

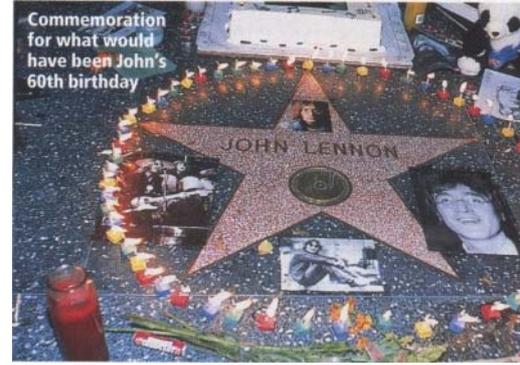
Lennon's last days...  
John and Yoko outside  
the Record Plant, 44th  
St, NYC, December  
1980

But that merely reflects the misplaced intelligence of modern times and modern stars. No one has the full-blown resonance of a Lennon nowadays, no one is loved the way he will continue to be, long after even the likes of Eminem are consigned to the minor footnotes of rock history. Maybe Lennon was advantaged to have been born in the time that he was, but no one took greater or more effective advantage of his times than he did. No one created as big a tear in the fabric of popular culture as did John Lennon.

As Ian MacDonald has pointed out, much of it was in his voice - that broad, grainy, Scouse-inflected yet perfectly pitched voice, bristling with wit, insolence, naive sincerity, pain and love. Bob Dylan can certainly lay claim to a partial credit for the invention of rock'n'roll attitude, and certainly the two artists influenced one another. But Dylan's voice didn't

register anything like as loudly as Lennon's did across the globe. Subsequent artists have all taken a little chip off Lennon - John Lydon amplified his sneer but was unable to match the remaining spectrum of emotion, Liam Gallagher has recaptured but not surpassed his laryngitic, sandpapery edge.

The '70s Lennon could never match the Beatles Lennon. He left a different sort of legacy. His very desire to play out his artistic life in full public view, rather than allow a marketing department or PR team coyly to ration his appearances, is laudable. The Surrealist André Breton spoke of the ideal of living in a "glass house", visible to all, and that's precisely what Lennon did, flaws exposed. Posing naked might have seemed like a stroke similar to the one Madonna pulled years later-but in Madonna's case it was merely the last stage in a systematic programme of self-marketing



## While Lennon wanted peace for mankind, deep down he did not want peace in his own life, or rather, he was incapable of enjoying it

and exploitation. Lennon may have been egotistical but he was compulsive in his public gestures rather than calculating. Granted, he became reclusive in the late 1970s, but when he re-emerged, it was his very desire not to place barriers between himself and the public which proved his undoing.

Had he lived, it's probable, judging by the occasionally banal bliss of his later output, that Lennon might not have made much music of worth, that he would have been a museum piece in his own lifetime. But then, who'd have guessed in the late-1980s, when both Dylan and Bowie's reputations were at their lowest ebb, that over a decade later they'd be praised for making some of the best music of their careers?

Had Lennon lived, there would have been further, fascinating convulsions to come. It would have been interesting, also, to see what caustic scorn he might have poured on the Thatcher/Reaganite, greed-is-good era.

Lennon's death has at least frozen him in iconic permanence - something many were reminded of when Oasis presented a huge image of the man by way of a backdrop to one of their 1990s gigs, prompting an outbreak of mass genuflection.

His value is as much in his failure as his success - that his idealism and the very counterculture he once fronted seems to have evaporated in these cleverer, more loveless and hopeless times makes his absence all the more sore, makes him all the more loved, regardless of the dirt, real or fabricated, that continues to be dug up on him.

He may have had many desperate flaws, but despite his rage and self-destructive impulses, his residual bitterness and deep-seated malice, he is a man we can love for what he aspired to be which is something better than most of us are, and what he wanted for the



For more on the life and music of John Lennon, watch *Behind The Music* on VH1 at 9pm on Friday 1 November



Tune in to Pete and Geoff on Virgin Radio (105.8FM/1215AM) from 4-8pm on Thursday 3 October, when they will also be discussing Lennon's unique impact on popular culture