

## Times Union

### **Kristofferson sings the good word**

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ALBANY -- A confession, an admission, full disclosure .. call it what you like -- I'm a Kris Kristofferson fan. Going into Thursday night's Kristofferson performance at The Egg, I didn't exactly throw my critical objectivity away, but I did sort of slip it into my back pocket, next to the well-thumbed booklet from his latest CD, "This Old Road," which in my book is on a late-career-epiphany-par with Johnny Cash's "American Recordings." Maybe I realized I was only half-working when I joked to my guest for the evening -- a fellow music geek of the first stripe -- that we weren't going to a concert, we were "going to church." Heck, I even urged him to "accept Kris Kristofferson as his personal songwriter." How could I have known how right I would be?

Kristofferson was magnificent, and his sermon in song somehow managed to sew up disparate issues of decadence and morality, freedom and responsibility and the play in everyday life of shadow and light. He also reminded any doubters of just how stunning his catalog really is. Remember, he's the only bar singer in the world who can play "Help Me Make It Through The Night," "For The Good Times," "Me and Bobby McGee," "Why Me?" and "Sunday Morning Coming Down" and finish by saying, "I wrote 'em all." But he's not a boastful guy. When he suggested that nicking a phrase from Willie Nelson was "stealing from the best," a fan shouted out, "You're the best." He replied, "Thank you, but please don't use me as a stick to beat up my heroes." Later, he nodded to some of those heroes, ticking off a litany of names -- including the recently deceased Buck Owens -- while singing "Final Attraction," a song actually inspired by watching Nelson sing live. Is Nelson a better singer? Sure he is. In fact, he's released an entire album of Kristofferson's tunes, but nobody -- but nobody -- can deliver his songs like Kristofferson does. All that weary experience, all that compassion and all that cragginess come together in a unique way. And now, at 70, he's finally grown into that coal seam of a voice.

At The Egg, in addition to the hits, Kristofferson sang the lion's share of his stunning 1970 debut album as well as most of "Road." Someone behind me -- an even bigger fan than me -- sang along with every word, new or old.

The real beauty of the show was that Kristofferson just sang one song after another, barely recoiling from one melodic bullet before firing another. His second set, for instance, featured 18 songs in just over an hour -- all of them killers. Magnificent. You should've been there.