



With all the attention garnered by Kris Kristofferson in the year of his 70th birthday, this exemplary tribute showcases the many facets of his songwriting--political, spiritual, self-mythologizing, peerlessly romantic--while celebrating the esteem in which he's held by generations of fellow artists. Neither Gretchen Wilson nor Shooter Jennings is as old as some of Kristofferson's best-known songs, but they acquit themselves just fine on "Sunday Mornin' Coming Down" and "The Silver Tongued Devil and I," respectively. It's no surprise that Emmylou Harris makes "The Pilgrim: Chapter 33" sound more beautiful than ever (with a surprisingly smooth segue from the recorded introduction by a young Kristofferson), that Rosanne Cash gets under the skin of "Lovin' Him Was Easier (Than Anything I'll Ever Do Again)," or that Willie Nelson captures the wistful essence of the epic "The Legend." Yet part of the collection's appeal is that it takes some radical chances, with Brian McKnight transforming "Me and Bobby McGee" into an aching soulful ballad, though the stripped-down pop duet by the usually superb Lloyd Cole and Jill Sobule on "For the Good Times" falls comparatively flat. Kristofferson gets the last word with a closing demo from 35 years ago, with "Please Don't Tell Me How the Story Ends" providing an apt finale. --*Don McLeese*