

JOHN FLYNN BIO

John Flynn is an American singer-songwriter and activist known for his powerful music and tireless efforts on behalf of the lost and the lonely, the shackled and scarred. His career has embodied an authentic troubadour odyssey that moved legendary folk DJ Gene Shay to call Flynn "the most quintessential folk singer in my life", and Deana McCloud, Executive Director of the Woody Guthrie Center in Tulsa, Oklahoma to write, "John Flynn is the real deal. His work follows in the footsteps of Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, Kris Kristofferson, and other social justice troubadours as he speaks the truth and gives a voice to society's disenfranchised. His work fills your heart and opens your eyes as he continues to walk the walk of a true advocate for equality, justice, and peace."

Over three and a half decades, John Flynn's music has carried him from Jersey shore bars to Nashville's Music Row; from home plate performances in major league ballparks to concerts in maximum-security prisons; from star-studded benefit shows at Tipitina's in New Orleans to appearances at the Walter Reed Military Hospital and the Dover Air Force Base. Along the way Flynn has continued to make new friends and fans as he has given of his defiantly unguarded heart and optimistic spirit from large and small stages, living rooms, pulpits and schools across this country.

Although Philadelphia's Main Line Times calls Flynn a folk icon, his work has often reached beyond the conventional boundaries of the genre. A wordsmith of rare facility, Flynn's songs are laced with keenly observed and soul-resonant scraps of irony, humor, stumbled-on wisdom, and streetwise compassion. Reflecting on some of this music, long-time friend and Flynn champion Kris Kristofferson has called John "an important artist whose work in prisons, rehabs, and half-way houses is distilled into the truth and the beauty of heartfelt and heartwarming slices of life". In 2007 Kris cited Flynn to TV Guide Magazine as one of his favorite country artists, saying, "He's got a great heart and I like the way he thinks".

Few people who knew John Flynn as a boy would have predicted the path his life would take. In his youth, Flynn was seen as quiet and exceedingly serious. As a senior at Ridley High School in suburban Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the former altar boy who once strummed a New Year's Day banjo in the world-famous Mummers parade was named president of the National Honor Society and Scholar Athlete of the Year while receiving two congressional nominations to the United States Naval Academy.

John was making plans to play lacrosse for Navy when he found out he would not initially be able to take his guitar with him to Annapolis. Although music had always been an important part of John's life, he was surprised to realize how much he had come to rely on his beloved Guild twelve-string. The thought of leaving it behind, even for a few months, caused him to begin to admit to himself that he had other dreams.

John abruptly changed course and began writing songs in earnest. He put himself through Temple University playing folk and country rock covers in bar bands, while slowly introducing his own songs into the mix. After graduation, John's plans to attend law school were abandoned when Billy Swan's recording of John's song "Rainbows and Butterflies" went top-forty on the country charts and John took a staff songwriting position at Combine Music in Nashville.

It was Swan who first introduced John to Kris Kristofferson. Since then Kris has written liner notes for John and sung on several of Flynn's CDs. John was honored when he found that Kris had even selected the lyrics to Flynn's song "Without You with Me" to recite at the funeral of his longtime friend and guitarist, Stephen Bruton.

These days John's performances draw widely from a significant body of work, ranging from his early country offerings to story songs, love songs, songs for kids, funny songs, songs of social justice, and meditations on love, loss, presence, forgiveness, and hope.

The father of four spurned touring when his kids were young, but, as the children grew older, superlatives began to welcome their dad's arrival to the national stage. In 2005, Arlo Guthrie invited John to join musical legends like Willie Nelson and Ramblin' Jack Elliott on the historic "Train to New Orleans" tour following Hurricane Katrina. It was on that trip that Ramblin' Jack generously dubbed Flynn "the John Lennon of the plasma generation".

Flynn has regularly appeared at Philadelphia Phillies games where he's performed both the American and Canadian national anthems. John was the first artist the Phillies called upon when Major League Baseball resumed play following the attacks of September 11, 2001. His emotional seventh-inning stretch performance of "God Bless America" was broadcast by ESPN. The sound of 45,000 voices singing along with him that evening prompted John to write his acclaimed ode to defiant courage, "I Will Not Fear". Flynn was the last person to sing at Philadelphia's storied Veterans Stadium before its demolition in 2004. Since 2007, Flynn was a regular performer at Phillies' sold-

out playoff games, appearing at home plate with his guitar many times during the "Fightins" torrid five-year streak of championship baseball.

Although an anti-war activist and former member of the Board of Directors of Delaware's oldest peace and social justice organization, Pacem in Terris, Flynn's deep concern for, and appreciation of, those who have served in the military afforded him unique opportunities to share his music in places where most folk singers would not necessarily have been welcomed. Rejecting the "support the troops by supporting the war" mentality, Flynn reasoned, "You can be against house fires, and still support firefighters". Flynn's powerful, anthemic songs, "Dover", about those who've made the ultimate sacrifice, and "Semper Fi", about the terrible and largely ignored cost of post traumatic stress disorder, have won Flynn numerous invitations to perform for men and women in uniform, as well as their families, across this country. John's CD release concert for *America's Waiting* was a benefit for the Eric Hall Foundation, an organization aiding combat veterans who have suffered PTSD or Traumatic Brain Injury.

Over the years John's work as a social justice activist has garnered almost as much attention as his music. An ardent opponent of the death penalty, he has organized, and been a principle performer in, a series of MERCy Concerts (Musicians Encouraging the Repeal of Capital punishment) in his home state of Delaware. Flynn currently serves on the Advisory Board for Camp Dreamcatcher, a therapeutic summer camp for children whose lives have been impacted by AIDS/HIV, where his annual concerts for the kids, and holiday fundraisers have become a tradition.

In 2005, Flynn began volunteering as lead inmate support group facilitator at Delaware's maximum-security penitentiary, The Howard R. Young Correctional Institution. Due to the success of, and need for, this work, Flynn eventually took on other prisons and, in 2013, began running additional groups for those who had been released.

These groups provided much needed community and transitional support for ex-offenders and have had a powerful impact in the fight against recidivism in Northern Delaware. In 2017, Flynn founded New Beginnings - Next Step, Inc., a 501 C 3 non-profit dedicated to helping incarcerated and returning citizens successfully transition to freedom. He currently serves as the executive director of this organization.

Among the recognitions John has received for his work are the Phill Ochs Award for Music and Social Activism for Political and Social Justice, the Dominican's Shining Star Award, Rotary's Paul Harris Fellow Award, and Pacem in Terris's Peacemaker Among Us Award. Additionally, The American Library Association has recognized John for family recordings; and in 2012 he was a Grammy honoree for his song "Two Wolves" on the anti-bullying compilation, *All About Bullies, Big and Small*.

Andrew L. Braunfeld of the Philadelphia Folk Festival sums up John Flynn's career this way, "It has been disappointing that the world of folk music has not, during the last half century, been creating many new heroes. John Flynn is a notable exception and is worthy of our respect as he follows the paths of Woody Guthrie, Phil Ochs and Kris Kristofferson."

For more information visit: www.JohnFlynn.net