

The Associated Press

'This Old Road' brings artist to Pittsburgh

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PITTSBURGH - Perhaps it's Kris Kristofferson's upcoming 70th birthday. Perhaps it's the recent death of friends Johnny Cash, Waylon Jennings and songwriter Harlan Howard. Perhaps it was just time.

Whatever the reason, the groundbreaking songwriter has created a late-in-life collection as uncompromising and as personal as the classic '70s albums that launched his career.

Focusing on songs about his country and his craft, Kristofferson explores the American ideal and the ongoing struggle - in relationships and in society - between freedom and security.

Kristofferson celebrates musical heroes and outlaws who speak their own truths without conforming and, in a song inspired by Willie Nelson, "Final Attraction," he explains his theory of how great songs heal by exposing pain and heartbreak in universal terms.

Producer Don Was strips down the arrangements to acoustic guitar and minimal rhythmic support, allowing Kristofferson to stay within an intimate vocal range that works for him. He no longer repeatedly shows his limitations by trying to push his voice into a range he can't handle.

These days, the Texas-born former Air Force pilot is more likely to be recognized for his acting than for his music. But "This Old Road" proves again that songwriting is where he finds his truest, strongest voice.