

Blurt

09/29/2009

Kris Kristofferson



Closer to the Bone

(New West)

www.NewWestRecords.com

Forty years ago, Kris Kristofferson had his songs recorded and turned into hits by the likes of Roger Miller, Janis Joplin, Johnny Cash, and Jerry Lee Lewis. And he became a successful recording artist in his own right, despite the handicap of a voice which could best be described as a sincere and delicate croak, albeit with an evocative sense of phrasing. After detours to the world of acting, Kristofferson's popular success evaporated, but he kept on writing songs worthy of standing next to "Sunday Morning Coming Down" or "Me and Bobby McGee."

Closer to the Bone is only Kristofferson's third album of new material in the last fourteen years, all produced by Don Was. Like 2006's *This Old Road*, *Bone* has something of an elegiac feel to it. At 73 years of age, Kristofferson is acutely aware that life is a precious gift, and that the moments of love found here and there within it are even more deserving of attention. "Darlin' take all the time that you're given / Be all you know you can be," he sings in "From Here to Forever," and that's not the vacuous advertising line of a Marine Corps commercial, but a word of wisdom given to his children. Once, freedom may have been just a word for nothin' left to lose, but now, Kristofferson seems more interested in what there is to gain.

Since he doesn't record at the rate he did when he started, Kristofferson may have pulled some of these songs out of his extensive file cabinet of material. "Good Morning John," written about his old friend Johnny Cash, was actually recorded previously by another old friend, Waylon Jennings, back in 1985. It's not insignificant that these two Highwaymen partners have passed on, especially in a song which references staying true to a friend for life. It's also worth mentioning that the guitarist Stephen Bruton played on this album shortly before he passed away from cancer earlier this year. Elsewhere on *Bone*, Kristofferson sings of the ways we keep memories alive of those we knew, most notably on "Hall of Angels."

If there were country singers looking to the classic songwriters for new material, "Let the Walls Come Down," with its sing-along chorus and its neat little rhythmic trick at the end of each verse, could be as big a hit as anything he's written. And, a brief coda to the album is provided by what Kristofferson says was the first song he ever wrote, at age 11 (in 1947!) reveals he started off with a cynicism he's long since abandoned, with the hook line being "The happiest day of my unhappy life was the day you set me free." After all those beautiful songs of love, life, and memory, it's nice to remember that wordsmiths like Kristofferson begin with the ability to be clever.

Standout Tracks: "Sister Sinead," "Good Morning John," "Let the Walls Come Down" STEVE PICK