

the Sopris Sun

TACAW presents John McCutcheon

By Myki Jones

Published May. 3, 2023

Critically-acclaimed and seasoned folk singer-songwriter John McCutcheon will be performing at The Arts Campus at Willits (TACAW) on Saturday, May 6 at 7pm.

The six-time Grammy-nominated artist discussed his upcoming performance with The Sopris Sun, what's next for him and provided some insight into the long career he has cultivated through a series of community-building endeavors, hard work and creative adventures.

McCutcheon has been releasing music for 51 years, which includes 43 albums, and is currently working on the production of his latest. He shows no signs of stopping any time soon.

"All my contemporaries are retiring, and I'm thinking, 'Why in the world would I retire from such a great job?,'" he queried.

His sound is richly influenced from his childhood in Wausau, Wisconsin when there was a revival of folk music and civil rights movements were on the rise. He was introduced to folk music while watching the March on Washington D.C. at age



11 with his mother. He watched folk legends like Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, Mahalia Jackson and his future friend and mentor, Pete Seeger, use their music to advocate for a cause they believed in.

McCutcheon pestered his parents for a guitar over the next three years after falling in love with the music that accompanied such a powerful movement in history.

Finally, "On my 14th birthday, I got it and I've never looked back. I was hungry to learn about this music. I just put on my shoes and started playing in front of people. Simultaneously, I kept learning," he stated.

This hunger to learn has stayed with him. While at college, he asked his advisor about doing a three-month independent study

where he would hitchhike around the Appalachians to meet banjo players, as that was the instrument he was interested in at the time.

"That three-month independent study is something I am still on 51 years later," in a way, McCutcheon continued. "So, in the ensuing period, I have been lucky enough to travel the world where I have picked up a dozen or so different instruments based on the context and experiences that I've had."

During that hitchhiking trip, he witnessed the role musicians often played in those rural communities. These performers acted as a connective tissue to bring people together in times of mourning, celebration and sometimes for fundraising.

"I quickly learned I was interested in how that sort of cultural glue happened and how the musicians figured into that. Every day since then, there's been this curiosity and excitement about learning... It's what has kept me going," he shared.

McCutcheon said that his music has evolved. The eras of his music reflect periods of interest or changes in his personal life. Of his discography, eight albums are children's records; his original, "Howjadoo," was released in 1983 as a first-birthday gift to his eldest son.

The creation of this album, and others to follow, came from his desire to create children's music for the whole family to enjoy; perhaps preemptively settling arguments about what to listen to on long road trips.

Along with creating music in that realm, his songwriting repertoire includes political satire, union songs for children, tributes and more. Once, he put out four separate albums in a single year, celebrating the four seasons, in collaboration with Si Kahn,

McCutcheon feels lucky to have a career that simply requires time to perfect his craft, from writing music and practicing various instruments, all while being able to continue to perform.

He expressed excitement about

his TACAW performance, as this will be his first concert in the Roaring Fork Valley.

McCutcheon hopes the audience comes away thinking "they had a great time and maybe heard some songs that touched them or made them laugh — or maybe pissed them off from time to time — but they went on an entertaining ride and that they were glad they were there," he said.

For more information and updates on McCutcheon, visit his website at www.folkmusic.com

Tickets for McCutcheon's performance are available at www.tacaw.org