



LET ME TAKE YOU DOWN
IN A CYN SANDWICH:

The Profoundly Paradoxical Mind
of John Lennon
Part II

by Brian Murphy

Whenever a noble soul comes, the audience awaits.
And he is not judged by his performance,
but by the spirit of his performance.

—Emerson

[*Journals*, Dover, p.206]

An essay-review of the following books:

**Cynthia Lennon, *A Twist of Lennon* (New York: Avon
Books, 1978).**

**Frederic Seaman, *The Last Days of John Lennon:
A Personal Memoir* (New York: Birch Lane Press, 1991).**

**Robert Rosen, *Nowhere Man: The Final Days of John
Lennon* (Soft Skull Press, 2001).**

Memories of John Lennon, ed., with an introduction by,
Yoko Ono (New York: HarperCollins, 2005).

Elizabeth Partridge, *John Lennon: All I Want Is the Truth,
A Photographic Biography* (New York: Viking, 2005)

Marion Winik, *Above Us Only Sky* (Emeryville, CA: Seal
Press, 2005).

Cynthia Lennon, *John* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2005).

*with comments on the following
(relatively neglected, post-Beatles) recordings
by John Lennon and Yoko Ono:*

Two Virgins: Unfinished Music I, May, 1968
Unfinished Music #2: Life with the Lions, Nov., 1968

The Plastic Ono Band—Live Peace in Toronto 1969, 1969

Plastic Ono Band, 1970

Imagine, 1971

Some Time in New York City, 1972

Mind Games, 1973

Walls and Bridges, 1974

Rock 'n' Roll, 1975

Double Fantasy, 1980

Heart Play—unfinished dialogue—

A Spoken Word Documentary, 1983

Milk and Honey, 1984

Menlove Avenue, 1986

Live in New York City, 1986

The John Lennon Anthology, 1998

IV: Outside to Inside

Unfinished Music No. 1 Two Virgins Yoko Ono/John Lennon
(May, 1968)

Even before The Beatles broke up and John embarked on the creation of his solo albums, he and Yoko made this example of what Elliott Mintz meant as John's work as an "emotional provocateur." Clearly, the great effect Yoko had on John was telling him that he was what she was—not a mere world-famous pop singer but an "artist." As they came together, one from the pop-rock world and the other from the avant-garde art-world, into a new territory altogether, their passionate love and life were to be the materials for this new art work, and they could go on, making conscious their mission to "change the world." They were born-again lovers and artists: thus, two virgins, who are pictured naked and unashamed on the front and back of the album cover—which, indeed, had to be covered in a plain brown wrapper to be actually sold anywhere. The material on the album is in the category of avant-garde experimental. In effect, it is like an audio home movie: it consists of the two of them (you can occasionally discern their actual voices), well, experimenting. Mostly this consists of Yoko's soon-to-be trademark screaming. Perhaps she is using her body to simulate some Japanese-sounding instrument. To western ears, the effect is screaming. And you can hear John occasionally trying to use the piano to simulate whatever she was simulating. The effect is so trying, right at the edge of the physically painful, that you wonder not only why they thought anyone *else* would want to listen to it, but why *they* would want to listen to it. Naked, unashamed, and emboldened, they went on to their rather more public artistic experiments—culminating, after they were married, in the bed-in for peace at the Amsterdam Hilton. Cynthia records that the daunting Aunt Mimi thought John was making a complete idiot of himself with what she thought were not daring experiments in existential art but "in-

creasingly odd stunts.” [John, 311, 333] John thought they were using their celebrity for the cause of peace. Watching them in bed is certainly less stressful than listening to their experiments in sound. It is in the nature of things: some experiments just don’t work. (This seems particularly true of experiments in sound: after all, modern art has become an accepted part of the cultural heritage; modern music never did.) The album includes comments from, of all people, Paul McCartney, words printed just under the full-frontal-explicit picture of a naked John and Yoko: “When two great saints meet it is a humbling experience. The long battle to prove he was a saint.” *Paul? Saints?* Here is that famous Sixties irony pushed to perfect pan-comprehensibility.

Unfinished Music #2: Life with the Lions (Nov., 1968)

This too begins with a comment from John’s soon-to-be-former Beaterly life. George Martin’s words are printed on the album’s back cover: “No Comment.” (Interpretation: John and Yoko have moved way beyond all that George Martin-Beatles stuff.) The front cover shows John, fully clothed, on the floor next to Yoko, her black hair spilling over a white pillow and a white gown, a sphinx in an all-white hospital bed. The back cover shows John, alone, surrounded by London bobbies, simultaneously threatening and protecting. The CD version has plenty of other photos of the two of them: they look like any happy couple, and one assumes that was precisely the point.

The first track, “Cambridge 1969,” is a 26-minute avant-garde (yes, she knew John Cage!) exercise in Yoko screaming and John’s finding strange new sounds on the guitar—*any* sounds as long as they were not *musical* sounds. The piece does build to a sort of conclusion. After a fake-out conclusion at around 17 minutes, (the wretched listener is unaware that he or she has ten minutes yet to go) the piece builds to a sort of conclusion with drums and sax entering. Mal Evans is credited with performing the “watch,” so he must be thanked for the piece finally ending. The rest is a literal audio home movie,

most of it from the hospital room where Yoko was confined after she became pregnant (but before the miscarriage); there is a five-minute track of “Baby’s Heartbeat.”

The album is dated “Nov’68” after the “May’68” of its predecessor—as if albums might come out like personal family bulletins. The CD reissue adds two bonus tracks: one, “Song for John,” is something like a song (as Yoko will write real songs later, especially on *Double Fantasy*) and the other, “Mulberry,” is more screaming.

The Plastic Ono Band—Live Peace in Toronto 1969 (1969)

These first three albums pre-date the official “solo” work described below. These three are occasional pieces. Taken together, however, they form a perfect introduction to the albums to come. The first pair is as private as the second is public. The first side of the original LP of *Live Peace* consists of John leading a very interesting pick-up group, assembled solely for the purpose of playing at a peace rally in Toronto—Yoko is credited with “vocals,” and the word seems elastic enough to cover what she provides; the others (having “rehearsed” only on the plane over the Atlantic) are Eric Clapton, guitar; Klaus Voorman, bass guitar; and Alan White, drums. The first side is moderately enjoyable to anyone who wants to listen in on a very rough jam session (hear drummer White start on the wrong beat and then quickly recover part way through the second song “Money”) as the guys, plus Yoko, play a couple of Beatles songs but are more interesting in their warm-up with the early rock songs John learned in his adolescence—such as “Blue Suede Shoes” and especially “Money.” The side culminates in the instantly recognizable “Give Peace a Chance,” a song that you have to be there for and be in on rather than simply listen to. Side Two has two items listed—“Don’t Worry Kyoko (Mummy’s Only Looking for Her Hand in the Snow)” and “John John (Let’s Hope for Peace)” —and consists almost solely of Yoko screaming. No one could ever listen to this side more than once (if that). This, again, is experimental, avant-garde art at its wildest and least accessible.

But the balance—the public and private sides of John and Yoko—in these albums is a fascinating indication of what John Lennon was going to do (alone and with Yoko) in the Seventies.

Plastic Ono Band (1970)

Actually, the title is *John Lennon/Plastic Ono Band*. He obviously meant to begin the new decade, after his “divorce” from The Beatles with music as simple and plain (like the title) as he could make it. He was no longer concerned with delighting his audience. No album that begins with a mournful bell tolling and is book-ended with “Mother” at the beginning (“Mother, you had me, but I never had you . . . Daddy, come home . . . Mother, don’t leave”) and “My Mummy’s Dead” at the end is aiming to delight. The latter is sung in a flat, suitably dead voice, accompanied only by chords incongruously played on a ukulele (the instrument he first learned—taught, in fact, by his mother). The album shows no concern whatever for mere popular success. That was good, because it never achieved any.

However, between the two mother laments are interesting, though hardly ingratiating, songs. Indeed, this first album has a brave-new-world quality to it: it is, on its own quite original terms, a very interesting assemblage. After the first song, “Mother,” which is really harrowing in its presentation of John’s pain at having been abandoned, and at *continuing* to feel, at the profoundest level, abandoned, comes “Hold On,” a genial, almost jaunty memo-to-self: “Hold on, John: it’s going to be all right.” The first two songs, in other words, constitute a kind of dialogue with himself, a reminder of that Oscar Wilde saying that “In art, a thing can be true, and its opposite can be true.”

The next two songs, the famous “Working Class Hero” and the not-famous “Isolation,” have a similar balancing effect. The first—covered many, many times (I heard a scrap of it at a 2004 anti-Bush demonstration!)—is an angry (Dylanesque) statement of bitter anger at the establishment. (It is close in sentiment, if not style, to Pink Floyd’s equally famous “Another

Brick in the Wall.”) “Isolation” is a perfect evoking of its own title: a melody that is plaintiveness itself is sung by a frightened-sounding (rather than angry-sounding) John.

“Remember” is perfectly paired also with “Love.” “Remember,” ironically, is a song of John’s no one can remember. But “Love” is one of his greatest: a tender, aching, *memorable* melody sets words arranged in one of his favorite modes—that of a mirror:

Love is real, real is love
Love is feeling, feeling love

“Well Well Well” is a wonderful song—a combination of the autobiographical with a driving riff on the words “well well well.” The autobiographical part shows well where they (and things) were in 1972—when “The Sixties” were still decidedly cooking:

We sat and talked of evolution
Just like two liberals in the sun
We talked of Women’s Liberation
And how the hell we could get things done

And paired with that confident song—its political confidence supported by its brash musicality—is its opposite:

Look at me
Look at me
Who am I supposed to be?

The final pairing moves to a conclusion which is, its own way, as startling and as satisfying as the conclusion of The Beatles’ masterpiece *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*. The second-last song is boldly called “God” and begins:

God is a concept
By which we measure
Our pain

And after a dizzying anti-litany of what he does *not* believe in (magic, I-Ching, Bible, tarot, Hitler, Jesus, Kennedy, Buddha, mantra, Gita, yoga, kings, Elvis, Zimmerman, Beatles) he rests:

I just believe in me
Yoko and me
And that's reality.

He concludes "The dream is over," but it is not quite a conclusion: the album ends with the 40 second dirge:

My Mummy's dead
I can't get it through my head

He accompanies himself on that thin-sounding ukulele (or is it a banjo?), the instrument his mother taught him.

If so many of the songs on this album constitute a kind of duologue, then the whole of the second album is itself a kind of complementary opposite to this edgy first solo release. Consider the first song.

***Imagine* (1971)**

The title song is surely about as immortal as a pop song gets—an anthem of peace and possibility, it was most recently on display in the 2006 Winter Olympics in Turin.

"Jealous Guy," is a very curious combination of edgy lyric (with its hints of violence, it makes one as uncomfortable as the earlier Beatles song "Run for Your Life", a sort of stalker-scare that concludes *Rubber Soul*) with a really, but incongruously, beautiful melody.

"It's So Hard" is a true Lennon rarity—a somewhat forgettable song. But "I Don't want to Be a Soldier" has a plain-enough anti-military message over wildly chaotic rhythms.

"Give Me Some Truth" is very pre-post-Modern in its belief that there is something called truth; this angriest of his songs is directed against what we now call, and accept all too supinely, "spin." Particularly delightful in their Swiftian sting

and hyphenated bark are such lines as “uptight, short-sighted, narrow-minded hypocrites” and “neurotic, psychotic, pig-headed politicians.” A line like “short-haired yellow-bellied son of tricky dicky” makes it clear he was talking about the Republican administration of the early 1970’s, but the same lines are eerily apt in reference to the first administration of the twenty-first century.

In the middle of all this furious anger, “Oh My Love” stands out like a flower: it has one of the most beautiful melodies he—or anyone else—ever wrote; it is a nearly perfect love song.

“How Do You Sleep?” is his famous diatribe against Paul. It is wickedly clever: the only thing you done was “Yesterday” and what you write is “Muzak to my ears.”

It’s very interesting that John positions the anti-Paul screed between “Oh My Love” (in 1974 he referred to Paul, in a Madison Square Garden concert, as “an old fiancée of mine”) and “How?”—a self-doubting, self-questioning song.

The album ends with “Oh Yoko,” an absolutely sappy-happy love song.

Some Time in New York City (1972)

So, his first solo album was mostly internal; his second, mostly about relationships. The third, *Some Time in New York City*, is his most overtly political and sounds completely different from the first two. It is angry, even bitter, hectoring and at times maddening; and yet it may his single most under-rated album of them all.

It opens with the daring “Woman Is the Nigger of the World.” After the assertion of the title he says (rather than sings), “Think about it; do something about it” as it rehearses all the bad old ideas about women: “We make her paint her face and dance,” etc. The band sounds blasting and buzzy: there is nothing of the simplicity of first two solo albums. The feminist message is more powerful than the music, and even the music begins to sound dreary and hectoring; even a fan feels that *at last* it fades out.

“Sisters, O Sisters” represents Yoko’s first appearance as a singer-songwriter on one of their joint albums. The elements do not quite cohere: it opens with Yoko saying something to the “chauvinist pig” of an engineer and John backing (and mocking?) her with a “Right on, Sister.” The song itself is a jaunty kind of thing that Yoko came to specialize in but here seems at odds with the lyrics:

We lost our green land
We lost our clean air
We lost our true wisdom
And we live in despair.

The song includes an extremely incongruous guitar break that seems to have nothing at all to do with this song.

Then comes one of the very topical songs, “Attica State,” about the prison riots in upstate New York. That we are presumed to be on the side of the rioting inmates almost goes without saying. (“We’re all mates with Attica State.”) And yet this—sung jointly by John and Yoko—is a great song of its kind, full of fury and power, with music that matches the words. It begins:

What a waste of human power,
What a waste of human lives,
Shoot the prisoners in the tower,
Forty-three poor widowed wives.

Yoko’s “Born in a Prison” follows logically from “Attica State” and has a powerful-enough theme:

We’re born in a prison,
Raised in a prison,
Sent to a prison called school.

For all his obvious native genius and carefully schooled talent (playing 8 hours a night in Hamburg, for example),

John believed that, in a way, rock and roll is a kind of folk art that, really, anyone can do. Paul and George recall his leaving the recording studio before a song was finished, saying he was going to have a cup of tea, and telling them casually to finish the song while he was gone. His insistence on the not-musically-talented Stuart Sutcliffe being in the early Beatles was another instance. The final one was Yoko. She was to him a kind of artist-everyperson: ideas and passion and values are more important than mere musical talent.

However and regrettably, this particular song, “Born in a Prison,” sounds utterly terrible (though she does *not* always sound like this): it needs a real singer, one who can stay on pitch and hold onto a melodic line.

Then comes John’s “New York City,” a really exciting rocker, with piano rather than sax, and with words one can hardly understand (except “me and Yoko Ono”); after being urged to write songs about himself and then writing one of his greatest, “In My Life,” on *Rubber Soul*, John certainly needed no further encouragement to use his life as the material for his art!

This is followed by two “Irish” songs. The first is “Sunday Bloody Sunday” which is another angry one about the soldiers shooting demonstrators:

Not a soldier boy was bleeding
When they nailed the coffin lids.

In this one John and Yoko’s voices blend in a harmonized anger very effectively.

Then comes one of the cleverest, most mordant songs he ever wrote, “The Luck of the Irish.” To a brilliantly catchy tune convincingly evocative of an Irish folk song, he sings:

If you had the luck of the Irish,
You’d be sorry and wish you were dead.
You should have the luck of the Irish,
You’d wish you was English instead!

The mordant cleverness gives way to bitter anger (“Why the hell are the English there anyway?”) and alternates with Yoko singing a completely incomprehensible chorus about shamrocks and flowers. (The song makes a perfect contrast with Paul’s song on the same subject and written about the same time, “Give Ireland Back to the Irish.” This is Paul’s Nice-Guy act at its best: “Great Britain, you are tremendous,” but that didn’t help: the BBC banned the song anyway.)

The epitome of his ripped-from-the-headlines song subjects is “John Sinclair,” about the man sentenced to ten years in a Michigan prison for possessing two marijuana joints. It has an infectious beat, and—who knows?—it may actually have helped, for soon after John and Yoko sang the song at an Ann Arbor concert, the Michigan Supreme Court ordered Sinclair freed.

The album ends with two Yoko songs. “Angela,” about black activist Angela Davis, is as topical as “John Sinclair” (“Angela, they shot down your man”). And Yoko’s singing here is somehow absolutely perfect.

In the last song, Yoko’s singing is less effective, but not painful. In “We’re All Water,” she conjures the whimsically delightful image of Nixon and Mao getting naked and dancing together.

With all its erratic craziness, this is a quite potent album. If it is not a perfect artistic accomplishment, well, they were not aiming for perfection or even art. This is an album that says, over and over: Think! Think about it! Do something about it!

***Mind Games* (1973)**

We are in another world with John’s next album *Mind Games*. The original idea for the title song was a setting of the Sixties’ saying “Make love, not war,” and you can hear the original line if you listen carefully as the song fades out. John was acutely aware of his role as song-writer to The Sixties generation: “Give Peace a Chance,” “Revolution,” and “Imagine” are the most successful and enduring of these anthems. But *Mind*

Games was made in 1973, and already The Sixties energies were beginning to fade. (Nixon's landslide re-election in 1972, the end of the draft, the wind-down of the Viet Nam War were all blowin' in the winds of the time.) Thus, John seemed to sense that "make love not war" no longer had the revolutionary edge it had even five years earlier. Besides, John had made his own central statement in his great song "Revolution" in 1967. A key line is:

You tell me it's the institutions,
But you better free your mind instead.

And the song "Mind Games" is an extension of that idea. The "concept" behind the album is contained on the album jacket (which, as with all his albums since *Sgt. Pepper*, also contains the lyrics to all the songs): there is a "Declaration of Nutopia.," which is "a conceptual country": with "no land, no boundaries, no passports, only people." Two epigraphs explain: y.o. says, "Only people can change the world," which seems true enough; this is paired by a saying attributed to one Dr. Winston O'Boogie, (born in 1940, John was patriotically christened John Winston), a *nom de musique* of John's: "Madness is the first sign of dandruff."

Discovering, exploring, and freeing the mind: this is the real theme of the album, which is only intermittently successful, and, really, only "Mind Games" is a truly successful song. "Tight As" is amusing (and fun to play the drums to) but is another example of that true Lennon rarity—a quite forgettable song. Even worse: there are songs the fans *wish* they could forget: "Aisumasen (I'm Sorry)" is the first of John's confessional genuflections to Yoko, and it is a really dreary song, as is "One Day." John tries to get his anthem mode back, but "Bring on the Lucie (Freeda Peeple)" is lackluster. The "Nutopian International Anthem" is amusing as it consists of total silence, an all-too-welcome and therefore dangerous device on this album. "Intuition" is catchy in the worst possible way, filled with clichés that he does not animate; it is positively irritating.

“Out of the Blue” is a thank-you to Yoko: “I was born just to get to you.” It is sincere but not inspired.

Yoko is the subject again (we wish her back as a collaborator, because then there would not be so many songs *to* her) in “I Know (I Know),” which is interesting, perhaps, as part of the JohnandYoko psycho-drama (“I love you more than yesterday”), but, again “dreary” comes to mind. “You Are Here” is a very slow love song with a Caribbean feel and sound to it: it is a very “studio” song with a lush orchestra and backup singers. The final song was clearly meant to be a contrast—a fast rocker, “Meat City,” but (to me) the rhythm never really finds a groove (he needed Ringo?), and it sounds densely overproduced.

***Walls and Bridges* (1974)**

The somewhat but unmistakably tired quality of *Mind Games* is almost the very subject of *Walls and Bridges*. “Going Down on Love” might be amusingly ribald, but it sounds more depressed than sexual. It is followed by “Whatever Gets You Through the Night,” which *is* a song about getting over your depressions and addictions. “Scared” says it all: that’s what he is. He continues to write about himself, ever the “emotional provocateur,” but the provocation tends more toward the provoking. He is either obviously depressed (Nobody Loves You When You’re Down and Out”) or angry and cruel (“Steel and Glass”). Despite the occasionally surreal line, “Old Dirt Road” is obscure and dreary. No wonder he decided to stop recording when he finished this exercise in hollow self-revelation and dreary self-flagellation.

***Rock’n’Roll* (1975)** was released after, but actually recorded before, *Walls and Bridges*. It is *almost* the wonderful recap of his youth. It begins with “Be Bop-a-Lula,” the great Gene Vincent song John was singing when he first met Paul McCartney. “Do You Want to Dance,” “Just Because,” and others like them conjure up the dance floors they played and the legendary dank

cellar of the Cavern. But Phil Spector's "wall of sound" just overwhelms the music.

Double Fantasy (1980), coming after five years of silence, is, in its way, a perfect album. It begins with the delightful sound of a little Japanese bell, an allusive contrast to the somber toll of the funeral bell that opened his first solo album, *Plastic Ono Band*. *Double Fantasy* is perfectly balanced: the cover has their two names, one on each side, with *Double Fantasy* in the middle; and then there is that marvelous photograph of The Kiss—the perfect image of John and Yoko: the fact that this is quite obviously a posed rather than impassioned kiss only seems to add to its haunting beauty. The two singers, the two artists take turns, and each song is addressed to the other. Occasionally, there is fear ("I'm Losing You") but there is also reassurance ("Yes, I'm Your Angel"). Most of John's songs ("Watchin' the Wheels," "Woman," "Beautiful Boy,") express clearly and exactly what he wants them to. "Watchin' the Wheels" is his *apologia* for his five-year silence and is a wonderful, and witty, song. And several of Yoko's are very interesting. Although the bouncy "I'm Your Angel" is uncomfortably close to "Makin' Whopee," some of her love songs sound sincerely affecting, and her line, from "Beautiful Boys," to John "Your mind has changed the world" seems like a powerful—and powerfully expressed—truth. The second song, "Kiss Kiss Kiss" concludes with the sounds of a Yoko orgasm: obviously she was doing that emotional-provocateur thing herself—and very effectively! "Yes, I'm Your Angel" and especially "Every Man has a Woman Who Loves Him" are really inventive songs, well produced and sung; and they fit between John's songs perfectly.

*Heart Play—unfinished dialogue—
A Spoken Word Documentary* (1983)

On a stunning photograph of John and Yoko, having coffee in a beautiful New York restaurant, there are these explanatory words: "These conversations with John and Yoko took place in the late summer and the fall of 1980." At times in

his last five years, he may have been depressed and stoned and hardly there at all; but the man pictured here in sound is a witty, lively-minded, quick-witted, thoughtful, amusing, and articulate talker. True, there is occasionally a bit of an ego-maniacal, even slightly paranoid, edge; but this John Lennon also had many really thoughtful and provocative things to say.

Obviously arranged by Yoko as a self-portrait of the artists, the themes of John and Yoko emerge with an articulated bite: he was a limited machopigpopstar until Yoko showed him (“she taught me everything I fucking know”). They want to live and work and make art *together*. They are equals. “Together is where it’s at.” Feminism is the future, and he’s happy to be part of it. Falling in love with Yoko was the most intense and meaningful event in his life, eclipsing even the accomplishments of The Beatles: indeed, they are just “the boys” that you leave behind when you find “the woman.” He does not want to be a pop or sex idol (“let them jack off to Mick Jagger”). He wants to be Yoko’s husband and Sean’s father, and he also wants to make good music that they like. The two albums (*Double Fantasy* and the posthumous *Milk and Honey*) they first called Ear Play, because they tell a story, the story of their life and love. He sounds a trifle insecure when he says he has no idea how people will respond (he had, after all, been silent for five years, an eternity in the pop world), but he hopes that listeners will see that the albums were made “with love and a lot of sweat.” The album is arranged so as to end with reflections on pacifists who get shot and a statement of the message: realize your own dreams; life is *not* about finding a guru or leader to follow; and all you need is love.

If the Seaman and Rosen tell-alls are telling any truth, they are describing a man just before he apparently bounced back filled with an energy and conviction that are plainly audible on this “documentary.”

Milk and Honey (1984) is the Part II John and Yoko had planned for release just after *Double Fantasy*. But, as John wrote in that album’s “Beautiful Boy,” “Life is what happens to you while

you're busy making other plans." In the *Heart Play* documentary, John said that they had 20-some songs ready, and they were arranged like a play. So, for example, *Double Fantasy* begins with John's invoking "Our life together." That alternate-song arrangement—nearly each song is addressed to the other—is therefore exactly reproduced in *Milk and Honey*. All but the very last songs are relatively studio-polished. So the "story" continues with John "Stepping Out": The baby's asleep, the cats have all been fed, and even a househusband needs an occasional night out: he'll be back by two . . . or three . . . or (as the song fades out) even four. This song probably accounts for Yoko's "Sleepless Nights" riposte. John's fascinating "I Don't wanna Face It" ("I look in the mirror and don't see anybody there!") is answered by Yoko's "Don't Be Scared," which has a really delightful reggae-like rhythm. (It was called New Wave at the time and was popular in New York dance clubs; it quite strikingly anticipates disco.) The album develops the theme that all things are not always well at The Dakota, that, indeed, life sometimes just sucks. John's "Nobody Told Me" (i.e., that "there'd be days like these") has a real groove and several of Lennon's trademark lines, e.g., "Everybody's smoking, and no one's getting high." Yoko responds with what is possibly her cleverest song, sung not to John to her own "Sanity."

I don't know what to do with my sanity
when the world's at the brink of calamity.

(Is the world always on the brink of calamity?) This witty song is only a minute or so long, and leads therefore nicely into "Borrowed Time"; it too is another genuinely wonderful song with a nice Caribbean feel and sound. Yoko's voice is often effective on these two albums, but she simply can't sustain the pitch to carry the melodic line of "Your Hands." John's fans usually *hate* his *apologias* to Yoko. The title "Forgive Me (My Little Flower Princess)" says it all; to the fans who *hate* this kind of

thing even the jaunty melody and the clever percussion won't help.

Next come two clearly unfinished songs which were the kernels for the "Browning" theme that was to be the connecting thread (and to provide the cover material) for the album. First, Yoko sings "Let Me Count the Ways," a very effective adaptation of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's most famous poem, "How Do I Love Thee?" Yoko adds a repeated "thank you, thank you, thank you" to the original; both the gratitude and the inventive melody together make this a truly lovely song. The very home demo-tape quality of John's "Grow Old Along with Me" makes this the saddest of all the posthumous songs: the best that was yet to be never had a chance to happen. The album ends with a semi-finished song of Yoko's, "You're the One," which, like John's last, could have been a great love song.

(Yoko had made and released two albums between John's death and the appearance of *Milk and Honey*. *Season of Glass* (1981) is quite harrowing as it deals with John's death: from the shots heard on the album to the bloody glasses on the cover. Like its follow-up, *It's Alright* (1983), this is *not* a usual pop album at all; it is much too intensely personal for that.)

Live in New York City (1986) is the final concert John and Yoko gave—the first being the *Live Peace in Toronto*. (John himself would make another appearance, in Madison Square Garden, with Elton John in 1974.) This concert dates from August, 1972, is drawn from material from the first three officially published albums, and it sounds as if it quite convincingly rocked the Garden. Yoko says that the concert was their "grassroots politics" aiming for "Peace and Enlightenment." It certainly has something rare in rock concerts: while it booms along powerfully and infectiously enough, it also has pith and point: "think about it, do something about it," John insists. And any rock concert that includes the intense pain of "Mother" is *not* a conventional rock concert!

Menlove Avenue (1986) was pilloried on its release, and half of it deserves the pillory—to be precise, the first half. The first five songs were recorded for the *Rock 'n' Roll* album but understandably didn't make the final cut. Some, like "Here We Go Again," and "Rock and Roll People," are merely limp. However, John's singing and Phil Spector's arrangements of standards "Angel Baby" and especially "To Know Her Is to Love Her" are blown up to absurd proportions, like sonic equivalents of giant helium balloons. However, the last five are alternate versions of songs from *Walls and Bridges*, and they are invariably much better than the inflated versions finally released on the album. "Steel and Glass," in particular, emerges as a subtle and powerful song, not the snarly and gratuitously bitter thing it later became. The last five songs pave the way for the fascinating *Anthology* that was to come twelve years later.

The John Lennon Anthology (1998) is a *very* handsomely produced box of 4 discs and a detailed book, the whole liberally decorated with photos (John and Yoko as warrior-artists is a particularly great one) and John's distinctive and curiously affecting drawings. Obviously, a set of 4 discs of outtakes, drafts of songs, snatches of conversations (those with Sean are quite charming) is for confirmed fans. But what those fans might learn from this is that what made *Mind Games* and *Walls and Bridges* sound a bit tired is *not* (or at least not so much) a lack of energy or inventiveness in the song writing and gestating but rather to—perhaps—a sort of insecurity that led John to make those albums sound over-produced. Almost invariably, the original versions—before the studio overlays of echo and strings and so forth—are more effective than the released versions. Listen especially to "Bring on the Lucie," "Woman Is the Nigger of the World," (you will notice how ingeniously he stuffs sexist clichés into the song); and "You Are Here" is *much* more beautiful than in the version officially released. This is especially true of the whole *Rock 'n' Roll* album: Phil Spector simply buries John's energetic and often witty vocals with the fa-

mous “wall of sound.” The wall collapses on, and buries, the music.

The *Anthology* is particularly interesting in giving us drafts of songs. Terribly poignant, of course, are those he never lived to finish. “I Don’t Wanna Face It,” for example, has a self-accusatory line—“You want to save humanity, but it’s people you just can’t stand”—that has a real sting (it’s his own self-accusatory version of Julian’s crusher about his father who tells people to love each other but doesn’t love his own son): there is a real list of things he doesn’t want to face—most especially himself. This song was nearly finished and exists in a version that really rocks. It’s the kind of song that makes one wonder how John would have responded to a jacked-up, purely verbal form like rap—that new form that was just about to come into being as John Lennon was shot dead.