

THE GRAFTING JOHN SCHLITT

Intimacy. Not a theme usually associated with rock 'n' roll—not even with Christian rock 'n' roll. But it is, nonetheless, the overriding theme of *The Grafting*, the latest solo release from legendary rock vocalist John Schlitt.

"*The Grafting* feels like an intimate project because that is exactly what it is," John declares. "It is the album I've wanted to make for a long time. It is about intimacy with God and with family. It is about bravery and courage. It is, at times, bold and rebellious, and while the musical style may sound a little different than people might expect, it is still all about victory through Jesus."

With more than three decades worth of water under the musical bridge, John has seen just about everything the industry has to offer from both the mainstream and the Christian side—the good, the bad and the ugly. He's earned multiple Gold Records, GRAMMYs and Dove Awards. He's toured all over the world and has been inducted into the Gospel Music Hall of Fame. He is a man who has ridden the rock 'n' roll lifestyle to the depths of depression, felt the healing and restoring hand of God lift him from the mire and lived to sing about it. He is a man who has something to say and who has earned the right to say it.

After 20 years fronting Petra, the most successful rock band in Christian music history, John Schlitt is still passionate about the message of the Gospel and is compelled to deliver it in his own inimitable fashion. John called on the multiple talents of rising star producer/songwriter Dan Needham (Amy Grant, Petra, Michael McDonald) to help craft his vision. John provided the heart and soul, while Dan added the hands and feet.

The result, a stunning collection of nine new songs and one old favorite, is an astonishing, multi-layered look into the very nature of love and life, lost and found in Christ. While the moods may be many, at their core, they are all pure John Schlitt.

"Dan is my son-in-law, and I had him produce it for me because I knew the sound he would bring would be exactly what the album should sound like," John says. "We would meet and talk about the things that were important to me, that I wanted to sing about. I knew he would be able to write what I felt. A week or two later he would come back with a song. It was amazing! He was a natural. There were some other writers that contributed to the songs, including Mark Heimermann, Kevan Cajka, Scott Faircliff, Mark Martel, Kevan Cyka and Steve Merkel, but Dan was the main writer."

That close bond between father-in-law and son-in-law allowed for the creation of a uniquely new style for John Schlitt—one that appeals not only to the Boomer Generation that grew up on his music, but is also relevant to younger generations.

"I wanted *The Grafting* to feel like an AOR (Album Oriented Rock) record," John explains. "I wanted it to be an album that would appeal to folks who grew up on Christian rock 'n' roll, an album for folks who want some tension in their music, but not too much. We took our time with it and came up with a sound that is very fresh, very current, yet still very familiar."

To a large degree, *The Grafting* focuses on the light that love brings. That light of love reveals every nook and cranny, every crack and crevice in our character. Yet it is that same light of love that looks beyond the imperfection to the need within and begins the healing process. Nowhere is that theme more boldly proclaimed than in the project's first two cuts, "Stand" and "Keep Your Light On."

"We were created to shine, to stand," John states. "We need to be courageous, to do something positive for the Kingdom of God. We can't put on a lampshade to hide the light within us. We must make a choice that we will not hide away."

While John Schlitt is known for his remarkable rock 'n' roll voice, "Only Men" proves he is equally adept at delivering a poignant, emotion-laden ballad. Yet even here, the message of the Gospel shines with a boldness usually ascribed to saints of bygone eras.

"I get so angry by how the world treats my Lord, while it treats ordinary men with such respect," John muses. "I wanted a song about the fact that Jesus is Lord, and the rest are only men. Every man who has ever founded a religion is dead and buried, but Jesus is sitting at the right hand of the Father."

John encourages believers to imitate the compassionate nature of God in the gently driving rocker, "Face of God," a song that was written specifically due to his involvement with such benevolent organizations as Food for the Hungry.

"We can give Third World kids the chance to live rather than die from something as simple as dirty water," John declares. "When you look into the eyes of these kids, you can see the face of God."

The gorgeous title cut is apt to draw tears from even the hardest of hearts. A celebration of the bravery of those women with the courage to choose life rather than death for their unborn children, "The Grafting" might be the most personal song on this album.

"The Grafting' is about my adopted grandsons," John says. "There are organizations in this country that glorify the easy way out of a crisis pregnancy, which is death. Abortion is so dangerous, and adoption is so beautiful. I frequently work with Mercy Ministries. They help take care of that girl who chooses life over death. If she feels adoption is good for her and best for the baby, then they find the right couple that is hungry for a child."

There are tears all over this record, but there is also joy and plenty of hope in anticipation of the new life that comes with restoration through repentance. John touches on these themes in such tunes as "Your Eyes," "Gravity" and "Lord Have Mercy."

"Dan wrote 'Your Eyes,'" John says. "I just melted when I heard it. It's about the fact that with your own eyes you can see the love of Jesus Christ. It is a symbol of the peace and love that God gives you when you see through His eyes. 'Gravity' is about how the love of God pulls me back whenever I try to wander away, and 'Lord Have Mercy' is a traditional praise and worship song."

John employs his amazing vocal range to great effect on such "First Song" and "Carry On," tunes that are both encouraging and triumphant. "This is a victorious record," John declares. "Don't be scared. Don't be manipulated by the enemy. Carry on the work of the Lord, and sing like you sang when you first got saved."

His latest project finds John exploring uncharted musical territory, while remaining anchored by his unmistakable voice. It is a combination that is sure to please his legion of fans and attract a new generation of adherents. At once intimate and accessible, *The Grafting* is without a doubt John Schlitt's most potent album to date.