

THE LONDON FREE PRESS

Pleasant surprise

Sat, April 1, 2006

By DARRYL STERDAN, SPECIAL TO THE FREE PRESS

THIS OLD ROAD

KRIS KRISTOFFERSON NEW WEST/RED

When you can write songs like Kris Kristofferson, you don't need to decorate them with a bunch of fancy junk. So on *This Old Road*, the country maverick's first studio disc of new material in more than a decade, he doesn't. He just sits down with his acoustic guitar, his harmonica and his craggy voice, and -- with the occasional bit of help from old pals such as guitarist Stephen Bruton and drummer Jim Keltner -- he casually shares some plainspoken, honest reflections on love, loss and contemporary society, along with his favourite topic, freedom. Producer Don Was, who also helmed Kristofferson's last disc, knows enough to hit record early enough to get his folksy introductions on tape, play a little bass when it's needed and generally stay out of the way of the master.

It is perhaps no surprise that Kristofferson, 69, spends a lot of time reminiscing on this laid-back disc. But it definitely is a surprise -- and a pleasant one -- to learn that age has diminished neither the purity of his vision nor the spark that drives his songcraft.