

## POST-INTELLIGENCER

Kristofferson fans get what they came for: A simple but powerful show

By TIZZY ASHER

Johnny Cash's spirit must've been smiling down from a seat high up in the packed Moore Theatre on Thursday night as Kris Kristofferson played, accompanied only by a small table bearing his harmonicas and a bottle of orange Gatorade.

Kristofferson owes many debts to Cash. Not the least of which is that Cash made it acceptable and even desirable for an old man with an acoustic guitar to stand up and sing with no adornment and no perfectionism -- in short, nothing but the power of his songs.

As Kristofferson worked his way through his vast repertoire of songs, it was clear the audience was here for just that. From the moment he ambled onstage with his peculiar stiff-legged walk and squinty eyes peering out from under wavy gray hair, he held the packed house enraptured. They screamed, they cheered and one woman even shouted, "You're still sexy!" "Compared to what?" Kristofferson responded.

Kristofferson launched with the lonesome "Shipwrecked in the Eighties" and worked his way through essential hits, such as "Darby's Castle" and a strangely rhythmic version of "Me and Bobby McGee." Despite his 69 years, his voice sounded surprisingly smooth, like an old saddle that's been ridden until it gleams. Guitar experts might find fault with his playing -- and

indeed he joked about it more than once -- but his simple, spare parts kept the focus on the evocative stories in the songs.

There was little in the way of between-song banter. This did not mean that the show was apolitical, however: The fervently anti-war song "In the News," from his forthcoming album "This Old Road" made a bold statement, as did his mumbled commentary on "The Best of All Possible Worlds," where he noted that the United States has more people in prison than any place in the world.

He closed his first set with the hopelessly mushy "Help Me Make It Through the Night."

After a 20-minute intermission, the second set kicked off with "The Junkie and the Juicehead, Minus Me," a comical song that had the audience laughing along. Cash reappeared with "The Pilgrim: Chapter 33," Kristofferson's tribute song, and a rousing version of "Sunday Morning Coming Down." The crowd worked itself into a frenzy by this point, and it erupted as he launched into a perfect version of "To Beat the Devil."

By the three-song encore, the crowd was ensconced in collective Kristofferson worship. He closed with "Please Don't Tell Me How the Story Ends," and one could feel Johnny smiling down with silent approval.