

John Lennon: Small pieces of the puzzle

I have a clear image of the first time I saw The Beatles perform; the ED SULLIVAN SHOW on a magic Sunday night a lifetime ago. Lennon stood relaxed and confident, broad grin and easy glance over the crowd. "She Loves You," "You Can't Do That." Then Lennon wise-cracking his way around the world. "Those of you in the cheap seats can clap, the rest of you just rattle your jewelry." Add glasses, "Tommorrow Never Knows," "Norwegian Wood." He is without any doubt the most influential member of his generation in the mid-sixties. Hair down to shoulders, penetrating gaze. "SERGEANT PEPPER" - psychedelia in full flower. I AM THE WALRUS, STRAWBERRY FIELDS FOREVER. There is no limit to the man's talents and inventiveness. Now bearded, hair long past his shoulders. HELTER SKELTER, REVOLUTION NUMBER NINE, ABBEY ROAD and LET IT BE - Now the Beatles are no more.

John and Yoko suggest that we should Give Peace A Chance. The hairiest Lennon of all in a white dress suit, hands in pocket. INSTANT KARMA. "We all shine on" Then on his first album, Lennon howls out his pain; the intensity is unnerving. "IMAGINE all the people, living life in peace" WALLS AND BRIDGES. To general disappointment, Lennon goes into retirement. Then five years later, Starting Over. And Then the end, shot in the night.



By
BRUCE OLIVER

The Beatles created a youth culture like the world had never seen. They gave our generation a sense of identity; a sense of purpose, and above all, the idea that we, the youth of the world, could change the way things were. With the Beatles as an obvious example, we realized that we had a power over our own existence. We knew we could do something out of the ordinary. Whether the great experiment was any kind of a success or not is for the historians to decide, but one way or another, it will never be forgotten. Lennon was everything we could be. A creative master, a man of wit, a humanistic thinker, friend of an entire generation.



One of Lennon's most admirable traits was also the one which caused him the most trouble; he was never afraid to put himself on the line for what he believed. He was the only one of the Beatles to attempt to use their fame and influence to change the world for the better. A mighty tall order for any human, but he gave it a try. He was the man who said "ALL YOU NEED IS LOVE" and "GIVE PEACE A CHANCE," surely the most significant, basic and far reaching statements of the decade for many millions of us who lived through that era. Later, some of his blunt statements on the state of the world were to bring him abuse and disdain; people laughed at his efforts towards world peace, but Lennon gave it a try at great personal sacrifice. After all, who needs that kind of ridicule? No one, but John was willing to give it a try. "I really thought that love could save us all." I can think of no better example for us all.

Of course, he did make mistakes. He was only human, as he frequently pointed out. To his credit, he never hesitated to talk about his errors as such, and encouraged people to learn from his errors, and their own.



Of course, John Lennon and the Beatles had a much broader influence on all of us than any other musical group before or since, but it all started with the recordings. It is difficult to give Lennon too much credit for what the Beatles achieved as musicians. His role in the band was clear; he was the rhythmic soul and chief rocker. He was also the master poet. McCartney had his role; he wrote and sang most of the ballads and pop songs, and had a lot to do with the success of the group. However, Lennon was the most innovative, even revolutionary, writer. A listing of all the songs he wrote would be in order, but in brief, the highlights would include HELP, A HARD DAY'S NIGHT, TOMMORROW NEVER KNOWS, I'M DOWN, TICKET TO RIDE, PAPERBACK WRITER. These songs epitomized the use of relentless rhythm and every man lyrics. To Lennon, the entirety of the human condition was grist for the mill. He didn't mind baring his soul; a single listening to any of his songs is enough to convince even the most cynical one amongst us that the man was sincere, sensitive and human.

As the music moved out of the pure rock and roll sensibly into more sophisticated experimentation, Lennon led the way. NORWEGIAN WOOD has never been equalled. His psychedelic masterpieces include those songs most commonly identified with the era, such as I AM THE WALRUS* A DAY IN THE LIFE, STRAWBERRY FIELDS FOREVER, LUCY IN THE SKIES. In the end the only way to judge the contributions John Lennon made is by the amount of pleasure his music provided to millions of listeners all over the world. The sheer volume of masterful music he produced with the Beatles and as a solo artist is the greatest testimonial to his genius; I doubt anyone will quarrel with the use of that work in the context of John Lennon. The Beatles were and are the most important musical event of the century; Lennon was more than a part of it.

This is the bottom line. John Lennon loved us all. He believed in us all. He shaped our lives in ways most of us will never know or appreciate. Without him, we are more alone, but he would never have abandoned us willingly. We wish him the best, just as he would do for us.