

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Media Briefing

AI Index: ACT 30/023/2005 (Public)
News Service No: 331
6 December 2005

Make Some Noise: John Lennon – inspiring change through music

As a solo artist, John Lennon's unique talent and passionate campaign for world peace made him one of the most influential activists the world has ever seen. "Peace is no violence, no frustration, no fear," claimed Lennon – and with this lyrical mantra, he strived to promote the issues he believed in, inspiring change through music which both provoked and united communities.

Lennon's first foray into a musical career beyond the Beatles came in 1968, when he recorded the experimental *Unfinished Music, No. 1: Two Virgins* with Yoko Ono. On 20 March, 1969, the couple married, and marked their honeymoon in Amsterdam with a now-legendary "Bed-In" for peace – a simple means of, in Lennon's words, "expending the least energy to maximum effect".

"Bed in" for peace

It was the newlywed's second Bed-In, however, in Montreal's Queen Elizabeth Hotel, which led to a defining moment in the peace movement. From 26 May to 2 June 1969, John and Yoko talked Peace to anyone who would listen, from the comfort of their own bed. The torrent of repetitive media interviews they gave led to the birth of a simple but powerful slogan, 'Give Peace a Chance', which in turn became an anthem for the peace movement when an impromptu studio was set up in the hotel room. On 1 June 1969, Lennon and Ono were joined by an eclectic backing group, including singer Petula Clark and a group of Hare Krishna devotees, who helped lay down the infectious chorus.

Lyrical activism

During his last two years as a member of The Beatles, Lennon spent much of his time with Ono publicly protesting against the Vietnam War. He sent back the MBE he had received during the height of Beatlemania, "in protest against Britain's involvement in the Nigeria-Biafra thing and support of America in Vietnam", and spread billboards with the slogan "War Is Over! (If You Want It)" across 12 cities.

Instant Karma

In February 1970, Lennon wrote, recorded and released *Instant Karma*, in the space of just one week. The single questions why we spend so much time dwelling on unimportant matters, instead of thinking about the world around us and the people we share it with, and became a major top ten hit in both the U.K. and the U.S.

Music with a message

After the Beatles officially split on 31 December 1970, Lennon's protest music took on a new intensity. The release of *Power to the People* in early 1971 highlighted Lennon's belief that if people come together as one, anything was possible. Through the song, he urged people to take action: "Say you want a revolution, Well you get on your feet, And out on the street."

Lennon released the *Imagine* album, which featured the top ten title track, in October 1971. During a period of civil unrest and war, the release was perfectly timed, and both the album and single immediately topped the charts. *Imagine* inspired people and brought hope, and became the most commercially successful and critically acclaimed of all John Lennon's post-Beatles efforts.

Whilst it was his work in the late '60s and early '70s that cemented Lennon's standing as a true icon, both as a songwriter and as a social activist, he released five further albums over the course of the next nine years.

His untimely death on 8 December, 1980, shook the world to the core. Aged just 40, Lennon's assassination left a void in the hearts of millions. His gift for capturing and igniting public consciousness through song is one that few artists have matched, and twenty-five years after his death, his extraordinary melodies and lyrics continue to inspire and empower new generations.

Yoko Ono's gift to Amnesty International

In 2002 Yoko Ono donated the rights to Lennon's solo songbook to Amnesty International. Now, with Ms. Ono's blessing, artists are coming together to record cover versions of Lennon's most powerful and resonant songs, in an effort to revive his uniquely potent mix of art and activism. In a world still troubled by war and poverty Lennon's message is just as relevant today as it was when he first wrote the tracks.

Public Document

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566
Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

For latest human rights news view <http://news.amnesty.org>