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## NASHVILLE SKYLINE: Kristofferson and Tomlinson Display Diverse Writing Skills

By: Chet Flippo

### Young Songwriter and Veteran Have Much to Say

I should not confess this, but I am puke-weary of over-sensitive country love songs by dreamy-eyed male singers. I mean, if the poet Lord Byron were to be reincarnated as a country singer tomorrow, he would head straight to the top of the charts. The arch-sensitive pop poet Rod McKuen, God bless him, missed his calling as a latter-day country love singer by being born too early. As Rod always said, "It doesn't matter who you love or how you love but that you love." Don't you think Rod's *Listen to the Warm* would strike certain country artists as being eternal lyric wisdom?

That said, there are a couple of mind-clearing CDs I've been listening to this week that bring into focus some of country music's eternal subjects. And, just as an aside, I ran across on the YouTube Web site this week a rare video of the Flying Burrito Brothers singing "Older Guys" on a boat somewhere in Florida when the band was made up of Gram Parsons singing lead, Bernie Leadon on lead guitar, Chris Hillman on bass, Michael Clarke on drums and Sneaky Pete Kleinow on steel guitar. The degree of musical exuberance and innocence they exhibited is amazing. And Gram was in joyous full Mick Jagger-Rod Stewart-flouncing mode. Music can really be fun, y'all.

And it can also be cleansing, as is brought home to me by Trent Tomlinson's upcoming debut CD *Country Is My Rock*. It's full of some intelligent kick-ass honky-tonk music that the world needs to hear today. The title song opens with a full-frontal guitar assault and emerges as an anthemic country theme, with the refrain, "Like some Hank wailin' from my pickup/Give me some Hag/Give me some Possum/With some screamin' guitars on top/Because country is my rock."

Tomlinson co-wrote all 11 songs on the album, and they're for the most part well-crafted. "Angels Like Her," for instance, laments that "It's angels like her/That send guys like me straight to hell." Another song, "Drunker Than Me," has attracted attention, naturally, because it's a frank guy song about how "I can't be with a woman who gets drunker than me."

That's the freewheeling kind of adventurous music that mavericks such as Kris Kristofferson have brought to town. And Kristofferson himself has just delivered a bright new CD that again illuminates his long and prolific career. It's hard to believe the man will turn 70 in June. He's writing better than ever, and his new CD *This Old Road* is a virtual songwriting text.

And it sounds pretty damned good, too. Kris, on guitar, is accompanied by his longtime guitarist and harmony singer Stephen Bruton, drummer Jim Keltner and producer Don Was on acoustic bass and piano. Less is often more, as Kris has proven over the years.

But it's the songs, as ever, that are the stars here. The

temptation is to quote from all 11 of them. If good drinking songs do indeed provide a catharsis, then good Kristofferson songs serve as a restorative.

"In the News" is the Kristofferson anger working its word magic:

*Burning up the atmosphere and cutting down the trees  
The billion dollar bombing of a nation on its knees  
Anyone not marching to their tune they call it treason  
Everyone says God is on his side*

*See the lightning, hear the cries  
Of the wounded in a world in Holy war  
Mortal thunder from the skies  
Killing everything they say they're fighting for*

And there is love here, too. "Thank You for a Life" is a very understated but eloquent statement of thanks:

*Thank you for a life that I'd call happy  
Overlooking all that we've been through  
When it comes to loving I've been lucky  
Everything I am I owe to you*

*Thank for the little girls you gave me  
Thank you for them bouncing baby boys  
Thank you for the sadness  
That you saved me from the madness, baby  
All I'm crying now are tears of joy*

"Final Attraction," which closes the album, was inspired when Kris was standing backstage watching Willie Nelson close a

show. He sings:

*Somewhere in your lifetime  
You were dared into feeling  
So many emotions  
That tear you apart*

*But they love you so badly  
For sharing their sorrows  
So pick up that guitar  
Go break a heart*

And then exhorts the singer to break a heart for Hank Williams, for Janis Joplin, for Waylon Jennings, for Jimi Hendrix, John Lennon, Roger Miller. And for him.

That's enough quoting. Go listen to it when it's released on March 7.