

Country music star performs in Ventura

Kristofferson plays farmworker benefit

By Charles Levin

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Roberto Lopez didn't buy a home until he was nearly 60. Yet Lopez, who has spent four decades working as a farmworker in Ventura County, considers himself lucky.

Many farmworkers here live in tool sheds or crammed two and three families to a house. Before moving into his house at Villa Cesar Chavez in Oxnard a year ago, Lopez, his wife and three daughters spent 15 years in a one-bedroom rental apartment.

"I still can't believe I'm living there," Lopez said Friday night, seated with his family in the front row of a benefit concert for farmworker housing, featuring country legend Kris Kristofferson.

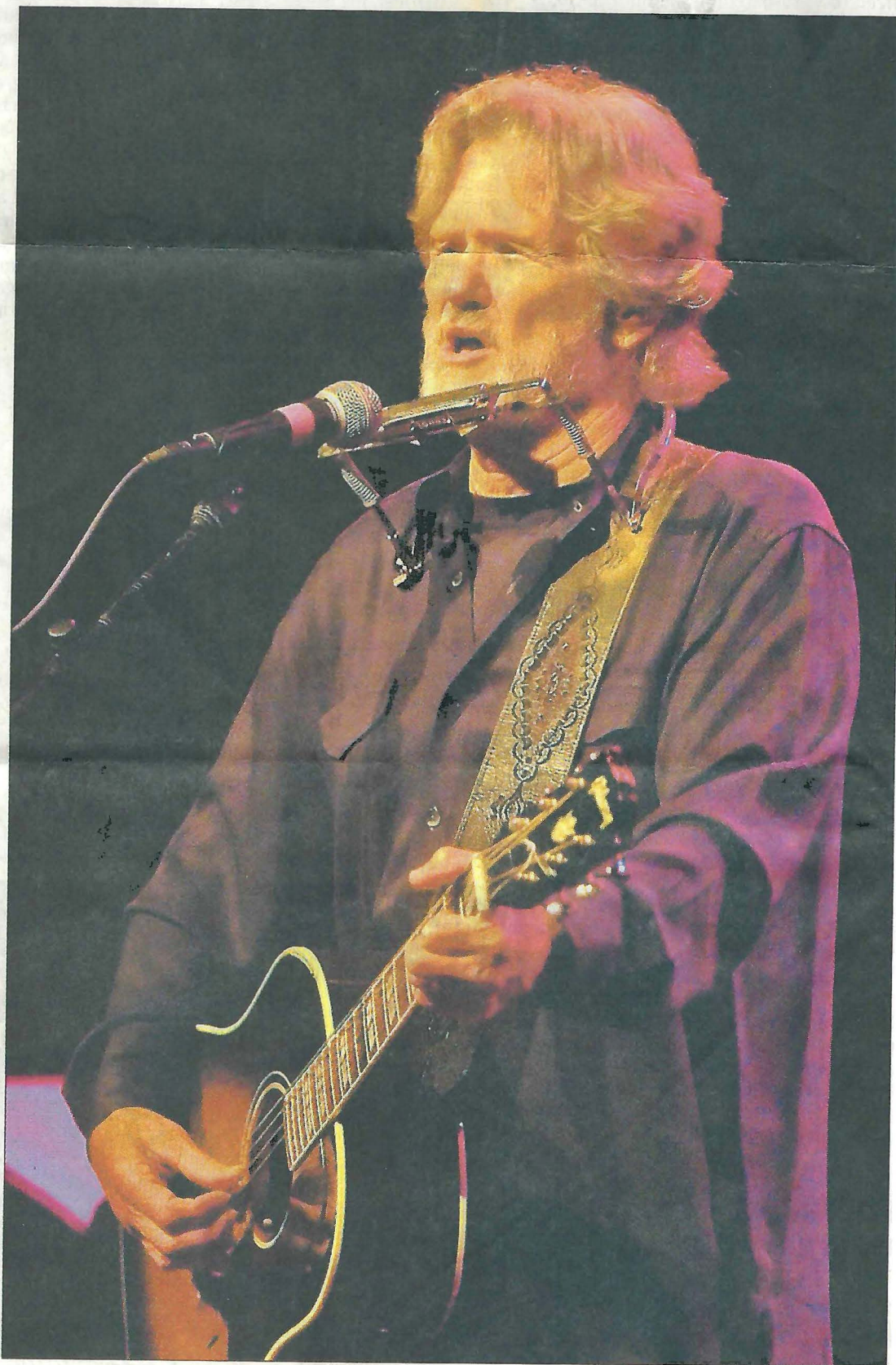
As he surveyed the crowd at the Ventura Theatre, Lopez said he hoped the show would spur more interest in the issue. "We already have a house," said Lopez, a tractor driver on a sod farm, "but there are many other families that need help."

Organizers and fans at Friday's sold-out show said they believe the concert marked a turning point in public awareness for the cause. Proceeds from the concert will benefit House Farm Workers Now! a project of the Ag Futures Alliance.

With a recent winter freeze destroying crops and taking jobs with it, the issue has gained even more currency, said Betsy Chess, publisher of the magazine *Central Coast Farm & Ranch*.

"It's ratcheted up the netherworld that our farmworkers inhabit," said Chess, a descendant of the Blanchard family that founded Santa Paula and Limoneira Co.

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James Glover II / Star staff

As Kris Kristofferson opened the show with the somber ballad "Shipwrecked in the Eighties," his gravelly baritone voice drew thunderous applause from the crowd at Ventura Theatre.

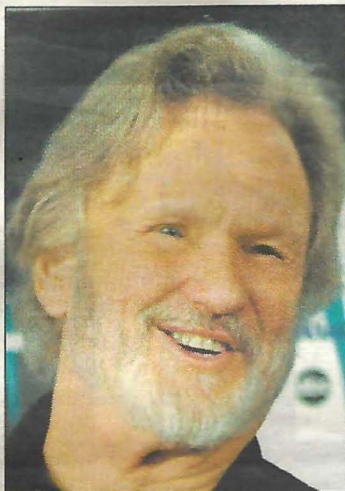
Double vision

Ventura Mayor Carl Morehouse is moonlighting ... as a Kris Kristofferson look-alike.

Morehouse is registered with several agencies as a Kristofferson impersonator. "I've been told for 25 years that I look like him," said Morehouse, adding that his constituents don't need to worry that he'll miss any city business while fulfilling imposter duties — he rarely gets calls to be Kristofferson.

Morehouse, who came up with the idea for the "Have a Heart for Farm Workers" Kristofferson concert, wasn't motivated by his resemblance to the singer.

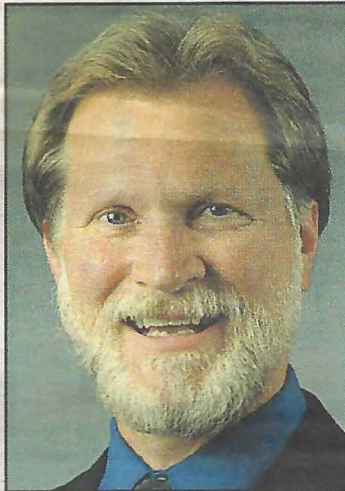
"I'm very committed to social equity," Morehouse said. "Agriculture is a very important industry, and ag has some of the lowest-paid workers in our county. Some of them live in pretty deplorable conditions, or



KRISTOFFERSON

there's overcrowding, doubling and tripling up."

Last year, Morehouse said, he thought about what he could do to help the workers — something along the lines of the Ventura



MOREHOUSE

Hillside Conservancy's annual concert, but with a bigger celebrity.

"It intrigued me to appeal to Mr. Kristofferson," Morehouse said. "He has a strong conscience

and had a friendship with César Chávez. I thought it was a logical connection."

Reaching Kristofferson wasn't easy, Morehouse said. Eventually, however, through "friends of friends," he attended a Kristofferson concert at the Troubadour in West Hollywood, where he passed along the concert idea to a music label president.

Morehouse brought the concert concept to members of the Ag Futures Alliance, who jumped on the idea.

Although the facial resemblance is uncanny, Morehouse and Kristofferson aren't an identical match. The mayor said he met Kristofferson in the 1980s when the singer performed at the Ventura Theater.

"I said, 'People say I look like you,'" Morehouse recalled. "He said, 'But you're taller.'"

— Karen Lindell

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films, they have to ask you."

Personal and political

Typically self-deprecating, Kristofferson said he was "surprised and pleased" by the reaction to "This Old Road." "Maybe they just give you credit when you get older, let you get away with more," he said.

Kristofferson said each of his albums "has been a reflection on where I am and what I'm going through. I'm kind of reflective at this end of the race. It's just a way I make sense out of my experience."

The album is as political as it is personal.

Kristofferson has never been shy about taking a stand on social and political issues.

He proudly recalled a newspaper article from 20 years ago about "right-wing country artists" that included a line about him: "The left-leaning Kris Kristofferson has been dismissed as irrelevant."

Despite his Army credentials, Kristofferson is not a war booster. In the 1980s, for example, he took flak for speaking out against U.S. intervention in Nicaragua. On "This Old Road," his anti-war stance is clear in the song "In the News," which relates the much-publicized murder of Laci Peterson and her unborn baby to

the war in Iraq.

Sample lyric about the Peterson case: "She sank into the darkness with their baby son inside her / A little piece of truth and beauty died."

Sample lyric about the war: "The billion dollar bombing of a nation on its knees / Anyone not marching to their tune they call it treason / Everyone says God is on his side."

The similarity between the Peterson case and the war, Kristofferson said, "is the coldbloodedness. There's nothing more coldblooded than the murder of that baby and mother — unless it's the

coldbloodedness of the act of bombing a defenseless nation that didn't attack us.

"It's a sad place where we are in our history," he said. "I can't think of a time when we've been so clearly in the wrong, as a nation."

"Wild American," another track from "This Old Road," is a tribute to some of Kristofferson's personal heroes, including Willie Nelson and Native American activist John Trudell. Kristofferson counts himself as a "wild American," described in the song as "the one they never tamed / 'Cause you stood your ground / And they could not

make you change."

On a softer note is the album's "Holy Creation," which Kristofferson called "the most personally satisfying" tune on the CD: "When I see the wonder / In the smiles of my children / It reminds me of dreams / Worth coming true."

The title song, a reflection on aging, is "probably the best whole song" on the album, Kristofferson said. It starts off with, "Look at that old photograph / Is it really you?" (in the song's video, the "photograph" shows Kristofferson on the cover of Rolling Stone in 1974).

The song continues with: "But I guess you count your blessings with the problems / That you're dealing with today / Like the changing of the seasons / Ain't you come a long way ... down this old road."

Kristofferson wrote "Final Attraction," the song quoted at the beginning of this article, while watching Willie Nelson close a show in Austin, Texas. He pays tribute in the song to a host of musicians who've made that connection with audiences, naming Hank Williams, Janis Joplin, John Lennon and others.

"I was just moved by the emotional bond between the artist and the people, the magic that's happening when that goes on," Kristofferson said. "Music aims at the emotions. If you move the heart, the head will follow."

Homes coming

Proceeds from the Kris Kristofferson concert will benefit Ag Futures Alliance's House Farm Workers! project.

The program, founded in 2004, doesn't build homes, said Jessica Arciniega, an AFA task force coordinator. Instead, "we're like an education advocacy group in the county," she explained, "trying to create awareness for people to see that farmworkers are a benefit to the community."

Program success stories, she said, include facilitating the development of 357 farmworker housing units in Camarillo, Fillmore, Oxnard, Santa Paula and Ventura; and forming housing groups

in those five cities that meet regularly to discuss farmworkers' needs.

The concert will include a "farmers market" dinner, featuring booths where chefs from county restaurants have created dishes using food supplied by local farmers.

Attending the concert, Arciniega said, will be Roberto Lopez, a longtime farm laborer who recently moved with his wife, Martha, and three daughters into a farmworker apartment in south Oxnard.

For additional information about the Ag Futures Alliance, visit <http://www.agfuturesalliance.net> or call 707-823-6111.

— Karen Lindell

Kris Kristofferson has a heart

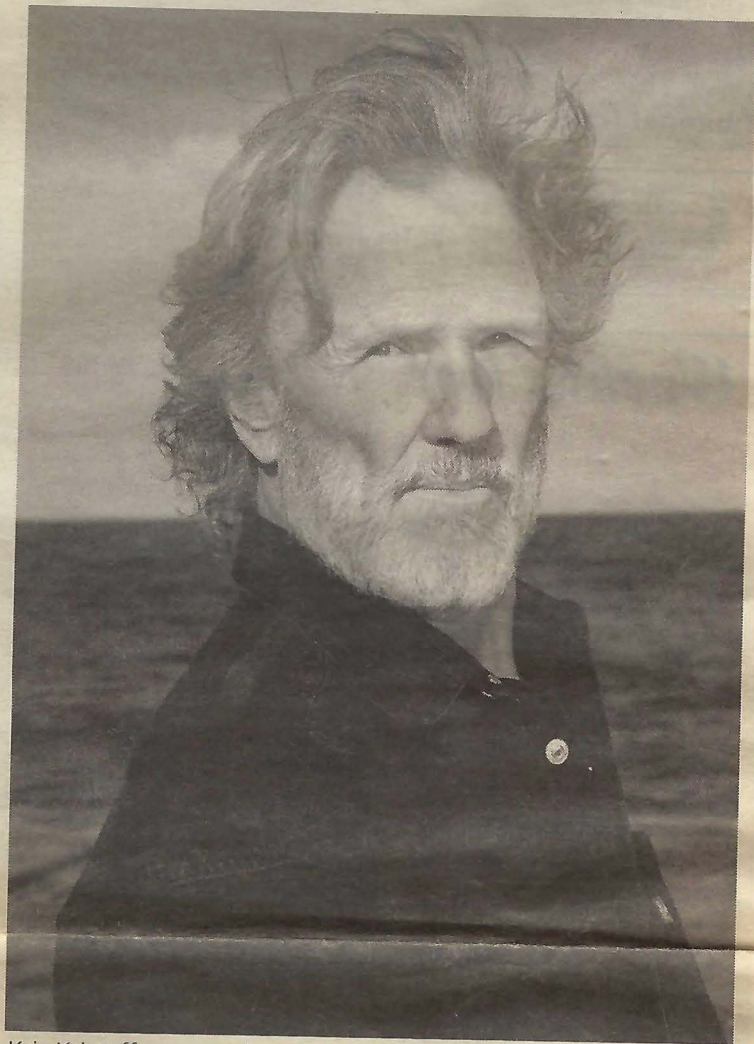
Veteran actor and musician performs at a farm worker benefit concert

by David Cotner

When was the last time you were homeless? How long do you think that feeling of loss and loneliness stays with a person? That astonishing sense of sheer *lack* – of walking down endless streets and peering through windows warmed by light and life, wondering when you'll find your home, wondering what it's like to be able to finally rest without feeling an inevitable hole for days because there is no hearth or home for you. Conversely, how does one keep from hardening one's heart against the plight of the less fortunate when it seems although their problems never end?

To this end, Grammy-winning Kris Kristofferson joins with House Farm Workers! (HFW), for a concert to benefit local farm workers who have no home in which to lay their collective hats (and heads). the "Have a Heart for Farm Workers" benefit concert at the Ventura Theater. At the event, there will be a farmers market-style dinner, silent auction and music by *jarocho* trio El Son del Pueblo in the theater lobby. (*Jarocho* is a type of folk music found most easily in Veracruz, Mexico.)

House Farm Workers!, a pro-



Kris Kristofferson performs at the Ventura Theater on Feb. 16.

tion and music by *jarocho* trio El Son del Pueblo in the theater lobby. (*Jarocho* is a type of folk music found most easily in Veracruz, Mexico.)

House Farm Workers!, a project of the Ventura County Ag Futures Alliance (AFA) Farm Worker Housing Task Force, was founded in 2004 to address the lack of decent housing for farm workers. Remember those decrepit, one-room shotgun shacks across the Pacific Coast Highway from the Point Mugu Air Station, directly behind the dive bar with the neon rocket? Those are precisely what the HFW tries to prevent — and all the despair and cold and silence that those shacks implied. Since they started, the organization has spurred the development of over 350 farm worker housing units in Camarillo, Fillmore, Oxnard, Santa Paula, Ventura and soon Thousand Oaks.

In addition to winning multiple Grammys and earning the distinction of Rhodes Scholar, Kris Kristofferson wrote, along with Monument Records founder Fred Foster, “Me and Bobby McGee.” That should bring immortality enough; it’s one of the most covered songs in the lexicon, right up there behind “Happy Birthday” and “I Don’t Know but I’ve Been Told Eskimo Pee Is Mighty Cold.”

Kristofferson began his songwriting career as a U.S. Army

Kris Kristofferson performs at the Ventura Theater on Feb. 16.

captain and chopper pilot in West Germany in the early 1960s. Back in the States, working as a janitor, he witnessed Johnny Cash’s most fertile period of singing and songwriting and he observed Bob Dylan record “Blonde on Blonde.” Flying choppers from oil rig to oil rig off Louisiana, Kristofferson wrote songs on platforms high atop raging seas until those songs he pitched to Nashville were covered by artists such as Jerry Lee Lewis, Patti Page and Janis Joplin. From there, it was a nuclear-powered slingshot of a thrill-ride to the top: He was introduced by Cash at the Newport Folk Festival. Then there were confrontational moments at the 1970 Isle of Wight Festival, when he was on the same bill as Jimi Hendrix (shortly before Hendrix’s death).

Onward to acting. He played the doomed alpha male outlaw in Sam Peckinpah’s *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* and the doomed alpha male actor opposite Barbara Streisand in *A Star is Born*. Throughout all of this, at the height of his creative powers, he played Han Solo in the *Star Wars* skit on the *Donny & Marie Show* in 1977. And then (whoops) he

starred as the doomed alpha male sheriff protecting desperate Slavic immigrants in *Heaven’s Gate*, a film that annihilated the United Artists Corporation with its profligate budget and abysmal box office results. Regardless, as the sheriff in John Sayles’ *Lone Star*, his acting career blossomed yet again and he took on the role of the lovably lethal vampire-killer Whistler in the *Blade* series of horror films.

Flash forward to March of last year and the release of Kristofferson’s latest album, *This Old Road*, a Don Was-produced retrospective of introspection about things like progress, change and honor (most of which hold new weight and meaning for the concert taking place on Feb. 16). Have a Heart for Farm Workers is a benefit that will remind everyone — from the lowest busboy to Kristofferson himself — that any of us, either by grace or accident, could be homeless. ■

Have a Heart for Farm Workers is sold out, but you can still contribute to the House Farm Workers! project. Visit www.agfuturesalliance.net/ventura for more information.

“**B**ut they love you so badly / For sharing their sorrows
So pick up that guitar / Go break a heart”

— Kris Kristofferson, “Final Attraction”

Kris Kristofferson knows hearts. Even farmworkers’ hearts.

While in California’s Mojave Desert making the video for “This Old Road,” the title track on his 2006 album, the singer-songwriter-actor ran into Paul Chávez, who was traveling through the area.

Kristofferson called César Chávez’s son by name.

The singer had been a friend of César Chávez, founder of the United Farm Workers of America, and a supporter of Chávez’s cause.



Speaking to The Star from his home in Hawaii, Kristofferson, who grew up in the Rio Grande Valley in Texas, said he was “aware of the hard life that the migrant workers had. I’ve felt close to the farmworkers for a pretty long time now.

“For a long time I have felt like they’re the most underpaid, underappreciated part of our society,” he said. “Any way I can help them I usually do.”

On Friday, he’ll help Ventura County farmworkers in the way he knows best: through music.

An actor too, Kris Kristofferson has starred in more than 60 films, including “A Star Is Born” (1976) with Barbra Streisand.

Benefit for county workers

Kristofferson is headlining the inaugural “Have a Heart for Farm Workers” benefit concert.

Proceeds will support the Ventura County Ag Futures Alliance’s House Farm Workers! project, which educates the community about the need for safe and affordable housing for agricultural laborers.

Kristofferson won’t be out in the fields performing directly for strawberry pickers. The concert takes place at the Majestic Ventura Theatre, where the audience is more likely to consist of Kristofferson fans who know the lyrics to “Me and Bobby McGee,” movie buffs who want to catch a glimpse of the “A Star Is Born” star — or anyone who wants to hear sung poetry at its most raw and touching.

Album’s sound is spare, bare

At age 70, Kristofferson has a ragged, gravelly voice.

To some critics’ ears, he’s

Getting there

KRIS KRISTOFFERSON

The country singer-songwriter will headline the inaugural “Have a Heart for Farm Workers” concert, a benefit for the Ventura County

never sounded better.

In a CD review, Rolling Stone magazine described “This Old Road” as “one of the finest albums in his storied career.”

Kristofferson and producer Don Was went for a stripped-down sound — vocals, guitar and harmonica, with scant backup on some songs — for “This Old Road.” The entire album took only two hours to record, Kristofferson said.

But the gritty, sparse tunes aren’t pared versions of what could have been something more. They stand alone.

Ag Futures Alliance’s House Farm Workers! project, at 8 p.m. Friday at the Majestic Ventura Theatre, 26 S. Chestnut St., Ventura. The doors open at 6:30 p.m. for a “farmers market” dinner and a silent auction. The concert is sold out. For more information, call the theater at 653-0721.

Kristofferson doesn’t shy away from emotional or weighty subjects — aging, addiction, faith, gratitude, war, mercy, freedom. He addresses love, too, but not just the romantic stuff. Kristofferson pays tribute to the deep love of family that comes with age, a long marriage (to wife Lisa Meyers) and being a father and grandfather (he has eight children, from ages 12 to 45).

Most of the album’s songs, Kristofferson said, “are pretty bare. I think part of what’s working on that record is what’s

working for me in concerts now. (Performing) just by myself puts a focus on the songs. I always hid behind a band before.”

Songwriter first

Early on, Kristofferson “hid” behind the music, because he was known more as a songwriter than a recording artist.

Born in Brownville, Texas, he eventually moved to San Mateo, Calif., where he graduated from San Mateo High School, then earned a bachelor’s degree in literature from Pomona College.

He also spent a year at Oxford University as a Rhodes Scholar.

Following family tradition (his father and grandfather were in the military), Kristofferson joined the U.S. Army and served as a helicopter pilot for five years.

He could have taught

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coverstory



Sam Erickson / Oh Boy Records

timeout The Star Thursday, Feb. 15, 2007



Sam Erickson /
Oh Boy Records

“I was just moved by the emotional bond between the artist and the people, the magic that’s happening when that goes on. Music aims at the emotions. If you move the heart, the head will follow.”

Kris Kristofferson, on his song “Final Attraction,” which pays tribute to Hank Williams, Janis Joplin, John Lennon and other musicians who he said have made that connection with audiences

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English literature at West Point but resigned his Army commission in 1965 and moved to Nashville to try a less lofty form of composition: songwriting.

He started at the bottom — make that the ground — sweeping floors at Columbia Records as a janitor.

The budding songwriter picked an opportune time for janitorial toil. While he was cleaning up at Columbia, Bob Dylan was recording “Blonde on Blonde” at the studio.

Kristofferson never actually spoke with Dylan, but he did meet another superstar.

“Johnny Cash liked my stuff,” Kristofferson said, explaining that he owes his break in the music business to the legendary Man in Black.

Cash expressed interest in Kristofferson’s songs and introduced him to other artists and the public at the Newport Folk Festival in 1969.

Kristofferson became a well-known Nashville name in 1969 when Cash recorded his “Sunday Mornin’ Comin’ Down,” which won the Country Music Association’s song of the year honors.

Around the same time, Ray Price recorded Kristofferson’s “For the Good Times,” which won song of the year at the Academy of Country Music Awards, and Roger Miller released “Me and Bobby McGee.”

“Bobby McGee” has been good to Kristofferson. In 1971, Janis Joplin’s version of the song went to No. 1 after being released posthumously. Jerry Lee Lewis’ rendition hit No. 1 on the country charts. Kristofferson recorded his debut album, “Kristofferson,” in 1970, then re-released it as “Me and Bobby McGee” a year later.

He won a Grammy Award in 1971 for best country song for “Help Me Make It Through the Night,” sung by Sammi Smith. He also won two Grammys for best country vocal performance by a duo or group, singing with his then-wife Rita Coolidge, in 1973 and 1975.

During the ’70s and ’80s Kristofferson continued to write and record, although musically he wasn’t in the best-selling spotlight again until he joined Johnny Cash, Willie Nelson and Waylon Jennings to form the Highwaymen. The country mega-quartet released its first album in 1985.

An actor is born

In the midst of musical success, the former scholar and helicopter pilot added another career to his resume: acting.

Since 1971 he’s starred in more than 60 films, including “A Star Is Born” (1976) with Barbra Streisand, a role that earned him a Golden Globe Award for best actor.

After a string of mostly forgettable movies, he made a comeback in 1996 with John Sayles’ “Lone Star” and is probably more familiar to recent moviegoers as vampire hunter Abraham Whistler in the “Blade” trilogy (1998-2004).

In 2006 he played a McDonald’s-hating rancher in “Fast Food Nation” (2006), a drama directed by Richard Linklater based on Eric Schlosser’s nonfiction book lambasting the fast-food industry.

Kristofferson said he hasn’t seen the completed movie yet but did read the book. “I liked what it was about; it’s thought-provoking,” he said.

He plans to keep acting as long as he can. “I think I can do concerts as long as I’m above ground,” he said, “but

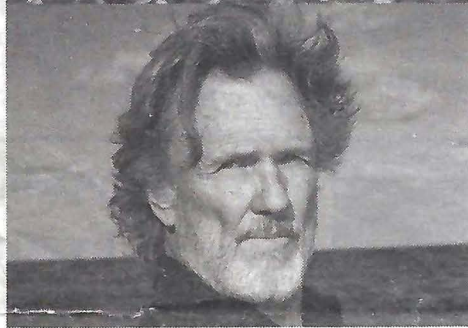
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HAVE A HEART for



FARMWORKERS



KRIS KRISTOFFERSON IN CONCERT

A benefit for House Farm Workers!, a project of the Ag Futures Alliance

Friday, February 16, 2007, 6:30 PM

Ventura Theatre, Ventura, California

Featuring a Farmers Market Dinner and Silent Auction

Benefits HOUSE FARM WORKERS!

a project of the Ventura County Ag Futures Alliance

Tickets: \$50 Includes Dinner & Concert

Available at Ventura Theatre Box Office (62 South Chestnut, Ventura)
and online at Ticketmaster <http://www.ticketmaster.com/artist/732827>

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