

John Lennon

imagine
john
lennon

(1970)



John Lennon

imagine
crippled inside
jealous guy
it's so hard
i don't wanna be a soldier
mama i don't wanna die
gimme some truth
oh my love
how do you sleep?
how?
oh yoko!

(1970)

imagine the clouds dripping. dig a hole in your garden to put them in. yoko '63



Just a year on from the implosion of The Beatles, John Lennon's life had yet to settle. In 1971, while lawyers picked over the remains of his old band, he travelled with Yoko to meet her family in Japan, and to America pursuing custody of Kyoko, her daughter by ex-husband Tony Cox. Within John's own, ever-enquiring mind, a war of ideas was raging.

In London and New York he had been drawn to the radical underground, where hippy ideals of the 1960s met the hard-edged politics of a new decade. But this being John, nothing was cut and dried. In parallel he was cultivating an almost mystic line of thought, much of it inspired by the art and poetry of Yoko Ono.

John's first post-Beatles album, *John Lennon/Plastic Ono Band*, had emerged in late 1970

to critical praise but only muted approval in the marketplace. The conclusions were, to him, pretty obvious. He might be a trail-blazer in all kinds of ways, but he was at heart a populist – an artist but also an entertainer. The task was to frame his ideas in music that listeners loved and took inside their hearts. *Plastic Ono Band* had been admired, but often from a distance. The role of the next album – the record that became *Imagine* – was an attempt for maximum communication offering hopes to the bleeding, battered world.

On the musical level he certainly succeeded. *Imagine* is the best-loved album of his solo career, while its title track is perhaps his most revered. By contrast to its austere predecessor the new music had melodies in abundance, and colour and variety. It had flashes of broad humour and moments of absolute joy.

In his home outside London, at Tittenhurst Park in Ascot, John had built a studio where he could record the raw tracks, without recourse to his traditional base at Abbey Road. The producer Phil Spector returned to help John oversee an informal family of musicians. Among them were George Harrison, and friends like Klaus Voormann



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and the drummer Alan White, who had all played on John's tremendous debut collaboration with Spector, 'Instant Karma!'. The Rolling Stones' favourite pianist Nicky Hopkins was there, and members of the Apple label's Badfinger.

As Yoko says: "It was so good to have breakfast in our own home and walk right into the new studio next to it. We could smell the grass and the trees from the garden and heard the birds chirping. We felt like they were helping us."

Imagine took shape in the early summer, after which the tapes were taken to New York for final overdubs (not least the magisterial saxophone of King Curtis) at Record Plant East. It seems that everyone involved, and certainly John himself, had a sense of its being exceptional. Here were songs that threw revealing light on his whole personality at that point – from the devout but imperfect lover to the embattled former Beatle; a man preoccupied by his inner doubts yet ready for anyone when his righteous fury was aroused.

The keynote song itself was drawn from Yoko's work. It was so influential upon John that he later said she deserved a co-credit. As far back as 1964, in her collection of

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poems called *Grapefruit*, Yoko began each piece with an invocation to "imagine": one example, from 1963's *Cloud Piece*, is quoted on the album cover. Whether in spiritual or earthly matters, the idea runs, we must visualise our goals before we can achieve them. It's a theme to which Lennon returned frequently, and the hymn-like simplicity of its setting reflects his basic faith – namely, that our collective imaginations are a force for good.

The cover-art, from a photograph by Yoko, further shows John in a dreamer's role, literally with "head in the clouds". But typically of Lennon there was an earthier touch, as well, in a giveaway postcard of him wrestling a pig – satirising, as most fans at the time would have spotted – Paul McCartney's pastoral image on his own solo LP of that year, *Ram*. For all that 'Imagine' has a generosity of spirit, the infamous 'How Do You Sleep?' is narrow and hard, despite its lush and spacious arrangement. John would later say that the attack on his former musical partner was, in fact, as much an assault upon himself.

'Gimme Some Truth' looks out with an idealist's impatience to the political world, while 'Crippled Inside' has that quality (more obviously than 'How Do You Sleep?') of a

tirade that is leavened with self-reproach. Its knockabout honky-tonk contrasts with Lennon's previous album, *Plastic Ono Band*, though the lyric shares a "primal scream" acuteness. Likewise 'Jealous Guy', another unflinching look into the writer's own sense of failure, is spun into a different realm by its ethereal melody. If John felt that his last album – forbiddingly stark to some ears – had not found the mass audience its songs deserved, he was not about to make the same mistake with *Imagine*.

Emotional range is central to this record's enduring appeal, with light and shade at every turn. From tough, grinding rockers like 'It's So Hard' and 'I Don't Wanna Be A Soldier Mama' we are sent to the solace of 'Oh My Love' or the confessional vulnerability of 'How?'. And the album skips away in a song of sheer delight, 'Oh Yoko!', possibly the happiest thing that John Lennon ever committed to record.

On its release in September 1971, the *Imagine* album was recognised as a rounded self-portrait of this complex, candid, passionate man. It re-established his eminence in the commercial firmament, among a rising generation of rock'n'roll stars such as Led Zeppelin and David Bowie.



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It was clear the 1970s John Lennon would not sit in the shadow of his 1960s self.

When he left England for America, on 3 September 1971, it was just another trip in John's turbulent existence, probably in search of some fresh cause to champion, more battles to fight and unknown songs to sing. Nobody knew, of course, that he would never see his homeland again. For now, New York looked like the city to be – the capital of the world, as he believed – where new adventures beckoned with siren allure.

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John Lennon and The Plastic Ono Band (with the Flux Fiddlers)

Produced by John & Yoko and Phil Spector

Imagine: John Lennon: Pianos. Klaus Voormann: Bass. Alan White: Drums

Crippled Inside: John Lennon: Electric Guitar. Klaus Voormann & Steve Brendell: Upright Bass. George Harrison: Dobro. Nicky Hopkins: Piano. Ted Turner, Rod Linton & John Tout: Acoustic Guitars

Jealous Guy: John Lennon: Guitar/Whistling. Klaus Voormann: Bass. Jim Keltner: Drums. John Barham: Harmonium. Alan White: Good Vibes

It's So Hard: John Lennon: Guitar. Klaus Voormann: Bass. Jim Gordon: Drums. King Curtis: Sax

I Don't Wanna Be A Soldier Mama I Don't Wanna Die: John Lennon: Guitar. Klaus Voormann: Bass. Jim Keltner: Drums. George Harrison: Slide Guitar. Nicky Hopkins: Piano. Joey & Tommy Badfinger: Acoustic Guitars. Mike Pinder: Tambourine. Steve Brendell: Marracas. King Curtis: Sax

Gimme Some Truth: John Lennon: Guitars. George Harrison: Lead Guitar. Klaus Voormann: Bass. Alan White: Drums. Rod Linton & Andy: Acoustic Guitars. Nicky Hopkins: Piano

Oh My Love: John Lennon: Piano. Nicky Hopkins: Electric Piano. Klaus Voormann: Bass. Alan White: Drums/Tibetan Cymbals. George Harrison: Guitar

How Do You Sleep?: John Lennon: Guitar. George Harrison: Slide Guitar. Klaus Voormann: Bass. Alan White: Drums. Nicky Hopkins: Piano

How?: John Lennon: Piano. Klaus Voormann: Bass. Alan White: Drums. John Barham: Vibes. Nicky Hopkins: Piano

Oh Yoko! John Lennon: Guitar/Mouth Organ. Klaus Voormann: Bass. Alan White: Drums. Nicky Hopkins: Piano. Rod Linton & Andy: Acoustic Guitar. Plus the J & P duo

All songs written by John Lennon except track 7 by John Lennon and Yoko Ono.

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A joint interest in 'Oh My Love' claimed by Ono Music Ltd. Whip and Mirror by Yoko Ono. Cover Design and Photo: Yoko Ono; Typography: George Maciunas

Basic tracks made at Ascot Sound Studios. Engineers: Philip McDonald, Eddie Klein (no relations), Eddie Ofor, Eddie Veal, Eddie Beer. Food by Val and Diana. John & Yoko's personal assistant: Dan Richter. This and that: Mal Evans and Peter Bendry. Flux Fiddlers overdubbed at Record Plant, NY. Engineers: Roy Sicala, Jack Douglas, Shelly Yukus (sleep). This and that: Tom and Arlene and Al Steckler. String orchestrations: Torrie Zito. Cloud Piece, 1963 by Yoko Ono, on back cover

All arrangements by Lennon except 'Oh My Love' by Lennon/Ono. Alan White appears by courtesy of Wizard Records Ltd. An Apple Record. An EMI Recording

Remaster Project Production
Producer: Yoko Ono.
Project Co-ordinator: Allan Rouse.
Remaster Engineers: Paul Hicks, Sean Magee. Audio Restoration: Simon Gibson. Remastered at Abbey Road Studios, London, England, 2010

Sleeve notes by Paul Du Noyer.
Additional Photography: Peter Fordham (© 1971 Yoko Ono), Spud Murphy (© 1971 Yoko Ono). Drawing by John Lennon

Art direction by Yoko Ono. Design by Peacock. Artwork Co-ordinator: Karla Merrifield. Photo research: Xilonen Oreshnick. Project management by Timothy Ryan, Jane Ventom, Kris Perera and Guy Hayden

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