**JOHN McCUTCHEON**

**FIELD OF STARS – release date 1/10/25**

By any normal measure, John McCutcheon, at age seventy-two, should be retired. He’s punched the clock in the international folk music world for over a half century. He’s been a respected archivist of Appalachian music. He was in the forefront of popularizing the hammer dulcimer and is considered a world master on the instrument. He helped revolutionize children’s and family music with five consecutive Grammy-nominated albums. He co-founded and led the fastest-growing Local in the Musicians Union. His songwriting is hailed around the globe and his instruction books introduced thousands to the joys of their own music making. He recorded and released tribute albums to Woody Guthrie, labor musician Joe Hill, and his friend and mentor, Pete Seeger. He even starred in a one-man musical, **Joe Hill's Last Will**, which toured nationally and internationally. And he has consistently been one of the most popular touring musicians in the folk world. Yes, by any normal standard, he could proudly hang up the banjo and retire.

But John McCutcheon is just getting started.

“I feel as though I’m finally getting the hang of doing my job well.”

During the pandemic, when a lot of the music world shut down, McCutcheon wrote and released three recordings of new material. He proved that Zoom could be used for good as well as for evil by forging online songwriting partnerships with a half dozen fellow writers, not the least of whom was the iconic Tom Paxton. They even released a joint album, ***Together***, which not only won critical raves but was dubbed “the best album I’ve ever done, period.” by Grammy Lifetime Award winner Paxton.

And, just when you think he can’t surprise you anymore, he drops album #45: ***Field of Stars*** *(release date: Janary 10, 2025)*, a stunning collection of original and cowritten songs people are calling “the best of his career.”

***Field of Stars*** was supposed to be recorded and released in 2020. Musicians were hired, studio dates booked. And then came COVID. So, the songs where shelved until it was safe to go into a small windowless space with some of your best mates. But then came the explosion of writing that John produced during the lockdown. Three albums in three years, each seemingly better than the last. After tackling the McCutcheon/Paxton project, he was ready to take the long-delayed 2020 album down from the shelf and get back to work on it. But times had changed. A lot of the earlier songs stayed, others didn’t. Plus, there was a wealth of new songs from those Zoom sessions.

What resulted was a collection of songs that reflect McCutcheon’s belief in the power of history to guide, of faith to heal, of love to abide, of humor to relieve, and of music to give voice to those often silenced or, worse, forgotten.

The title cut explores the Camino de Santiago through the eyes of four very different pilgrims on that ancient path. **The Hammer** is a paeon to the late Henry Aaron. **Redneck** reveals one of the origins of that word while retelling the story of 1921’s Battle of Blair Mountain. Similarly, **MS St. Louis** is the story of a too-little-known tale. His long history in Appalachia again comes through in two other songs, **Hell & High Water** and **Tired**, which has a twist worthy of O. Henry. There are lovely vocal duets here, with Carrie Newcomer on **Field of Stars** and with bluegrass great Claire Lynch on the lovely **Only Ones Dancing**.

Again and again, John McCutcheon has demonstrated an ear for a good story, a deft pen, and the ability to provide insights using the most ordinary experiences that both surprise and delight. Add to that the stellar musicianship of guests like Tim O’Brien and Stuart Duncan, pristine production, and beautiful packaging and ***Field of Stars*** is not only his 45th album in a 52-year career, it just may be his best yet.

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