

'The Fray' is Smith's sixth studio album, written and recorded in a universally difficult 2020, and his vulnerability throughout is offered to his listeners, unadorned. "It's been a hell of a year, but I feel I've created my most honest work as a result, and as a necessity. A lot of these songs are about accepting that life is hard, but just holding on and trying to enjoy it anyway." Smith's stubborn optimism in tough circumstances shines through on the title track, in which he sings "Holding onto hope / I don't need a decent reason / Yes and though it disappears sometimes / It returns with every season".

Smith co-produced 'The Fray' with long-time friend and producer Sam Lakeman. They recorded at Peter Gabriel's Real World Studio, with pianist Jason Rebello (Sting, John Mayer), bass player Ben Nicholls (Seth Lakeman, Nadine Shah), Drummer Jay Sikora (Paolo Nutini) and Jessica Staveley-Taylor of The Staves. The album is a true reflection of the times, with American collaborators Sarah Jarosz, Courtney Hartman, The Milk Carton Kids and Bill Frisell recording remotely and sending contributions over international borders. John's frequent touring partner Lisa Hannigan contributed via a virtual studio session in Dublin.

Smith co-wrote a couple of songs for the album whilst on tour before the pandemic. Driving a rental car from Asheville to Nashville, John stopped to write the standout track 'Eye to Eye' with North Carolina-based Sarah Siskind. The Americana influence is a red thread throughout the album which beautifully complements Smith's unmistakable British Folk roots.

With 10 weeks in the US Americana top 50 charts, and with strong coverage in AP, Mojo, Sunday Times, No Depression, Guitar Magazine, and The Fretboard Journal, backed up with over 2million streams in the first two months of release alone, 'The Fray' is set to become John's most successful and critically acclaimed album.

Smith was born in Essex and raised on the Devon seaside. Known for his intimate songwriting, his honey-on-gravel voice and pioneering guitar playing, he has spent the last fifteen years touring internationally and has amassed over 55 million streams on Spotify. As a session musician he has played guitar with artists as diverse as Joan Baez, David Gray, Joe Henry, Lianne La Havas and Tom Jones.

*'Smith's voice is a rare and deeply soulful combination of granite and velvet'* - THE SUNDAY TIMES

*'Aching, doggedly optimistic and gently spangled with hooks'* - MOJO

*'There's a comforting sway to the album's melodic folk-pop, built on Smith's subtle guitar work...12 tunes of resilience, devotion and hope, with determination in the lyrics and buoyancy in the music.'* - ASSOCIATED PRESS

*'An album of searing honesty and lithe beauty whose songs amplify the emotions and experiences of so many of us this year—the reassessed relationships, the self-reflection, and the ultimate search for hope.'* - THE BLUEGRASS SITUATION