

# Actor Kevin Costner takes a musical detour through the Modern West

BY STEVE WILDSMITH  
steve@thedailytimes.com

Kevin Costner knows a thing or two about hard work.

After all, the iconic actor has won two Academy Awards, three Golden Globes and an Emmy for his film work; “Dances With Wolves,” “Bull Durham” and “Field of Dreams” are but three of the movies that have cemented his place in American popular culture. On the flip side of that coin, he’s also had to endure the critical drubbing that films like “Waterworld” and “The Postman” received, so he also knows full well how harsh critics can be of his art.

All of that is as good an explanation as any other for his reticence to pursue music, he told *The Daily Times* during a recent phone interview. In fact, when his wife, Christine, suggested he call up old friend John Coinman and look into starting a band, it was a full two years before the idea came to fruition.

“She found some early music of mine, and after she mentioned it to me, it took me two years of prodding to do it,” Costner said. “It’s like not wanting to take out the trash. I just kept putting it off, and finally she confronted me about it, and that’s when I decided to do it.”

“There’s a song we do called ‘90 Miles an Hour,’ and that’s kind of a metaphor for my life and the choices I’ve made in my life. As an actor and a director, people get very fearful of your choices. They ask, ‘Will you be successful? How will you do this?’ Often times, it’s the people who love you the most who do this, so when I decided to go back into music, I didn’t tell anybody. I had no idea we would tour, and I had no single plan about this band, other than



**KEVIN COSTNER AND MODERN WEST** — (from left) Park Chisholm, Teddy Morgan, Costner, Larry Cobb, Blair Forward and John Coinman — will perform Friday at Cotton Eyed Joe in West Knoxville.

I wanted to play again with John and play wherever I was making a movie.

“I had no idea if people would come see us or if we could make a single record,” he added. “I just kind of go down the path of whatever interests me.”

As it turns out, Kevin Costner and Modern West — which performs Friday night at Cotton Eyed Joe in West Knoxville — is quite the talented ensemble. Although Cotton Eyed Joe is known for the country acts it brings in, Costner’s wheelhouse is clearly roots rock; he can pen a country song with as much skill as anything coming out of Nashville these days, but the band works best when the guys lock onto an Allman Brothers-style groove, albeit with more nods to the pop world than the blues one,

and churn out a multi-guitar attack built on killer hooks and melodies that become instant ear worms.

A lot of that, Costner said, is due to the talent with which he surrounds himself.

“Two of the guys were in my very first band, and the rest are studio musicians who are really good,” he said. “I know quality, I think, and they’re quality men, first and foremost, because they’re going to be around my family.”

In addition to two Kevin Costner and Modern West records — “Untold Truths” and “Turn It On” — the band cut an album of songs for and inspired by “Hatfields and McCoys,” the History Channel mini-series for which Costner won an Emmy for his portrayal of “Devil Anse” Hatfield. Many of the

songs are instrumental ones, sweeping mood pieces that demonstrate just how versatile the members of Modern West are.

(East Tennessee aside: Costner said he hoped “Hatfields and McCoys” was going to be filmed locally, but production instead moved to Romania. He’s also friends with Dave Serrano, head baseball coach for the University of Tennessee.)

There’s a fourth Modern West record, “Where the Music Takes You,” that’s completed and will be for sale at the band’s shows, but right now, Costner added, there are no plans to distribute it to radio.

“Our songs are good enough to make hit records, but what it would take to try to do that is probably not the way I conduct my life,” he

## KEVIN COSTNER AND MODERN WEST

**WHEN:** 9 p.m. Friday, Aug. 19

**WHERE:** Cotton Eyed Joe, 11220 Outlet Drive, West Knoxville

**HOW MUCH:** \$25 in advance/\$30 at the door

**CALL:** 675-3563

**ONLINE:** [www.kevincostnermodernwest.com](http://www.kevincostnermodernwest.com)

said. “I can’t devote the time it would require.”

Obviously, Hollywood is his first priority. His next big-screen project, “Hidden Figures,” debuts next year; the story of three African-American women whose mathematical work helped determine Apollo 11’s flight to the moon in 1969, it’s a story of “contributions to that effort that have fallen through the pages of history,” he said. And there’s additional good news for fans of his cinematic interest in period pieces set in the Old West, gems like “Silverado” and “Wyatt Earp” and “Open Range” — he’s working to get a new Western off the ground and hopes to begin production on it next spring.

His famous face is, without a doubt, a huge factor in bringing fans out to Modern West shows. He acknowledges that; he’s also keenly aware of the criticism leveled at actors who launch music careers on the side. He’s built up enough capital — both financial and good will — over the years, however, that those things seldom matter to him.

“People have been going to see the movies for a lot of years, and ... they show up when I play for a lot of different reasons,” he said. “It doesn’t matter. The trick for me is to break the ice, in a sense, and turn it into my living room. There’s never been a giant plan for the music, other than to play.”