

'Old Road' still open to dissent

Kris Kristofferson

By Mark Brown, Rocky Mountain News

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"Some of the old songs even work better today than when I sang 'em before," Kris Kristofferson says, musing about his live show and the way his work has held up over the years.

"They're not all topical news songs. But I guess there's a common theme going through them. Humanity or whatever - of treating people decently."

That's a thread of humanity and controversy that runs through Kristofferson's classic work, from *Sunday Morning Coming Down* to *Me & Bobby McGee*.

It also runs through the new album, *This Old Road*, which won't even be in stores till March.

But he's playing songs from that album along with his classics; fans will hear them at the Paramount Theatre on Friday night, including the politically charged anti-war song *In The News*.

Honesty comes with a price, even if it doesn't get high-profile boycotts like the Dixie Chicks endured.

"I've paid for that. Believe me," Kristofferson says by phone from a tour stop in Utah. "Getting dropped off of labels. Just being unmarketable."

"The album that got me dropped off a label is called *Third World Warrior*. And the songs would fit today," he says.

"I can remember back in the '80s I read something in *USA Today* talking about the general right-wing leaning of the country market. They dismissed 'the left-leaning Kristofferson as irrelevant,' " he says with a hearty laugh. "It's fun to find you're irrelevant by some journalist."

"The older I get, the more people know where I'm coming from. I still occasionally get some people who are really pissed off."

Kristofferson occasionally gets slagged as something of a traitor, "but so did that senator, that old war veteran, Murtha. I saw some letter on TV the other day that called him 'the new Hanoi Jane' and 'the greatest friend al-Qaida ever had.' You're going to pay for it. But even before I was getting my songs cut people were saying, 'No, you can't say this, you can't say that.' I never had to change what I was going to do and I

don't think I ever will."

If records and Kristofferson's memory are correct, it has been nearly 10 years to the day since he last performed in Denver.

Friday's show will be an intimate, solo-acoustic event. Kristofferson has been touring that way for a couple of years, largely by accident.

"I was doing a film in Scotland and got an offer to do some gigs in Ireland," he says.

"I didn't want to mobilize all the troops. I'd done one gig solo-acoustic in Nashville and it went over well. So I went out to do this in Dublin, the only difference being that there about 3,000 people there. We sold out three nights. It went over so well that it puts a focus on the songs in a way that's much like this new album."

This Old Road is "more or less the show I've been doing on the road – just myself with a guitar and a harmonica. It's a long night if you don't like the songs, because I do a couple of hours."

He mixes new and old. It all works.

"There's nothing I can't do, unless I don't remember it. Like I said, I do about two hours of songs. It's a lot of songs. I try to mix up the old ones and the new ones in a way that makes sense to me. It changes a little bit. I have certain songs I'm going to do regardless – songs like *Bobby McGee*, songs I just wouldn't feel right not doing. They don't bore me; I can still get inside them."

One of the centerpieces of the show (and the new album) is the song *In The News*, which examines the media's take on everything from the Laci Peterson murder to the war in Iraq.

"That's the kind of song that usually gets me in trouble in the show," Kristofferson says with a laugh.

Kristofferson saw and loved the bio-pic of his longtime pal and mentor Johnny Cash, *Walk the Line*. He loved the respectful warts-and-all telling of Cash's story.

"I was really relieved to find they treated him with respect. There was a part of his life that you could sensationalize. I was really impressed with the performances, Joaquin and Reese," he says. "To me it was like *Ray*. It was a respectful treatment of it. In the old days it seemed to me (that movies) generally didn't treat country music with that much respect."

After the *March 7* album release Kristofferson takes up a whole new slate of live shows, promotional work and more, including an appearance at the South By Southwest music showcase in Austin.

His autobiography was due in stores two months ago; it's up there on amazon.com. Don't hold your breath; it hasn't even been written yet, he admits.

"I told 'em I just got too busy the last couple of years. I can't devote the creative time to it that I need to do. So I told them to just wait a while. It'll happen, but it's not gonna happen tomorrow. I just look at what I've got ahead of me in March - man , it's horrible. It's all backstage and no gig. Those are the worst."

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