

## Songs from the Heart

by Bob Mehr



Kris Kristofferson's latest CD, *Closer to the Bone*, is a personal reflection on his life and the people he's loved.

"AS YOU GET UP TO THIS END OF THE RACE, YOU TEND TO LOOK BACK ON EVERYTHING AND TRY TO MAKE SOME SENSE OF IT," says 73-year-old singer-songwriter Kris Kristofferson when speaking about his new album, *Closer to the Bone*. "This record is pretty reflective."

Although Kristofferson's latest is a largely minimal affair, it does feature contributions from an esteemed cast of musicians, including producer/bassist Don Was and ace session drummer Jim Keltner. Foremost among those, however, is guitarist Stephen Bruton, to whom the album is dedicated. Bruton and Kristofferson began playing together in the early 1970s, when Bruton was fresh out of school. He remained Kristofferson's close friend and collaborator until he passed away from [cancer](#) in May.

"We worked together since he was just about a baby," Kristofferson says. "We worked together so long, he was like an extension of me. I really miss him."

The album finds Kristofferson reflecting and offering musical messages to his family ("From Here to Forever," which he wrote for his children), fellow artists ("Sister Sinead," which is about his kinship with controversial singer Sinead O'Connor), and fallen friends ("Good Morning John," a tribute to Johnny Cash).

Kristofferson also rescues a few unrecorded gems from his songbook for this disc, including "Love Don't Live Here Anymore" and the secret track, "I Hate Your Ugly Face," which is actually the first tune he ever wrote -- back when he was just 11 years old.

"You look back at certain songs and you come to appreciate the way they hang together," he says. "So these were worth revisiting."

The Texas-born, California-raised Kristofferson has always led an adventurous, rambling existence. His experiences -- as a [football](#) star, a Rhodes Scholar, and an Army captain -- helped shape his eye for detail and characters, gifts that led to his eventual breakthrough as a [Nashville](#) songwriter in the late

1960s.

“Since I was a teenager, I’ve always tried to do as many different things as I could, get as much varied experience as possible, in order to be a writer,” he says. “I worked as a laborer out on Wake Island, went all over [California](#) doing road construction, worked up in [Alaska](#) as a firefighter, served five years in the military. I figured that kind of living would give me material to write about. That’s also why I gravitated toward country music. I felt like it was talking about real things and real people.”

Kristofferson penned a string of classic narratives -- “Me and Bobby McGee,” “Sunday Mornin’ Comin’ Down,” and “Help Me Make It through the Night” among them -- that became hits for a variety of country and pop artists before he went on to become a solo star and later a successful film actor. Kristofferson continues to make movies, and he plans to keep touring; for the past decade, he’s been captivating audiences with nothing more than a guitar and a harmonica. “Playing solo, there’s a freedom to it and directness of communication between you and the audience that I really like,” he says.

Kristofferson plans to branch out with his writing as well. “I’m hoping to write some longer stuff -- an autobiography or maybe even some fiction. But I’ll still be putting my thoughts down in songs for a long time,” he says, adding with a chuckle, “Whatever else I do, I’ll be playing music until they throw dirt on me.”