



# John Schlitt

By Emily L. Foley

Living His Second Chance to the Fullest

**T**he name John Schlitt is familiar to many people; for others, it is the name Petra that rings a bell. John is best known in the Christian community for the 19 years he was lead singer for Petra, a Christian rock band that many consider to be the pioneer of the genre.

## Early Career

John began his music career as the

lead singer for the celebrated secular rock band, Head East, when he was a young man fresh out of college. The group enjoyed fame through the 1970's, during which time the drugs and alcohol associated with the lifestyle became John's constant companions. By 1980, his addiction had become so detrimental that his fellow band-mates decided to let him go. John recalls that a six-month "binge" led to the firing and describes

himself during that time as "a vegetable."

Feeling all hope was lost, John continued to feed his dependency and even began to contemplate suicide. It was during that time that his wife of nine years, Dorla, found Christ. She began to pray for John and continually asked him to come and talk with her new pastor. John blew off her requests initially, but finally agreed.

“I had no intention of changing,” John recalls. “I just wanted her to remember that I had tried—after I had killed myself.”

## Saved by Grace

God had other plans, however. During John’s talk with the pastor, he found hope and discovered a reason for living that he had never before known. John gave his life to the Lord and became a new creation. Of his salvation experience, John shares, “I can remember it like it was yesterday—that weight and guilt being lifted. And from then on, I was never alone. Even through everything the enemy tried to use to knock me down, it was Jesus and me, and that has not changed.”

John took a job using his engineering degree and entered a new phase of his life. However, he continued to get calls from managers of secular bands trying to persuade him to



Petra (left to right) Paul Simmons, Bob Hartman, Greg Bailey and John Schlitt

get back into the music world. John considered those offers a direct attack from the devil.

“Once you’re in the direction of the Lord, Satan will tempt you with anything he can to get you back,” John says. He got an unlisted phone number to prevent the temptation and continued on with his new life. “I thought I had the American dream,” he continues. “I had a wife who supported me, a home, kids going to Christian school, a good job, a wonderful church—and I was really getting into the Word. I had it all.”

John remembers that it was during that time that God spoke very clearly to him, saying, “Don’t get content.” “I told my wife, ‘God said this isn’t it,’ John says, “but I had no idea what that meant.” At that time he had no inclination of getting back into the music industry. “I thought I had blown it during my secular days,” he explains, “but I felt the Lord was telling me not to let the enemy chase me away from what He had planned for me.”

## Petra Calls

The Lord’s plans were revealed to John through Bob Hartman, one of the founding members of Petra. When Bob began looking for a new lead singer for the group, someone

mentioned that John had become a Christian and suggested him to Bob. Since John's phone number was unlisted, Bob had his work cut out for him. He purchased an old Head East album and looked through the credits until he found where John thanked his brother. He then looked up John's brother's phone number and gave him a call.

John recalls, "Bob called my brother, explained who he was, and asked him to please give me his number. He was a little surprised when I called him about five minutes later!" Both Bob and John were quickly convinced the pairing was of the Lord, so after five years away from it, John was back in the music business. This time he used his broad vocal range and musical talents to glorify the Lord.

John joined Petra in 1986 and continued with the band until they retired in 2005. During that 19-year period, Petra recorded 16 albums and won four Grammy Awards and 10 Dove Awards. In 1994, Petra was granted the distinction of being the first Christian group to be inducted into the Hard Rock Café, and in 2000, was inducted into the



John Schlitt's third solo album *The Grafting*

Gospel Music Hall of Fame.

## Sharing God's Love Today

John recently released his third solo album, *The Grafting*. Those unfamiliar with John and his music will listen to the album and meet a gentle, compassionate man whose whole life is wholly devoted to the Father. "I am very proud of this album," John says. "It is very relevant to me, now at my age. It is the style of music I should be singing, and the subject

matter is absolutely right."

The album's producer, Dan Needham, is not only a well-known song-writer and producer in the world of Christian music, but he is also married to John's daughter, Kari. The collaboration between John and Dan resulted in an album that is equally as compelling for the Baby Boomer generation, who "grew up" on John's music, as it is for the younger generation, who are just being introduced to John's voice and his love of Christ. The album is intimate and real and focuses on topics such as adoption, helping children who live in Third World countries and standing up for what is right as a Christian. John says, "There are so many men, so many false prophets, being put on pedestals today. It is important to me to declare that Jesus Christ is the real Lord and there are no others."

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**For further information about John Schlitt's solo career or to book him to sing for your church or group, please visit [www.johnwschlitt.com](http://www.johnwschlitt.com).**