

John McCutcheon – Bio

John McCutcheon was born in Wausau, Wisconsin on August 14th 1952. Raised in Wausau, his parent's record collection ran the gamut from classical music to albums by pop acts such as The Inkspots and Trini Lopez. John's pre-teen days were filled with piano lessons and little league baseball. By the early sixties, McCutcheon fell under the spell of the British pop invasion, particularly The Beatles. Later he had an musical epiphany, and established the future direction of his life, when he heard the music of Seeger, Guthrie and Dylan. His first guitar was a mail-order purchase, and later he bought a banjo. McCutcheon would closet himself in his room trying to perfect his playing on each instrument. Following high school, McCutcheon enrolled as a American folk studies at St. John's University in Collegeville, Minnesota. Taking to the road whenever he could – weekends and holidays - McCutcheon travelled the length and breadth of the America's attending folk concerts and festivals, concurrently enhancing his skills on each instruments by learning from the numerous traditional musicians he met. During this period, John added the hammered dulcimer to the, ever lengthening, list of instruments he played. In 1972, McCutcheon moved his base to Tennessee, and three years later settled in Virginia. He taught for a year at Clinch Valley College in Wise, Virginia, while continuing to work as a performing musician. The first pair of John's albums were released by June Appal, and **"The Wind That Shakes The Barley"** more than amply displayed his skill with the hammered dulcimer. Later albums appeared on Front Hall Records and Green Hays. The 1983 release of **"Howjadoo!"** marked the beginning of a relationship with Rounder Records that lasted for twenty years. The album subsequently won the NAIRD for Best Children's Album. Over the years, McCutcheon continued to record the occasional children's music album, alongside those intended for adults. His adult albums were occasionally instrumental only, and while he launched his musical career by arranging and singing traditional material, in time McCutcheon became a skilful and much admired songwriter.

Like Seeger before him, one of the essential aspects of McCutcheon, the man, is the marriage of his music to his sense of social and political awareness. He organised the U.S. – U.S.S.R. Friendship Tour in 1991, where Russian and American musicians took the stage together for twenty-five shows on each landmass. When McCutcheon initially travelled through Appalachia, he became involved with the Miners For Democracy Union, which fought strip mining and sought to galvanise communities by organising them. Later, he co-founded the Southern Mountain Musicians Co-op, and in recent years has served as President of the musician's union, Local 1000.

McCutcheon has garnered five Grammy nominations and received numerous NAIRD Awards. He has worked as the producer on nearly two dozen albums by other artists. Besides performing in clubs and concert halls, and appearing at countless summer festivals, John also works with groups of children in schools and appears at rallies and conferences. In the last three decades as a musician he has toured Australia, Nicaragua and Europe. In Nicaragua he spent time promoting a children's literacy program – *"Libros para Ninos,"* and in 1996 had a children's book titled **"Happy Adoption Day"** published by Little Brown. He has also produced three recordings to benefit a community organising group – **"Rainbow Sign," "Rainbow Tales"** and **"Rainbow Tales, Too."**

McCutcheon's early fall of 2002 recording **"The Greatest Story Never Told"** was released by Minnesota based imprint, Red House Records, and four years later Appalsongs released **"Mightier Than The Sword"** a recording that merged McCutcheon originals with songs where the lyrics were inspired by, or drawn from works by, Barbara Kingsolver, Pablo Neruda, Sister Helen Prejean, Woody Guthrie and others.

Discography : **"How Can I Keep From Singing"** [1975] ; **"The Wind That Shakes The Barley"** [1977/2000] ; **"Barefoot Boy With Boots On"** [1980/1998] ; **"Fine Times At Our House"** [1982] ; **"Howjadoo!"** [1983] ; **"Winter Solstice"** [1984] ; **"Signs Of The Times"** [1986] ; **"Step By Step"** [1986] ; **"Gonna Rise Again"** [1987] ; **"Mail Myself To You"** [1988] ; **"Water From Another Time"** [1989] ; **"What It's Like"** [1990] ; **"Live At Wolf Trap"** [1991] ; **"Family Garden"** [1993] ; **"Between The Eclipse"** [1995] ; **"Summersongs"** [1995] ; **"Wintersongs"** [1995] ; **"Nothing To Lose"** [1995] ; **"Sprout Wings And Fly"** [1997] ; **"Bigger Than Yourself"** [1997] ; **"Doing Our Job"** with Tom Chapin [1997] ; **"Autumnsongs"** [1998] ; **"Springsongs"** [1999] ; **"Storied Ground"** [1999] ; **"Supper's On The Table"** [2001] ; **"The Greatest Story Never Told"** [2002] ; **"Hail To The Chief!"** [2003] ; **"Stand Up!...BroadSides For Our Times"** [2004] ; **"Welcome The Traveller Home [The Winfield Songs]"** [2004] ; **"Mightier Than The Sword"** [2006] :

Arthur Wood

Kerrville Kronikles 09/02 & 02/06

[620 words]