

An Evening with Kris Kristofferson



by Nate
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One man. One guitar. Generations worth of stories about hard living, heartbreak, love, and life all wrapped up into one intimate musical performance. This is what I was fortunate enough to witness last Tuesday (May 3rd) as a member of the jam-packed audience inside the Zeiterion Theater for the performance by American icon Kris Kristofferson. Although I expected to enjoy the show (as I do almost any live music performance), I grossly underestimated the raw power and rugged emotion this 74-year-old native Texan brought to the stage.

When I was younger, my grandfather would frequently take me on camping trips to bluegrass festivals throughout the Midwest, and a Waylon, Willie, or Johnny Cash record never seemed too far out of the rotation on Dad's record player. Although at that point in his career (mid 80's) Mr. Kristofferson was primarily focused on his acting, I remember staring at the cover of the *Highwayman* record and reveling at the outlaws, especially the one with the cool name, unaware then of his



genre-stretching resume and the breadth of

As I grew older my musical interests drifted towards southern rock and the blues, where many of the artists I grew to love were undoubtedly influenced by his songs as well. What follows is my recollection of the evening, which can be perfectly captured in the following lines from the song "Bird on a Wire," lines which are rumored to be requested by Kristofferson for his epitaph:

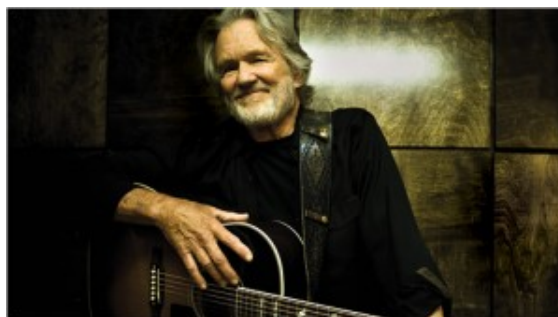
*"Like a bird on a wire
Like a drunk in a midnight choir
I have tried in my way to be free."*

- "Bird on a Wire" by Leonard Cohen

To roaring cheers he walked out dressed in black with his guitar strapped to his chest, a lone spotlight shining down on his microphone stand, looking every bit the part of the outlaw persona that made him an icon. He simply nodded his head, and began to play and sing. His whiskey-gravel voice instantly silenced the crowd as he began to weave his tales. After the first song, "Shipwrecked in the Eighties," he quipped: "I was going to apologize for those words I forgot in that song, but I've already forgotten what I'd forgot," poking fun at his age and senility while giving us all a glimpse of the fun we were about to have for the next two hours.

He quickly won over the crowd with a salute to our Troops

before proceeding, then moved right into what was a great first set that included favorites like the touching “Darby’s Castle”, the anthem “Bobby McGee” (which became a sing-along), and then dialed up the knee-slapping “Best of All Possible Worlds.” This became the theme for the evening, as he laced soul-bearing ballads with tunes of upbeat, outlaw debauchery to get the crowd laughing again.



Kris Kristofferson

The night was filled with songs that were easily recognizable (some surprisingly so), as well as songs from deep within the catalog that I wasn’t familiar with. I’ll have to admit, I tried to take notes on the songs he was playing to compile a set list, but somewhere toward the end of the first set I put my pen down, feeling like I was losing the emotional connection with the artist as I reached for my notebook every couple of minutes.

Although the tightness of the music drifted at times, and there were more than a couple of forgotten lines, I was absolutely riveted by the way Kristofferson played to the crowd. There was continuous banter between himself and a few energetic fans, even taking a couple of requests off the cuff. He sprinkled in a couple timely anecdotes in as well, one in particular about a former Army flight instructor that preceded the song “Sky King,” for whom it was written. If I were a Berklee graduate, I could easily nitpick the simplicity of the music and the tonal range of the singer, but I think the beauty is the way he dances within and around his limits, and all you hear is the stories, every one of them believable.

He ended the night with a double encore, embracing the crowd and oozing with gratitude. The lights dimmed as the harrowing and befitting "Please Don't Tell Me How the Story Ends" began. Then, as simply as he walked on, The Outlaw strode off the stage. As the Cohen quote alludes, Kris Kristofferson has experienced a life of hard-living, broken dreams, fun, and great achievements. Throughout it all he has done it his way, wild and free, which perfectly embodies the American Spirit.