



Released to mark the 70th birthday of legendary songwriter Kris Kristofferson, *The Pilgrim* brings together artists from various disciplines to reprise some classics as well as lesser-known songs. Marta Gomez gives "The Circle" an evocative Spanish tinge; Brian McKnight renders "Me and Bobby McGee" as a sultry hip-hop come-on; Marshall Chapman gives "Jesus Was a Capricorn" a grinding, down-home southern soul twist; Russell Crowe (yes, that Russell Crowe) & the Ordinary Fear of God give the tragic story-song "Darby's Castle" a muted, Irish-inflected grandeur. But it's the artists with personal connections to Kristofferson who steal the show. On "The Silver Tongued Devil & I," Shooter Jennings offers a bluesy, boozy honky-tonk lament before busting into an attitudinal, sputtering strut; Rosanne Cash is both ethereal and sensuous in a shimmering rendition of "Lovin' Him Was Easier (Than Anything I'll Ever Do Again)"; Rodney Crowell takes "Come Sundown" straight to the honky-tonk dance floor, where a steel guitar, tinkling piano, and twangy lead guitar set the pace; and Willie Nelson gives "The Legend" ("Were we better men / than we'd ever been") a stately south-of-the border flavor to a tale of a legendary outsider who gets away with it all. Emmylou Harris, Jessi Colter, and Gretchen Wilson all acquit themselves admirably as well, and Kris himself shows up in a spoken intro preceding Harris's dramatic "The Pilgrim: Chapter 33" and tenderly works his way through a stark 1970 demo of "Please Don't Tell Me how the Story Ends." Surely, that's yet a long ways away.

--David McGee