



John McCutcheon "**The Greatest Story Never Told**" Red House Records

At the outset of his performing career, quarter of a century ago, a McCutcheon concert or recording generally consisted of his arrangements of traditional songs. With over two dozen albums to his credit, most of which were released by Rounder Records, these days, McCutcheon's composes much of the material he performs and records.

On this thirteen-song collection, his first for Red House, this, Wisconsin born, adopted son of Virginia wrote nine of the songs, and collaborated with Si Kahn, Steve Seskin, Tom Chapin and Michael Mark on the remainder. As for the supporting cast of players, they include Jon Carroll and J.T. Brown from Mary Chapin Carpenter's band, The Kennedy's – Pete and Maura, bluegrass legend Tim O'Brien and a trio of young Australian Aboriginal women, The Stiff Gins.

John recorded this album Bias Studios in Springfield, Virginia and studio owner Bob Dawson co-produced the disc. This is their tenth collaboration, and, to date, five have subsequently been nominated for Folk Grammy awards.

The punch line to the opening, album title, track comes in the final verse, where reference is made to, Joseph, the least acknowledged participant in the *greatest story ever told*. In the earlier verses, McCutcheon quotes examples of the unsung *real* heroes of history. *Dancing In The Street*, isn't the sixties Stevenson/Gaye/Hunter composition, but a malediction, set appropriately in Detroit, as observed by a *down and out/one time dancer* who never noticed "*all the changes in this town.*" For *changes* read decades of, *deterioration and loss*. Included in the *changes grab-bag* is the rise of the *out of town* mall and the fall of the *local* five and dime, the failure of human communication in these modern times, and the rise in popularity of music that is little else but noise. The principal omission however, according to the narrator, is our failure to go *dancing in street* - hand touching hand, eye meeting eye, with joy overflowing from our hearts. In the annals of songwriting, love songs have been legion. Intelligent love songs have only ever composed a small fraction of that legion, and McCutcheon's *Last First Kiss* is a finely constructed work. *Ghosts Of The Good Old Days* is recollection of simpler times, while the light hearted pair *Barbershop* and *When I Grow Up* hardly require explanation. If *Children Of Abraham* is a prayer for understanding among nations and creeds, then *Extend A Hand* is proof that reconciliation can be achieved. Supported vocally by, The Stiff Gins, the latter song, complete with sounds of a didgeridoo and clap sticks, recalls the May 2000 march in Sydney, in support of the Aboriginal Reconciliation Movement. In the wake of 9/11 our world has, literally, been swamped by songs that reflected what happened on that fateful day. Thankfully, *Follow The Light* is one of the better examples. *Used to Be* is a wonderful take on the issue of ageing – "*the best years are still ahead*" and "*there's no future in how it used to be.*" Recalling the August 28th 1963 Civil Rights Movement march on Washington, D.C., an event that his late mother could not attend, *One In A Million* is a loving son's tribute to a parent he obviously adored. From the humanitarian to the spiritually touching all the way through to the humorous, this collection of McCutcheon stories may just be one of John's greatest.

Folkwax Rating 9 out of 10

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