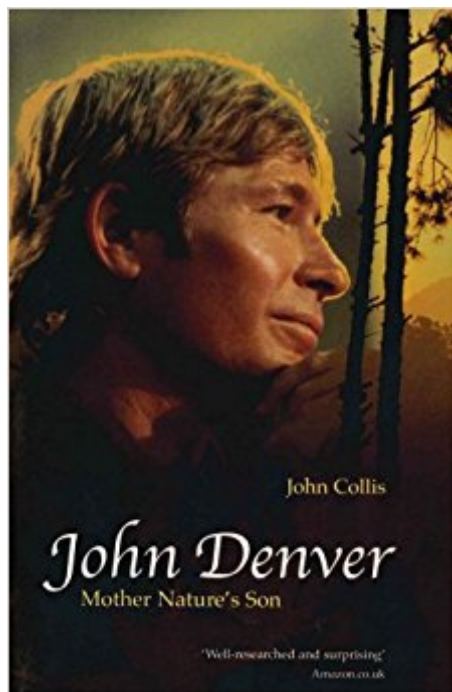


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# John Denver: Mother Nature's Son



## Synopsis

In the 1970s, John Denver was America's biggest-selling solo star, a singer whose crossover appeal drew millions of fans from the worlds of folk, pop, and country music. Beneath the tranquil surface of his music and his clear tenor voice, however, lurked a darker side to Denver's character. The wholesome figure who cavorted with the Muppets was a troubled alcoholic. Delving into the singer's past, John Collis found a man who was considerably more complex than the placid surface of his music might suggest. And, in looking at Denver's career, Collis assesses his contribution not only to the world of music, but to the culture of which he was both a protagonist and a victim.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Shallow survey of the sandy-haired pop singer whose airy nature-loving ballads hid a darker life of drunkenness, emotional turmoil, and spousal violence. In his introduction, British music journalist Collis (*Van Morrison: Inarticulate Speech of the Heart*, not reviewed) confesses that he has "always harboured some reservations" about Denver's music, and later dismisses such chart-topping hits as "Sunshine on My Shoulders" as "irredeemably banal." Born Henry J. Deutschendorf Jr. in Roswell, New Mexico, on New Year's Eve 1943, the future pop star chafed against the severity of domestic life with his father, an Air Force pilot whose frequent postings took his family all over the world but gave the youngster a feeling of homelessness. At the age of 13, Henry Jr. received his first guitar (from his grandmother) and five years later left home for Los Angeles to become a folk singer. After

some false starts, he became a fixture in the folk clubs, where he changed his name and eventually joined the Chad Mitchell Trio. His "Leaving on a Jet Plane" became a hit for Peter, Paul and Mary. He was later signed to RCA as a solo act and thanks to a likable stage presence, a songbook promoting nature appreciation over drugs, and several cleverly placed TV appearances Denver became an international star in the 1970s, while secretly indulging in drugs, booze, and violent acts (some involving chainsaws) against his wife. After co-starring with the Muppets and George Burns in movies, Denver championed environmental issues and EST founder Werner Erhard's ill-fated Hunger Project. He was in the midst of a comeback when he died in 1997 while flying an experimental airplane off the California coast. Because Collis has relied almost exclusively on published sources and has done comparatively little original research, he falls back too heavily upon speculation about Denver's hidden personality and private demons. As a biography, this book has about as much depth as Denver's songs. (6 photos) -- Copyright ©2000, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"Say it ain't so. Could it be that pop star John Denver--a bard of love and life and American's best-selling solo star of the 70s--abused his wife? That the hard-core environmentalist was a private-plane-flying air polluter?...While discussing the dark sides that may...have lurked beneath Denver's grin, Collis also gives a nod to the positive impact of the singer's ecological activism and wholesome music."

I was recommended to bypass this book as it had very little information in it that those of us who have stayed with John all through his career don't already know - and that is true. However, I was curious so I got it anyway. This book was not sentimental - it didn't bring tears to me eyes but once, that being at the end when the author states that John was cremated on Oct. 15th. I cried then for the loss of this amazing man. However, the book amused me as I watched a man who clearly started out not being an admirer of Johns, and who seemed to want to keep it that way, had to struggle in places to try and keep himself from falling over the precipice into the pit of John Denver admiration! I must thank Mr. Collis that at least the compliments that he paid to John, for the most part, did not come across as being given begrudgingly. I would recommend reading this book if you would like to read some background information on John's family and musical comrades that you might not already have known. Some of this background added some depth to an already deep and complex man.

It is clear that this author wasn't all that interested in John Denver, with so many meaningless tangents and so little new information. He doesn't add to our knowledge or insights about John Denver, and his treatment of John's personal life was superficial and indicated no research with people who actually knew him. His "analysis" of John's psychological state was speculative and lazy. You could find everything he had to say on a web site somewhere. And his snarky musical criticism was just irritating. Don't waste your money.

I love everything about John Denver.

Good Book

I like it because it is one of his first recordings. which I do not have in my collection. thanks.

I hesitated buying this book after reading the less-than-positive reviews. But I am so glad I ordered it anyway. The book can not, and should not be compared to John's 1994 autobiography, *Take Me Home*: which I own and have read. *Mother Nature's Son* delves more into the aspect of John's music and the time frames of his life from whence the different songs were written. The book offers fresh insight into the good, as well as the bad influences tugging at this multi-talented individual as they pertained to his music and his desperate longing to understand himself and his need for acceptance in the world. I honestly believe the man was lonely, and alone among his family and multitudes who adored him. The author has done his research and gives John well deserved credit where credit is due. He also allows us to see John stripped of the "sugar sweet, country-boy, aw-shucks" mask. The good, the bad, and the ugly are revealed here. After all, we are all fallible, and John was no exception. I highly recommend this book to all interested in John Denver and his music and times. It will give new insight and understanding of the music and the man.

The dust cover is SO misleading (example: there is no reference to 'wife beating' in the actual book.) I was delighted to read Collis' critique of Denver's music; the author appears impressed with many of John's songs, and the explanations as to why are most interesting. Also, John Collis pays honest tribute to John Denver's generous efforts to improve this planet. This book is considerably less critical than John's autobiography '*Take Me Home*'; however, there is little new in the way of biographical information. I recommend this book to readers who are eager to learn more about the musical angle of Denver's career.

I've been a John Denver fan for years. I have almost all his cd's and DVD's, have watched every one of the movies he's starred in and used to travel from one city to the next to see him in concert whenever possible. His music was inspiring and really gave one an insight into some of life's most beautiful moments and creatures! This book really goes deep into John's soul and gives an awareness of the dark parts of his life that some may not have known existed. It is well written. I think John would have approved of the revelation of some of his "secrets". His passing was a significant loss both to the music world and to the world in general. He sincerely cared about the environment and changing the world to make it a better place to live! I would recommend this book to anyone who is an ARDENT admirer of John Denver and his music...it gives you an even deeper insight into the simple but yet complex man he was and after reading it, like me, you'll feel even closer to knowing him and the person he was!

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