People

April 29, 2019 issue

Kiefer Sutherland

TV Star to Country Singer

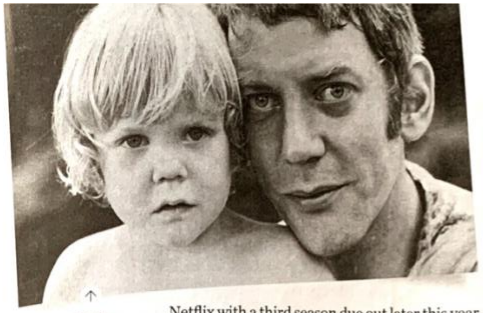
AFTER EARLY FAME AND ACTION-HERO SUCCESS, THE *24* TOUGH GUY DECIDED TO EXPLORE HIS OTHER PASSION: MUSIC *By* GILLIAN TELLING

When Kiefer Sutherland first left his hometown of Toronto for New York City at 17 for a theater role, he had no idea his career would suddenly take off like a rocket. "I did two plays, went to California and got my first film job," recalls Sutherland, now 52. The son of actors Donald Sutherland and Shirley Douglas earned instant success playing big-screen bad boys, including bully Ace in *Stand by Me* and vampire leader David in *The Lost Boys*. In his mid-20s he showed off his sexy swagger in *Young Guns* and *Flatliners*, where he met his one-time fiancée Julia Roberts. But he says he was too young to appreciate the success that was coming his way. "The ignorance and arrogance of youth made me think, 'Oh, this is just another day and this is how life's going to be,'" he says with a laugh.

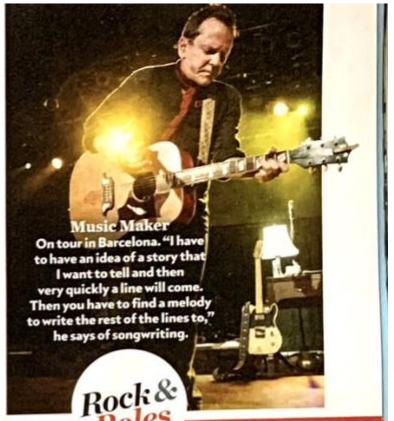
Later he found a second act as a TV action hero, winning an Emmy for the hit 2001-2010 Fox series *24* and playing the President on *Designated Survivor*, which has moved from ABC to Netflix with a third season due out later this year. But he always yearned to be a musician. When *24* ended, he started taking songwriting seriously. "I've loved music since I was young," says Sutherland. "I always played guitar and violin and a little piano." His inspirations are classic country rebels such as Johnny Cash and Merle Haggard. "It got to the point where I had a lot of songs," he says. Still, he didn't feel confident enough to record them himself. "I was aware of the stigma of an actor doing music and said, 'No way.'" But after a dinner with his producing partner "that included a few drinks," he gave it a shot. "I liked the way they sounded," he says. "But I also discovered how much I loved playing live." He finds it similar to acting: "It's storytelling, but such a different experience."

Now Sutherland, who has been married twice (to Camelia Kath and Kelly Winn) and is now engaged to actress Cindy Vela, 40, has fully embraced his troubadour persona. He has played 300 shows in the last two and a half years and is about to release his second album, *Reckless & Me* (out April 26). "The experience I've had with the audiences we play to has just been one of the great joys in my life," says the dad to actress Sarah Sutherland, 31, who plays Julia Louis-Dreyfus's daughter on *Veep*. "And each member of my band is a fantastic person that I actually love spending time with." Though he notes touring isn't exactly what he had expected. "I grew up in the days of Led Zeppelin and people destroying hotel rooms," he says. "You can try that a couple of times, but I promise you, you won't have a very good show the next day. There has to be a discipline." What he enjoys most is bonding with fans. "I know I'm one of the luckiest people I've ever met, but that doesn't mean you get to go through life without having any difficulties," he says. "The loss of someone you love or a broken heart or disappointment—when I listen to a song and realize the artist is going through the same thing, I make a real connection. That, for me as a songwriter, is the ultimate goal." ●

'I could have golfed or taken vacations, but this is what I wanted to do'



A Voice Like Dad "For better or for worse, I have my father to thank for my voice," says Sutherland (with Donald in 1970). Gravelly and deep, "it has served me well."

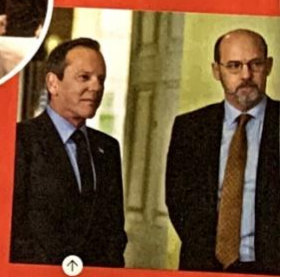


Music Maker On tour in Barcelona. "I have to have an idea of a story that I want to tell and then very quickly a line will come. Then you have to find a melody to write the rest of the lines to," he says of songwriting.

Rock & Roles

'80s Sensation "I didn't realize that through my 20s I was going to do the most popular work I've ever done," says Sutherland (in 1987's *Lost Boys*).

'90s Fame With costar Julia Roberts in the 1990 drama *Flatliners*.



His Day Job On *Designated Survivor* with Anthony Edwards. "I certainly never took a break," Sutherland says of recording and touring in between filming. "Doing TV is almost an all-encompassing job."

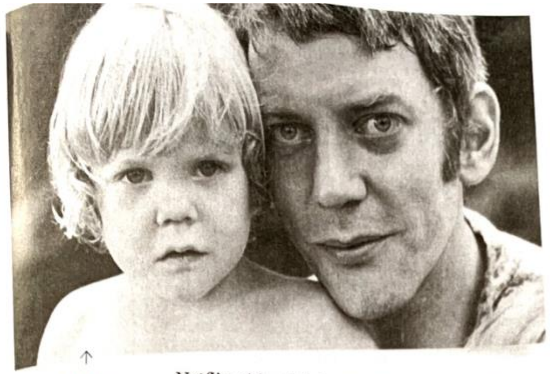
Kiefer Sutherland

TV Star to Country Singer

AFTER EARLY FAME AND ACTION-HERO SUCCESS, THE *24* TOUGH GUY DECIDED TO EXPLORE HIS OTHER PASSION: MUSIC *By* **GILLIAN TELLING**

When Kiefer Sutherland first left his hometown of Toronto for New York City at 17 for a theater role, he had no idea his career would suddenly take off like a rocket. "I did two plays, went to California and got my first film job," recalls Sutherland, now 52. The son of actors Donald Sutherland and Shirley Douglas earned instant success playing big-screen bad boys, including bully Ace in *Stand by Me* and vampire leader David in *The Lost Boys.* In his mid-20s he showed off his sexy swagger in *Young Guns* and *Flatliners,* where he met his one-time fiancée Julia Roberts. But he says he was too young to appreciate the success that was coming his way. "The ignorance and arrogance of youth made me think, 'Oh, this is just another day and this is how life's going to be,'" he says with a laugh.

Later he found a second act as a TV action hero, winning an Emmy for the hit 2001-2010 Fox series *24* and playing the President on *Designated Survivor,* which has moved from ABC to

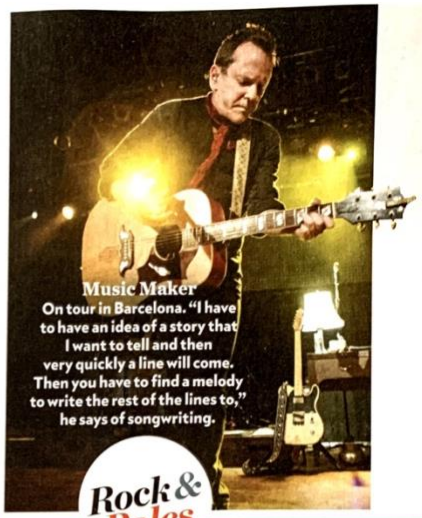


A Voice Like Dad
"For better or for worse, I have my father to thank for my voice," says Sutherland (with Donald in 1970). Gravelly and deep, "it has served me well."

Netflix with a third season due out later this year. But he always yearned to be a musician. When *24* ended, he started taking songwriting seriously. "I've loved music since I was young," says Sutherland. "I always played guitar and violin and a little piano." His inspirations are classic country rebels such as Johnny Cash and Merle Haggard. "It got to the point where I had a lot of songs," he says. Still, he didn't feel confident enough to record them himself. "I was aware of the stigma of an actor doing music and said, 'No way.'" But after a dinner with his producing partner "that included a few drinks," he gave it a shot. "I liked the way they sounded," he says. "But I also discovered how much I loved playing live." He finds it similar to acting: "It's storytelling, but such a different experience."

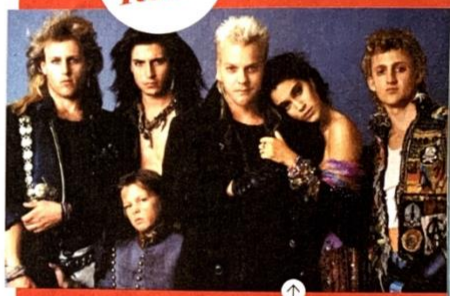
Now Sutherland, who has been married twice (to Camelia Kath and Kelly Winn) and is now engaged to actress Cindy Vela, 40, has fully embraced his troubadour persona. He has played 300 shows in the last two and a half years and is about to release his second album, *Reckless & Me* (out April 26). "The experience I've had with the audiences we play to has just been one of the great joys in my life," says the dad to actress Sarah Sutherland, 31, who plays Julia Louis-Dreyfus's daughter on *Veep*. "And each member of my band is a fantastic person that I actually love spending time with." Though he notes touring isn't exactly what he had expected. "I grew up in the days of Led Zeppelin and people destroying hotel rooms," he says. "You can try that a couple of times, but I promise you, you won't have a very good show the next day. There has to be a discipline." What he enjoys most is bonding with fans. "I know I'm one of the luckiest people I've ever met, but that doesn't mean you get to go through life without having any difficulties," he says. "The loss of someone you love or a broken heart or disappointment—when I listen to a song and realize the artist is going through the same thing, I make a real connection. That, for me as a songwriter, is the ultimate goal." ●

'I could have golfed or taken vacations, but this is what I wanted to do'



Music Maker
On tour in Barcelona. "I have to have an idea of a story that I want to tell and then very quickly a line will come. Then you have to find a melody to write the rest of the lines to," he says of songwriting.

Rock & Roles



'80s Sensation
"I didn't realize that through my 20s I was going to do the most popular work I've ever done," says Sutherland (in 1987's *Lost Boys*).

'90s Fame
With costar Julia Roberts in the 1990 drama *Flatliners*.

His Day Job
On *Designated Survivor* with Anthony Edwards. "I certainly never took a break," Sutherland says of recording and touring in between filming. "Doing TV is almost an all-encompassing job."