

CULTURE

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'Nobody can keep you from making music' All actor, director Kevin Costner wanted to do was play music

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We've seen many actors turn to music in the midst of their movie and television careers. Russell Crowe, Jennifer Lopez and Keanu Reeves are on a long list of those who have done so and with varied levels of success. Success isn't on the mind of Kevin Costner so much when it comes to his music with his band, Modern West. The Oscar winner would merely consider it a byproduct to his musical passion.

It's a passion he is bringing to Midland this week. Kevin Costner and Modern West headline the Wagner Noel on Tuesday.

While the public knows Costner for his iconic films such as "Field of Dreams," "The Bodyguard," "JFK" and his opus "Dances With Wolves" — which won him two Oscars — music was in the back of his mind the whole time. They just didn't fit together so easily.

With the encouragement of his second wife, Christine Baumgartner, Costner took his guitar talents and dove into music. He and formed Kevin Costner and Modern West with two longtime friends, John Coinman and Blair Forward, who were part of Costner's first band, Roving Boy. The band released its first album, "Untold Truths," in 2008. They have five albums, so clearly this is not a fleeting interest for the actor.

Before the band's show on Tuesday, Costner spoke with the Midland Reporter-Telegram about this fulfilling new chapter in his life.

MRT: You're coming back close to the area from your "Fandango" days.

Costner: Yeah, we were in Monahans, Alpine, Big Bend for that movie. I have some family ties in the Panhandle area. I love that I'm coming to Midland. I love my little history with the area and it'll be a cool night with the people who show up.

MRT: You have had an extremely successful film career. One would imagine it quite satisfying, but is there something in music that fulfills you more?

Costner: Nobody can keep you from making music. They can keep you from making a movie. Someone can pull out a guitar and stand on the corner and make music.

I have a specific taste in movies, and there are some I want to make. But when I write songs, the cream gets to the top. And then it gives me a chance to go out and have a real-life relationship with people, compared to the imaginary one through the movies.

MRT: That must be something after all these years of movies and red carpets.

Costner: A real connection can happen. It's an authentic experience.

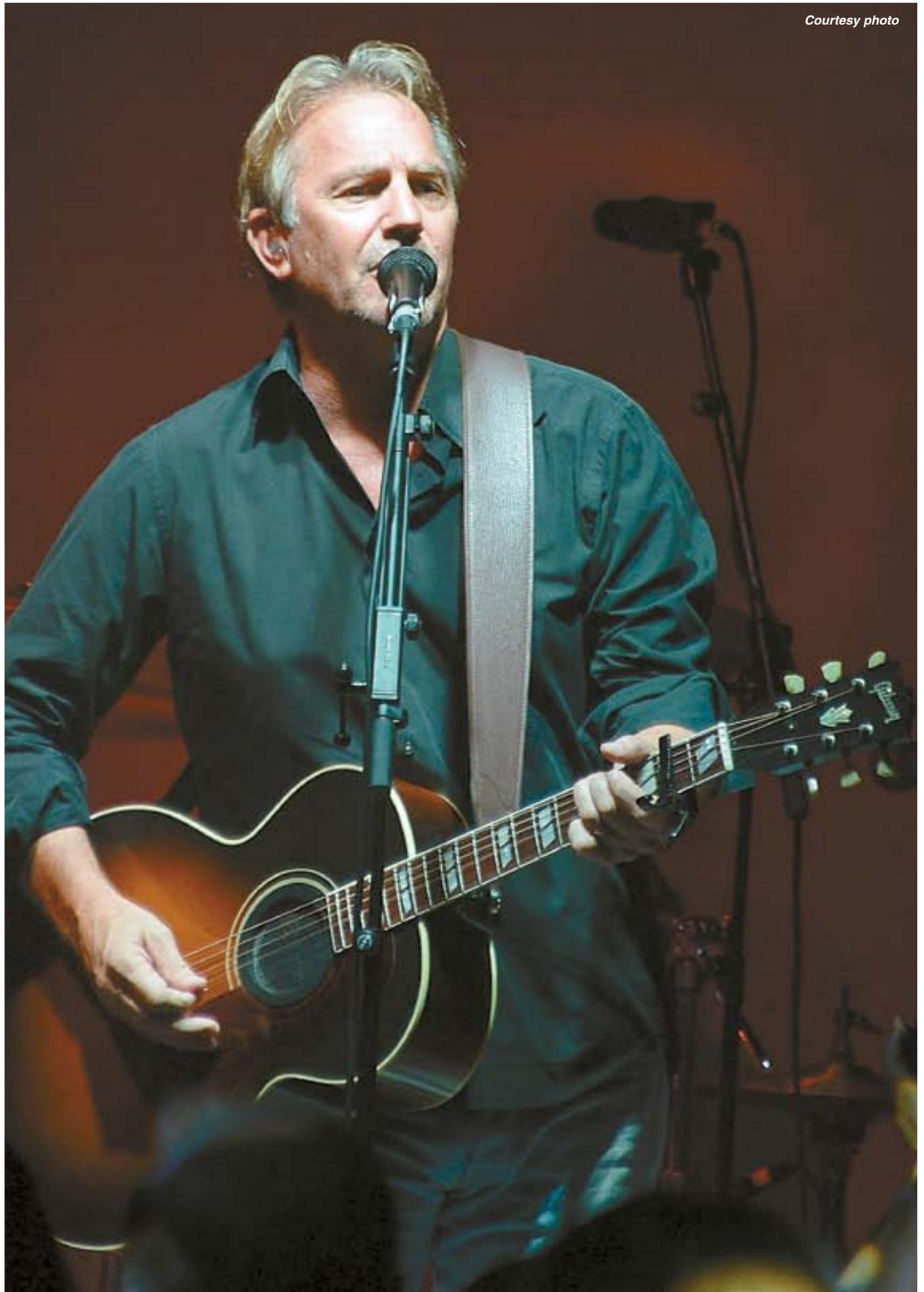
MRT: At the same time, you're far more vulnerable than being up on the screen.

Costner: We like to play our own brand of music. I wouldn't do this if we were playing covers.

I do like the drama of it all. In a movie you can have seven takes for that one perfect angle. But when you play live, there's no going back. Music doesn't separate.

MRT: Did you feel you had to prove yourself a little more?

Costner: I constantly play to people with their arms crossed. Hopefully after the first song I'll see some of those arms drop and maybe even some toe-tapping. I know people don't have to stay



Courtesy photo

Want to go?

Kevin Costner and Modern West, 8 p.m. Tuesday at Wagner Noel Performing Arts Center, 1310 N. FM 1788. \$50-\$70. wagnernoel.com.

for my show but I think that the band's music speaks for itself.

MRT: Perhaps due to some of your movies like "Dance With Wolves" or the mini-series "Hatfields and McCoys" or the name of the band itself, you get lumped into the country genre, but that doesn't seem quite apropos to the rock sensibilities of the music. How do you describe the music you put out?

Costner: I wouldn't know what to call it. I don't consider us a country band. I think we are a truly original experience and we write about what is relevant to us. And sometimes, that can be

something that happened to us in fifth grade (laughs).

Our music is highly orchestrated, and we take our time in how we present our music and lyrics. The presentation of it is very important and so we're not a jam band which just lets loose. And we've recorded a lot of music so we've narrowed it to 30 different songs which still fight their way to a 15- to 16-song setlist.

MRT: The song "Stand Strong" was released as a single last year. Does that hint at a new album coming out?

Costner: We have an album called "Where the Music Takes You" ready but I don't know what to do with it. The thing is, we don't have a master plan with our band. I kind of like that. We'd love to play 150 days a year but I simply can't, and I have a life and make movies.

MRT: You've often spoken how your wife encouraged you to reconnect with music, but were you ever encouraged by any of your contemporaries who had done the same?

Costner: I've seen other actors do it but that didn't have one thing to do with me. I don't have a life where I try to follow people. I grew up with music in the church and we had Roving Boy before. I don't separate my movie life and my music life.

MRT: Does that mean we'd see you in a musical?

Costner: I would do a musical. If I thought it was good and important and had something to say. I'd love that.

MRT: Does Hollywood see you as that?

Costner: I don't think people probably think that. I'm not much of a dance man (laughs).

MRT: You once said you try to go through life as heroically as you can. How would you say you do that?

Costner: I don't try to live with a level of fear and be all concerned with what people think about us or this idea that I would risk people feeling disappointed. I just can't live that way.

I also don't need to use my position of celebrity in my perception to do whatever I want regardless of the quality.

Last year, I worked on my first novel, "The Explorers Guild," which was a first-time thing for me. I don't know how I end up doing these things, but still, I poured everything I can into that and gave it my full attention.

And that's the way it is with music. We've been doing this for almost 12 years, and we've lucked out as far as we've gone.