

But were they really listening?

by Gordon Turtle

*I went out on Lower Broadway
And I felt that place within,
That hollow place where martyrs weep
And angels play with sin.*
(Bob Dylan, from "Dirge")

You had to be there.

I was at a party one night about four years ago that was hosted by the younger sister of a friend of mine. For our own interest, we asked every one of the guests — about thirty 17- and 18-year olds — if they could name the four Beatles. Not one of them could.

When I wrote about that party for a *Gateway* column a few weeks later, literally dozens of people accused me of making up the story, because to those to whom the Beatles meant something, it was impossible, absurd, that anyone could not know their names.

Much has been written about John Lennon in the month that has passed since he was shot, most of it with a decidedly maudlin edge. And, it appears, everyone was a little more upset than anyone else about the shooting.

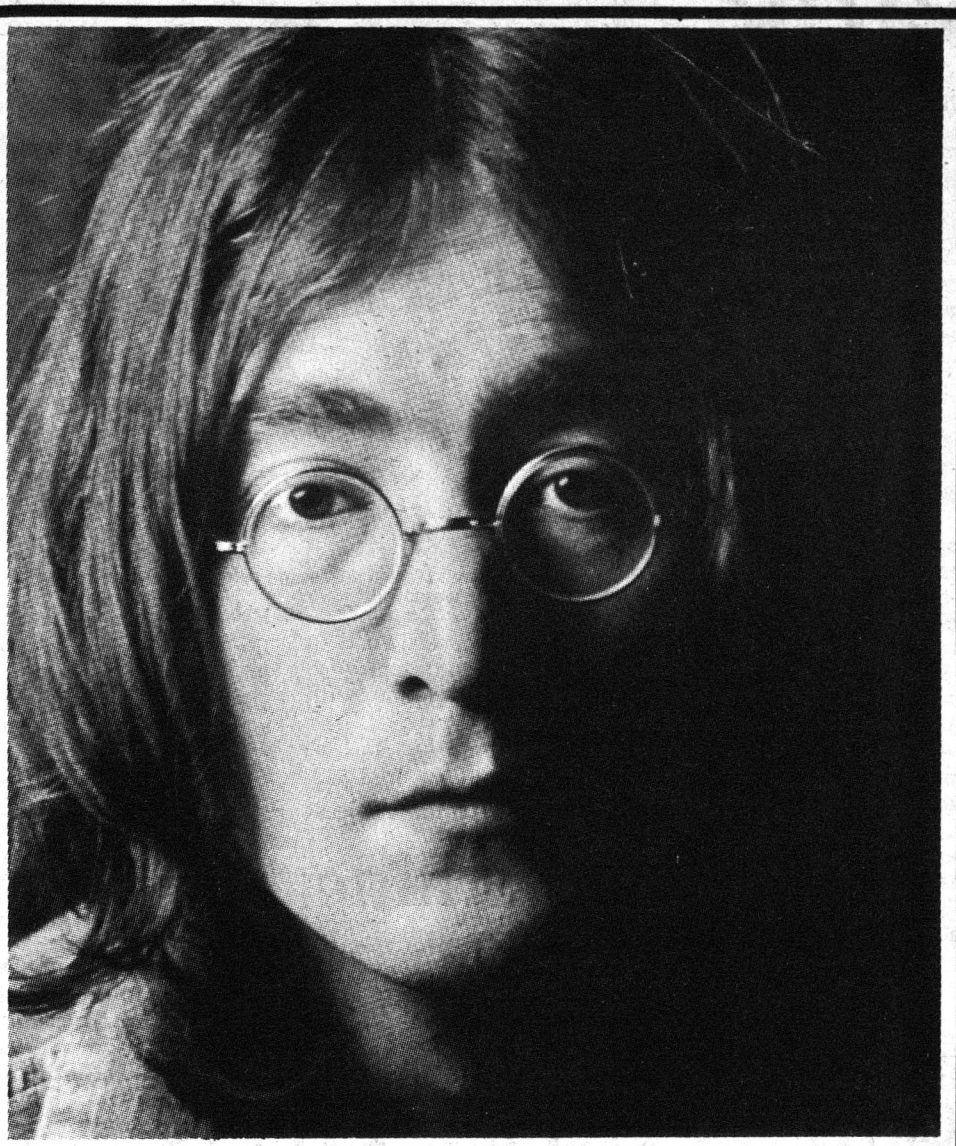
People like Kaye Corbett, editor of the *Sun*, Peter Newman, editor of *Maclean's*, and the anonymous committee of editorial writers at the *Journal*, all had something sentimental to say about Lennon's death.

It's hard to take what they had to say seriously, though, because clearly neither the writers nor the publications they write for ever learned a single thing from John Lennon or understood what he stood for. The next day, the editorialists went back to writing about snow removal and city council with equal passion and concern.

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It is difficult to write about John Lennon, especially so soon after his death. Lennon's full cultural impact might not be fully understood until long after the nostalgic and personal memories of his music fade away. But to those lucky enough to have been aware of the Beatles throughout their career, it was obvious they were part of a very select group of pop artists whose effect on the world was clearly visible even as it was occurring. And believe me, in 1970, everyone could name the four Beatles, even if he couldn't name the Prime Minister of Canada or the person next door.

To me, one of the most interesting aspects of the sixties and something for which the Beatles were at least partly responsible, was the sharp delineation



amongst young people of even slightly differing ages. If your first Beatle album was *Sgt. Pepper's*, then your conception of the Beatles might be radically different from the person's whose first taste of their music was *Abbey Road*. The albums are as different from each other as two albums by the same group could be, but they were released less than two years apart. The world was a different place in 1969 than it had been in 1967 and in the time between the Summer of Love and the Days of Rage, the Beatles maintained and even set the pace for millions of listeners.

Of course, everything about the Beatles and their times was quickly co-opted into the mainstream by the businessmen and the advertising agencies and the fashion designers, all of whom had long since run out of ideas. There is still nothing more laughable than the grey-suited bank manager with neatly-groomed sideburns and hair touching the ears (barely) who insists on maligning the Beatles and rock music in general. If it hadn't been for the Beatles, these people would still have the same buzz cuts they had when they got promoted from the mail room in 1951.

Take Peter Newman of *Maclean's* for example. This man, editor of jour-

nalism's answer to Barry Manilow, wrote a little introductory editorial to the magazine's John Lennon eulogy issue (December 22) and: (a) made sure that everyone knew his favorite Beatle song was "Norwegian Wood", showing where he's at, and (b) suggested that a "fitting" epitaph for Lennon "could be Don McLean's 'American Pie,'" displaying his pathetically shallow knowledge of rock music in general.

I wonder what the aging Newman and his counterparts with the other straight magazines thought about John Lennon when he wrote these lyrics:

*What a waste of human power,
What a waste of human lives,
Shoot the prisoners in the towers,
Forty-three widowed wives.
Media blames it on the prisoners,
But the prisoners did not kill,
"Rockefeller pulled the trigger",
That is what the people feel.
Attica, Attica State, we're all mates
with Attica state.*

I'm sure that the people at *Time*, *Newsweek* and *Maclean's* who wrote the vacant eulogies for Lennon in their respective magazines, didn't rush out to buy that record when it was released. Instead, they made Rockefeller vice-president of the United States.

Lennon also wrote surprisingly good and effective songs against the bourgeois socialization process, the persecution of Angela Davis, and the plight of England's last colony, Northern Ireland. I think I can guess why Newman's favourite Lennon song is "Norwegian Wood."

Obviously, John Lennon was not a political being to his core; most of his music was personal, or at least, written from a personal point of view. But after Watergate and Vietnam and the C.I.A. and Love Canal, it's obvious that Lennon was right about most things, and *Time* was wrong. Lennon's work was written for those who believed, not for those who fought his every move.

Even more maddening are those who figure that the "Lennon movement" was just a childhood phase, their version of James Dean or Natalie Wood adulation. Graham Hicks, pop critic for the *Edmonton Journal* is a good example. In an attempt to be honest and hard-nosed, Hicks wrote soon after Lennon's death that he couldn't really get choked up about his killing, because (and I'm paraphrasing) Lennon's music over the past few years hadn't been up to Hicks' standards.

The fact that Lennon hadn't done anything for Graham Hicks lately is totally irrelevant to Lennon's death. Lennon contributed so much to rock and western society in general, that labelling his retreat into isolation as a cop-out, as Hicks does, is offensive, selfish and ignorant.

The media response to Lennon's death has been predictable and disheartening. One would hope for meaning, not slick journalism and summary, not irrelevant nostalgia. I suppose it's only a matter of time until the John Lennon box sets and memorial K-Tel-ish albums are released (there's a book out about his death already), and Lennon memorabilia will skyrocket in worth and price.

But for many, John Lennon meant growing your hair, getting wire-rim glasses, learning to play guitar, reading *Ramparts*, brushing up on Vietnam, leaving home, becoming political, growing up in the shadow of the American madness. And, for many, the music of Lennon will be forever intertwined with Yippies, Bob Kennedy, Ho Chi Minh, Berkeley, Newark, Detroit, Washington, and Watts, police brutality and occasional moments of joy in an endless stream of misery.

John Lennon is gone, but the people and processes he fought against and made us aware of are still present in various forms. Unless Lennon's death reminds us of what his message meant, we'll all be a bit like Mark Chapman, "25 years old and the nicest, quietest guy you could ever meet."

*I heard your songs of freedom
and man forever stripped,
Acting out his folly
While his back is being whipped.
Like a slave in orbit,
He's beaten til he's tame
All for a moment's glory
And it's a dirty rotten shame.*

(Bob Dylan, from "Dirge")

up and coming

An incomplete guide to what's happening.

FILM

SUB

Sunday 11: *Airplane*, 7:00 and 9:30. Directors: Jim Abrahams, David Zucker, Jerry Zucker. A Mad magazine-type parody of disaster movies.

Tuesday, January 13: *Cruising*, 7:00 and 9:30. Director: William Friedkin. Starring Al Pacino.

National Film Theatre

Thursday, January 8: *Gion No Shimai*, 7:30. A story about two sisters who are geishas in Tokyo's red light district.

La Prise de Pouvoir Par Louis XIV, 9:15. The rise of the Sun King with emphasis on his physical, social and cultural environment.

THEATER

Citadel

Whose Life is it anyways? by Brian Clark. January 7 to February 1. Tickets at BASS outlets.

Workshop West/Catalyst Theater

Creeps by David Freeman. January 7 to January 18. About four handicapped young men imprisoned by society's expectations and their fight for dignity and independence. Staged at Theatre 3.

MUSIC

U of A

St. Cecilia Orchestra in Concert at Convocation Hall. Monday, January 12 at 8:00 pm. Admission free. Malcom Forsyth, conductor. Dawn Hage, trumpet.

South Side Folk Club

'Big' Dave McLean. Saturday, January 10. Doors open at 7:30. One of the few real and downright raunchy blues performers around. Tickets available at Keen Kraft Music, 10202 - 107 Ave., and SU tickets in HUB.

GALLERIES

Students' Union Art Gallery. 100 works from the Art Bank. January 9 to 25. On January 12, Christopher Youngs, director of the Art Bank, will give a seminar on the Art Bank programme at 7:30 pm at the SU Art Gallery.