that I see in my mind when I’m listening. And the cornfields, and how the land is, and you can see for miles and every place that you travel. And you know the mountains and the hills, and all that. The farmland of where you grow up and the Route 47, 74, 57 (chuckles) all those highways that you take to go to work, or to travel and those are the, that’s what I see in my mind when I listen to the music that I was growing up listening to. Those are the images I have when I’m daydreaming.

(Excerpt of Alison Krauss)

Alison Krauss there on fiddle, and sister Rosetta goes before us from Raising Sand, the album that she and Robert Plant recorded and released in 2007. Alison Krauss was interviewed by Illinois Public Radio Interns Gabrielle Parsons and Sonie Toe. Sonie Toe is an eighth grader at Jefferson Middle School, and a graduate of Youth Media Workshop. Gabrielle Parsons is a senior at Urbana High School. She comes to Illinois Public Media as an Executive Intern, through Urbana High’s Executive Internship Program. The new album from Alison Krauss and Union Station, “Paper Airplane” is just out from Rounder Records. For more information, go to illinoisyouthmedia.org, click on “Projects”, and then click on “Letters to the Future.”