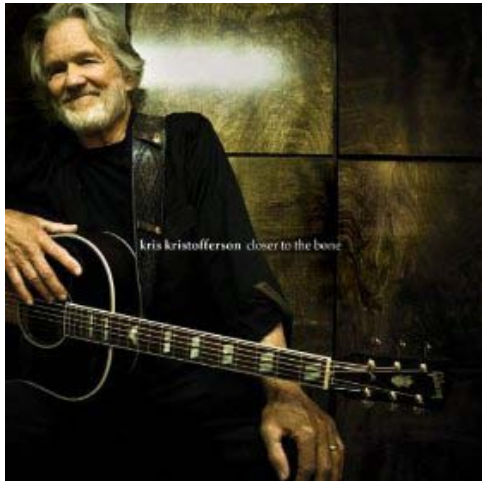


SOUNDS COUNTRY

If it sounds country, then that's what it is, you know — its a country song. — Kris Kristofferson

Album Review: Kris Kristofferson – *Closer to the Bone*

Posted on | September 22, 2009 | Jeff Giddens



1. There's a reason you don't hear Kris Kristofferson on country radio: his music is way too raw. Kristofferson claims to be concerned first and foremost with the *truth*, and his last two records have shown that he wants to put little in the way of that. If mainstream country radio cannot handle that, then so be it — their loss. On the title track for his new record *Closer to the Bone* he tells us the way its going to be:

“Comin’ from the heartbeat/
nothing but the truth now/
everything is sweeter/
closer to the bone”

2. Don Was, who also produced Todd Snider's **excellent record** this year, carefully constructed a similar setup around Kris. Careful not to let anything get in the way of the unadulterated power of the songs, he brought in veteran drummer Jim Keltner and longtime Kristofferson sidekick Stephen Bruton, who makes his final contribution to this world with his excellent guitar and mandolin playing. Though not as intentionally rough-around-the-edges as Kris' last record, the endearingly out-of-tune *This Old Road*, the songs shake with an acoustic strength that chooses to let the words speak in favor of musical dynamics. While Johnny Cash's late work with Rick Rubin found him covering Soundgarden, old hymns, and classic

favorites, the words pour out of Kristofferson like never before, as he shares wisdom, hope, and gratitude in a way that only a 73-year-old man can.

3. Kristofferson has lived through too much to shy away from anything, but certainly not in a pessimistic way. These songs show his appreciation for the more difficult moments in life, and the metamorphosis that they provide. One of the two living Highwaymen (and the other may never die), he pays tribute to one of his fallen band mates in "Good Morning John". He offers congratulations to the Man in Black for all that he accomplished, now that his future is "shining brighter than a star". Kris tried to cut the song with the Highwaymen, but when it came time for Willie to sing the plaintive line "I love you, John", the Red Headed Stranger couldn't make himself do it.

4. With 73 years comes plenty of loss, as Kris sings about in "Hall of Angels", all the more weighted by Bruton's passing shortly after the completion of the record. Detailing a scene of men gathered to console another man's loss (the masterfully vague "a lady who loved him and died"), a stranger approaches with a song. The stranger, who lost a girl he loved "more than her mother or anything else in the world", dreamed of a group of angels with burning candles, minus his lost girl. Asking why hers was not lit, the angels tell him that his tears "keep drowning the flame". While some songwriters might surround a heavenly dream with all sorts of production, Kristofferson gets it done with a simple key change.

5. This album is not for the faint of heart. It contains no songs about country people, barroom bad decisions, or about automobiles of any kind. Instead, Kris doesn't waste a second in relating that life is as much about the hard challenges you face ("Let The Walls Come Down") as much as it is about the people you are surrounded with ("The Wonder"). Life certainly is unpredictable, but I hope to get many more records out of this legend.