

The resolution was on again. Right on. Furthermore, in August of 1971, he left London for New York, where he would reassume his activism on an unprecedentedly impressive scale, never to set foot in England again.

BEFORE THAT, HOWEVER, there was other unfinished business. Released in 1971, *Imagine* continued many of the themes explored on *Plastic Ono Band*, only this time, as Lennon put it, "with chocolate on". The title track- its stately and gently reassuring chord progression bespeaking an interlude of post-Primal Scream tranquillity and resolution in Lennon and Yoko's life - is undoubtedly Lennon's most-loved song, his Beatles output included. Which is curious given that its idealism, while not perfectly consistent or properly thought out, is far from the usually obvious bleeding heart mush that often clogs up utopian rock balladeering. Inspired by one of Yoko's 1960s poems, it's essentially an exercise in what modern sports or management gurus would call 'visualisation'. A perfect world might seem like a remote possibility, the thinking goes; it becomes an impossibility if you do not at least try to picture it.

Fine, except you would have imagined that the world pictured in "Imagine" would be pretty inimical to the people who in their millions have taken the song into their mawkish embrace. No afterlife, no possessions, no conflict, not even the opiate of religion, merely a spacious, baggage-free existence in which humanity can rattle around freely and without friction, "*living life in peace*", though it really does seem like the peace which, for most ordinary souls, would result in jaw-aching boredom. To Lennon, refreshed and recovered from his Primal Scream therapy, such a world would have been Heaven on Earth - provisionally, anyway.

And there lies the authentic power of the song, what listeners (or half-listeners) really take away from it if they don't trouble to probe too deeply into the



John and Yoko at the screening of their film protesting the innocence of A6 murderer James Hanratty in 1972

lyrics. The balmy piano chords which gently walk you through the song, up its spiral flights of fancy, derive from a period of genuine, if brief, domestic relief and bliss in Lennon and Yoko's life. That's the slice of sublime confection that's served up here, and that's what lovers of "Imagine" are feasting on a temporary respite from the world of strife, religious and partisan grievances, greed, hunger and pursuit of things that are the compulsive stuff of existence. Which is why people come back to it again and again, even though it's hardly a blueprint for the way they would live their lives.

The Zen-like mood of the title track is not especially in evidence elsewhere on the album, however. "Crippled Inside" and "How Do You Sleep?" represent Lennon's most viperous attacks on

erstwhile songwriting partner McCartney, while "I Don't Wanna Be A Soldier" and the anti-Nixon

"Gimme Some Truth" represented early stirrings of Lennon's political reawakening.

IN LENNON'S MIND, there was a strong association between NY and political activism. He got off on the vibrant culture clash, the sleepless, hectic pace of life. He understood, instinctively, that while the 1960s had belonged in many respects to England, "The '70s are gonna be America's".

The Lennons made a beeline for Greenwich Village, sensing that it was the historical hub of the action. Having sold on their Ascot mansion to Ringo they now reinvented themselves as well-heeled Bohemians, renting a two-room apartment with a mattress for a bed and dressing down in affectedly unaffected garb - mostly denim and black turtlenecks. They swapped the old Rolls-Royce for a pair of bicycles. Bob Dylan popped by and gave them a guided tour of the Village, still then affordable, culturally active and not fully gentrified. Once ensconced as a member of the Greenwich community, it wasn't long before various left-wing activists, attracted by John's newly-avowed political sympathy, began to drop by. These included Jerry Rubin, Abbie Hoffman and David Peel, who wrote "The Pope Smokes Dope" and performed live with Lennon, not least on the occasion they went on a spontaneous all-singing, all-strumming walkabout of Second Avenue. John enjoyed, insofar as it was possible to enjoy, a new feeling of being a 'man of the people': Even though Lennons strolls through the Village were often broken up by the police and involved bodyguards or a 'screening' process instigated by Rubin which ensured that the seedier and more parasitical elements of the 'people' didn't get too close to him, this was an early reflection of the ex-Beatle's ultimately fateful assumption that he was on safe ground in New York. »

GIVE PEACE A CHANCE John and Yoko's bed-ins

LENNON AND YOKO EMBARKED on their famous bed-ins in 1969, a defiant gesture of hippie pacifism which went against the grain of a year that saw the madness of Altamont, the Manson murders, the death of Brian Jones and a general darkness fall on the rock landscape as the 1960s drew to a close.

The couple moved into the presidential suite of the Amsterdam Hilton and issued an invitation to the world's press to come and have a gander. Needless to say, the press corps turned up in sweaty droves, hoping that the Lennons were planning to oblige them with a session of rumpy-pumpy. Instead, they found the couple in bed, surrounded by flowers and signs reading "Bed Peace" and "Hair Peace". They remained in bed for seven days in all (except for day two when the maid changed the sheets) espousing their world view with varying levels of coherence. "We must bury our own monsters and stop condemning people," declared Lennon. "We are all Christ and we are all Hitler. We want Christ to win." Further bed-ins would take place, including one in Montréal, captured in the 1988 film, *Imagine*, featuring a confrontation with the American cartoonist Al Capp, whose abrasive and condescending attitude to the couple Lennon endured with surprising equanimity. And it was from bed that Lennon recorded what was effectively his signature anthem, "Give Peace A Chance", with help from Timothy Leary, Petula Clark and members of the Montréal Radha Krishna Temple.

"It's youth were addressing," explained Lennon. "Youth is the future. What's the point of getting fame as a Beatle and not using it?"



Strange bed fellows: the famous 1969 seven-day peace protest