

appalled when McCartney - aghast at what producer Phil Spector had done behind his back to "The Long And Winding Road" on Let It Be-announced the official end of The Beatles in a press release that accompanied his first solo album. The bastard. John would find that hard, if not impossible, to forgive.

AGGRIEVED, FEELING VICTIMISED and still bleeding internally from ancient psychological ulcers, Lennon took solace not just in a bad drugs habit but in Yoko. He married her in 1969, and embarked with her on the famous "bed-ins" (see panel, page 44) and a number of musical projects the results of which, it can be said most charitably, were mixed. "Revolution No 9", the brutalist tape collage featured on *The White Album*, had been regarded by many Beatlephiles as an abomination. However, especially taken in conjunction with serial killer Charles Manson's obsession with *The White Album*, it makes for genuinely frightening listening, an intense and inchoate transcription of the long scar of madness Beatlemania would inadvertently bring to the unhappy residents of 10050 Cielo Drive, or a sonic photograph, maybe, of the shit churning in Lennon's head.

That said, *Two Virgins*, John and Yoko's 1968 collaboration, was somewhat short of bring a conspicuous artistic triumph-not for its lack of conventional rock/pop content, but by the criteria of the avant-garde to which it aspired. It is on occasion so self-indulgent that listening to it feels almost like an invasion of privacy, an aimless farrago of studio doodling and shrieking, lacking in rigour and reason. *Life With The Lions* (1969), part of which was recorded on a tape recorder in a hospital during Yoko's miscarriage, similarly erred on the side of unlistenable. The critics tried their best, but Richard Williams' memorable review of *The Wedding Album*, released later that year, in which he mistakenly lauded what turned out to be the blank B-side of an engineer's test pressing as a masterpiece of minimalism, was only symptomatic of a confusion as to what the hell Lennon thought he was doing.

At a concert which eventually materialised as the *Live Peace In Toronto* album, audiences made clear their feelings about JohnandYoko's "new direction", booing Yoko's contributions in particular. Yet it was this concert and this album that persuaded Lennon the time was right to pursue a life and career outside The Beatles. And he was absolutely correct. For one thing, Lennon's despondency and heroin addiction hadn't totally ravaged his talent. Quite the contrary. His best work was now characterised by a raw, increasingly unabashed autobiographical candour (for example, "The Ballad Of John And Yoko") that didn't always sit easily within the conceptual constraints of the late Beatles, on *Sgt Pepper* or the pop suite of *Abbey Road*, or the fake `back to basics' ramshackle jollity of *Let It Be*. This hit home hardest with the 1969 single "Cold Turkey" whose merciless,

shredding guitar riff was a compulsive rendering of the agonies of heroin withdrawal. Only two decades later, with the likes of Nirvana, did rock music again come close to simulating the pain levels registered here. It had originally been intended as a Beatles song. The Beatles, however, rejected it. This wasn't The Beatles, this was beyond The Beatles. This was John Lennon, in the raw, like he was on the cover of *Two Virgins*.

In 1967, presumably on drugs at the time, Lennon had declared to the rest of The Beatles that he was Jesus Christ. Certainly the public image he was now beginning to project was one of messianic destiny coupled with a spectacle of public suffering. He would suffer, sometimes for his own mistakes, often

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the consequence of what, in the cool light of hindsight, looks like a frequent lack of judgement. Whatever anyone now thought of him, however, one thing was undeniable - as the cover of *Two Virgins* undoubtedly confirmed, to the discomfiture of many who wished for a return to a black-and-white era of chubby moptop innocence - John Lennon had balls.

THE BEATLES WERE HISTORY, a constriction from which he was now released. He couldn't wait to get down to business. A sluggard when forced to be a Beatle, he was on fire when In His Own Write. "Instant Karma!" was conceived, written and recorded in a day, January 27, 1970, a brilliant, rollicking encapsulation of Lennon's unique brand of "violent pacifism", a contradiction in terms to match the title itself.

Despite its choral assurance that "We all shine on/Like the moon and the stars and the sun", it's somehow as confrontational and menacing as a visit from a gangland debt collector. It's like Lennon's grabbing you by the lapels and hissing the lyric at you half an inch from your face. "You d better get yourself together, darlin'/Join the human race." All of Lennon's virtues and vices, his deluded optimism, his serrated wit, his moral courage, his earthiness, his cloud nine idealism, are poured into this cathartic bundle of rock, a shock, pre-dawn assault on barely awake 1970s sensibilities, like a brick crashing through a window pane with a label attached reading "PEACE". There'd be little enough of that in the decade, still less for Lennon.

Come April, the dissolution of The Beatles was confirmed and, as if to mark the final *decree nisi*, Lennon and his wife embarked on a four-month course of intensive Primal Scream therapy, conducted by the originator of the treatment,

Dr Arthur Janov. It was Janov's belief that all neuroses could be traced back to a deprivation of parental love in early childhood. A friend of Lennon's had posted him Janov's book on his travels in America, and John and Yoko, now ensconced at Tittenhurst Park, their Ascot mansion, were immediately enthralled. Lennon's mother Julia had, as John morosely observed, left him "twice"- once at age five when she relinquished custody of John to his Aunt Mimi, once again aged 17, when, having been reunited with Julia four years earlier, she was killed in a road accident. Meanwhile, Lennon's father, Freddie, an itinerant seaman, had only re-emerged in his son's life following his fame as a Beatle in the 1960s. It didn't require much psychological speculation to conclude that in seeking out gurus like the Maharishi, Lennon



John and Yoko with tartan tots Julian (6) and Kyoko (5) on holiday in Scotland, July 1969