

THE REPUBLICAN

Tales of the road suit Kristofferson

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With just an acoustic guitar and a wildly blown harmonica, Kris Kristofferson headlined the Calvin Theater in Northampton on Wednesday night, delivering a two-set, two-hour performance for a captivated crowd.

To suggest that he was ill-equipped to handle such a large venue with his minimalist approach would be discounting the value of the satchel full of songs and hitchhiker's wisdom that he brings with his performance.

Kristofferson was greeted with an ovation when he hit the stage and the appreciation grew from there as he warbled through 31 tales of drinkin', fightin', lovin' and finding Jesus at the end of a long road.

In fact, if it weren't for the long road, it seems that Kristofferson (and a long list of others) would have little to write about. Most of his well-worn characters are coming off the highway, heading out on the highway, or standing at a crossroads.

With Kristofferson, it really is about the words, the stories and the characters. He is a clunky guitar player, and his voice is as raw as a freshly scraped knee.

"I fell asleep just before the show," he announced, coughing and wheezing his way through the opening song. "Couldn't you tell?"

Actually, "Shipwrecked in the Ighties" should be coughed and wheezed-out, like the dozen songs that followed, and Kristofferson's ragged voice tells a tale like few others can.

His troubadour style was graceful through "Darby's Castle," and the early highlight was undoubtedly his slow, but earnest, run through "Me and Bobby McGee."

Kristofferson occasionally interrupted his songs, as if he was only listening along with the crowd, with simple observations like "Hope this ain't the theme song for the new millennium," while strumming away on "Nobody Wins."

He swooned through "Help Me Make It Through the Night," and suggested it was

time for a 10-minute break "or however long it takes," and then returned to the stage with the half-spoken "The New Mr. Me."

Kristofferson was never more lyrically brilliant than he was on "To Beat the Devil," the song an average writer could never conjure up, and he shifted smartly into the signature "Sunday Morning Coming Down," with the crowd roaring its approval.

Saying "God bless your spirit" and "hang on to your heart," Kristofferson left the stage, only to be called back for a four-song encore that included the politically charged "Don't Let the Bastards Get You Down" and "Don't Tell Me How the Story Ends."