Give Peace a Chance

“Imagine all the people living life in peace. You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one. I hope someday you'll join us, and the world will be as one.”

There are so many imperfections in the world that people have to endure, but only a few become their voice and their knight in shining armor, but one of the most famous activist the world has ever known was no doubt the activism of the musician John Lennon. John Lennon was the most iconic Beatle. He was the group's most committed rock & roller, its social conscience, and its slyest verbal wit. With the Beatles, he wrote or co-wrote dozens of classics – from "She Loves You" to "Come Together" – and delivered many of them with a cutting, humane, and distinct voice that would make him one of the greatest singers rock has ever produced. Because of him people have become passionate activists that still continue to spread his words of peace and wisdom.

Lennon's interests were as varied as the musical styles he sampled throughout his 20-year music career. They ranged from distrust of authority (seen in Working Class Hero), politics ("Some Truth") and literature ("I Am the Walrus") to spirituality ("Across the Universe") and primal scream therapy ("Mother"), and he immortalized all of them in song. Yet paramount among the causes to which Lennon was committed was his almost single-minded devotion to the anti-war movement, which moved to the forefront in the wake of his 1969 marriage to avant-garde artist Yoko Ono. Starting with their famous "Bed-Ins for Peace" Lennon and Ono turned the tables on the paparazzi that dogged their every move in order to stage their own unique anti-war "happening." It was an inspired tactic on the duo's part, and one that has never been successfully repeated by any other celebrity of note since then. Using their honeymoon at the Amsterdam Hilton in March 1969 as a launch pad for their anti-war efforts, the Lennons invited the worldwide media to join them in their hotel suite, where they sat in bed for two weeks straight, from nine in the morning to nine at night, engaging in discussions about world peace. A second Bed-In followed three months later in Montreal, where Lennon wrote and recorded what was to become the unofficial refrain of the peace movement – “Give Peace a Chance”.

Lennon and Ono used their honeymoon at the Amsterdam Hilton, in March 1969, as a "Bed-in for Peace" that attracted worldwide media coverage. At the second "Bed-in" in Montreal, in June 1969, they recorded "Give Peace a Chance" in their hotel room at The Queen Elizabeth. The song was sung by a quarter million demonstrators in Washington, D.C. at the second
Vietnam Moratorium Day, on 15 October 1969. When Lennon and Ono moved to New York City in August 1971, they befriended peace activists Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman. Lennon performed at the "Free John Sinclair" concert in Ann Arbor, Michigan, on 10 December 1971. Sinclair was an anti-war activist, co-founder of the White Panther Party and poet who was serving ten years in state prison for selling two joints of marijuana to an undercover policeman after a series of previous convictions for possession of marijuana. Lennon and Ono appeared on stage with David Peel, Phil Ochs, and Stevie Wonder and other musicians, plus anti-war radical and Yippie member, Jerry Rubin, and Bobby Seale of the Black Panthers. Lennon performed the song, "John Sinclair", which he had just written, calling on the authorities to "Let him be, set him free, let him be like you and me". Some 20,000 people attended the rally, and three days after the concert the State of Michigan released Sinclair from prison. This performance was released on the two-CD John Lennon Anthology (1998) and the album Acoustic (2004). Lennon later performed the song on the David Frost Show accompanied by Ono and Jerry Rubin. According to former MI5 intelligence officer David Shayler, Lennon gave financial aid to the Irish Republican Army, a claim which Sinn Féin have neither substantiated nor denied.

Inside their crowded suite John and Yoko sat peacefully holding hands, surrounded by pink and white carnations, record players, film equipment, and busy phones. They were both relaxed and at ease with reporters. “The whole effect of our Bed-In has made people talk about peace,” John said. “We’re trying to interest young people into doing something for peace. But it must be done by nonviolent means—otherwise there can only be chaos. We’re saying to the young people—and they have always been the hippest ones—we’re telling them to get the message across to the squares. A lot of young people have been ignoring the squares when they should be helping them. The whole scene has become too serious and too intellectual”. “What about talking to the people who make the decisions, the power brokers?” suggested a cynical reporter. John laughed, “S**t, talk? Talk about what? It doesn’t happen like that. In the U.S., the Government is too busy talking about how to keep me out. If I’m a joke, as they say, and not important, why don’t they just let me in?” From their bed John spent a lot of time on the phone talking with AM and FM radio stations all around the United States and Canada. His energy seemed to be unlimited, and he kept up a more or less constant conversation, one call after another, all the time promoting peace. The immediacy of his rhetoric was put to the test when he was connected to students who were in the midst of a Peoples’ Park demonstration in Berkeley. They were emotionally worked up and scared about a showdown with the police. “Help us, what are we going to do? It’s going to go wrong!” they shouted. With understanding and persuasiveness in his voice, John replied: “There’s no cause worth losing your life for, there isn’t any path worth getting shot for and you can do better by moving on to another city …. Don’t move about if it aggravates the pigs, and don’t get hassled by the cops, and don’t play their games. I know its hard Christ you know it ain’t easy, you know how hard it can be man, so what?-Everything’s hard-it’s better to have it hard than to not have it at am” John worked himself up into a fury: “Entice them, entice them! Con them-you’ve got the brains, you can do it. You can make it, man! We can make it-together. We can get it-together!”
John Lennon and Yoko Ono were interviewed at Apple offices in London on May 8th 1969 by David Wigg. Their conversation would air in two parts during May of 1969 on the BBC Radio-One program 'Scene and Heard.' At the time of this interview, John and Yoko were still a-buzz from their Bed-ins for Peace, and the Beatles had already begun the recording sessions for the album, 'Abbey Road.' Wigg would later remember: "The first interview with John and Yoko is at the Apple offices in London. They had just returned from their lie-in for peace at the Amsterdam Hilton and another in Montreal. On this tape John described what he hoped to achieve from his somewhat bizarre activities."

DAVID WIGG: "John, what do you and Yoko hope to achieve together, because you seem to be concentrating an awful lot of effort these days on LP's together and on your own things together."

JOHN: "Yeah. We hope to achieve peace, really. You know, that's what we're aiming at. It's a big achievement and we're just doing our best for it, you know."

DAVID: "Do you feel your week in Amsterdam, lying in bed, has achieved anything. Have you had any encouraging results?"

JOHN: "Yeah, there was a lot. First of all we made people laugh and that's good. You know, I mean, John and Yoko are like the wind. You can't see it, but when it passes the trees bend. You know, and that's what we do. And they had a lot of results apart from us getting a nice film out of it and probably an album, a lot of people wrote to us and sent word and people from the States, all around the world. And just instances like some guy wrote and said, 'Now because of your event in Amsterdam I'm not joining the R.A.F. and I'm growing my hair.' Now all we're saying there, symbolically, instead of kicking a shop window in, say, do something like grow your hair for peace. Like, even the guy in the factory he won't cut his hair. He's doing it for peace, whether he knows it or not. You know, he's protesting without... They have no moral or... and no reason can they get him for having long hair. You know, 'bout it going in the cake and all that. He can tie his hair up for work, etcetera, and etcetera. So we say, grow your hair for peace and stay in bed for peace. You know, do something like that that can't be got, can't be smashed."

DAVID: "But do you feel that growing your hair and lying in bed is a positive enough reaction. Don't you think it'd be better if people went out and did something more positive?"

JOHN: "That is a positive thing. (To Yoko) You tell him."

YOKO: "It's very, very positive. I mean, the fact that it stimulated other people to say that, like you said that, you know, this is the result of us doing it. You know, in other words, well, alright, let's do something positive for peace. So we started that, you see. So in that sense it's very very..."

JOHN: "So you go out and do it. If we inspired you to do something positive, we say we've done something positive. You know, you say, 'Well I can do better than that.' Do it. That's the point."

The following is what a reporter thought about the Bed-In that took place between John Lennon of the Beatles, his wife Yoko Ono. The interviewer, Robbie Dale, otherwise known as the Admiral, is a former English pirate disc jockey from Radio Caroline. Robbie Dale encountered the Lennon's sitting down to a linen, crystal and silver spread for a mid-afternoon breakfast. The reporter thought that the Bed-In was an immense success especially when the song “Give
Peace a Chance” became the all-time anthem for peace protestors. “Of all the things I have witnessed the most bizarre would have to be the Bed-In of 1969. There I was sitting next to the greatest musician the world has ever heard and I was the one interviewing him! When I asked John Lennon of what he thought of all this he said, “Getting peace, man. My wife and I are done dreaming of a better world and here we are taking action”. Reporter Dale continued by saying,” When I heard of the protest taking place at the Amsterdam Hotel I knew I had to go and see it myself. I took the longest of flights but it was completely worth it. I was in the room with my idol and I got the chance to talk to him one on one and I felt so immensely honored and stars trucked.” “From the beginning, I personally thought that the protest was a bunch of hokum, I mean who has ever heard of a Bed-In for crying out loud! But it was for peace and it was John Lennon protesting so of course I knew that at that time people will listen to this man’s words and surprisingly they did. ”

When I first heard of John Lennon’s Bed-In for Peace, I knew I had to write about it. After reading and watching interviews of the Bed-In only one thing went through my mind “John Lennon would be proud”. It was at the second bed-in that the song “Give Peace a Chance” was recorded. One of the lasting achievements of the protest, the song was an anthem for the anti-Vietnam war movement. It has gone on to become an anthem for world peace and has been covered by a wide range of artists, including Elton John, Louis Armstrong and Aerosmith. The attention-grabbing value of a bed-in as a method of protest ensured its replication worldwide. In 2009 youths commemorating the 29th anniversary of Lennon’s assassination staged a bed-in to voice concerns about climate change during the Copenhagen climate change summit. In October 2010, the One Movement Music Festival hosted a bed-in to mark what would have been Lennon’s 70th birthday. Back then, a Bed-In protest was seen as the most stupid thing someone has ever heard but after the success of the John Lennon protest people around the world has used it as a “weapon” for activism.

“If someone thinks that love and peace is a cliché that must have been left behind in the Sixties, that's his problem. Love and peace are eternal.”

- John Lennon