

= Imagine ( John Lennon song ) =

" Imagine " is a song written and performed by the English musician John Lennon . The best @-@ selling single of his solo career , its lyrics encourage the listener to imagine a world at peace without the barriers of borders or the divisions of religion and nationality , and to consider the possibility that the focus of humanity should be living a life unattached to material possessions .

Lennon and Yoko Ono co @-@ produced the song and album of the same name with Phil Spector . Recording began at Lennon 's home studio at Tittenhurst Park , England , in May 1971 , with final overdubs taking place at the Record Plant , in New York City , during July . One month after the September release of the LP , Lennon released " Imagine " as a single in the United States ; the song peaked at number three on the Billboard Hot 100 and the LP reached number one on the UK chart in November , later becoming the most commercially successful and critically acclaimed album of Lennon 's solo career . Although not originally released as a single in the United Kingdom , it was released in 1975 to promote a compilation LP and it reached number six in the chart that year . The song has since sold more than 1 @.@ 6 million copies in the UK ; it reached number one following Lennon 's murder in December 1980 . In 1985 , Central Park memorialized a portion of the park with a mosaic that reads " Imagine " in honor of Lennon .

BMI named " Imagine " one of the 100 most @-@ performed songs of the 20th century . The song ranked number 30 on the Recording Industry Association of America 's list of the 365 Songs of the Century bearing the most historical significance . It earned a Grammy Hall of Fame Award and an induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame 's 500 Songs that Shaped Rock and Roll . A UK survey conducted by the Guinness World Records British Hit Singles Book named it the second best single of all time , while Rolling Stone ranked it number three in their list of " The 500 Greatest Songs of All Time " . Since 2005 , event organisers have played it just before the New Year 's Times Square Ball drops in New York City . Dozens of artists have performed or recorded versions of " Imagine " , including Madonna , Stevie Wonder , Joan Baez , Elton John and Diana Ross . Emeli Sandé recorded a cover for the BBC to use during the end credits montage at the close of the 2012 Summer Olympics coverage in August 2012 . " Imagine " subsequently re @-@ entered the UK Top 40 , reaching number 18 .

= = Composition and writing = =

Several poems from Yoko Ono 's 1964 book Grapefruit inspired Lennon to write the lyrics for " Imagine " ? in particular , one which Capitol Records reproduced on the back cover of the original Imagine LP titled " Cloud Piece " , reads : " Imagine the clouds dripping , dig a hole in your garden to put them in . " Lennon later said the composition " should be credited as a Lennon / Ono song . A lot of it ? the lyric and the concept ? came from Yoko , but in those days I was a bit more selfish , a bit more macho , and I sort of omitted her contribution , but it was right out of Grapefruit . " When asked about the song 's meaning during a December 1980 interview with David Sheff for Playboy magazine , Lennon told Sheff that Dick Gregory had given Ono and him a Christian prayer book , which inspired him the concept behind " Imagine " .

The concept of positive prayer ... If you can imagine a world at peace , with no denominations of religion ? not without religion but without this my God @-@ is @-@ bigger @-@ than @-@ your @-@ God thing ? then it can be true ... the World Church called me once and asked , " Can we use the lyrics to ' Imagine ' and just change it to ' Imagine one religion ' ? " That showed [ me ] they didn 't understand it at all . It would defeat the whole purpose of the song , the whole idea .

With the combined influence of " Cloud Piece " and the prayer book given to him by Gregory , Lennon wrote what author John Blaney described as " a humanistic paean for the people " . Blaney wrote , " Lennon contends that global harmony is within our reach , but only if we reject the mechanisms of social control that restrict human potential . " In the opinion of Blaney , with " Imagine " , Lennon attempted to raise people 's awareness of their interaction with the institutions that affect their lives . Rolling Stone 's David Fricke commented : " [ Lennon ] calls for a unity and equality built upon the complete elimination of modern social order : geopolitical borders , organised

religion , [ and ] economic class . "

Lennon stated : " ' Imagine ' , which says : ' Imagine that there was no more religion , no more country , no more politics , ' is virtually the Communist manifesto , even though I 'm not particularly a Communist and I do not belong to any movement . " He told NME : " There is no real Communist state in the world ; you must realize that . The Socialism I speak about ... [ is ] not the way some daft Russian might do it , or the Chinese might do it . That might suit them . Us , we should have a nice ... British Socialism . " Ono described the lyrical statement of " Imagine " as " just what John believed : that we are all one country , one world , one people . " Rolling Stone described its lyrics as " 22 lines of graceful , plain @-@ spoken faith in the power of a world , united in purpose , to repair and change itself " .

Lennon composed " Imagine " one morning in early 1971 , on a Steinway piano , in a bedroom at his Tittenhurst Park estate in Ascot , Berkshire , England . Ono watched as he composed the melody , chord structure and almost all the lyrics , nearly completing the song in one brief writing session . Described as a piano ballad performed in the soft rock genre , the song is in the key of C major . Its 4 @-@ bar piano introduction begins with a C chord then moves to Cmaj7 before changing to F ; the 12 @-@ bar verses also follow this chord progression , with their last 4 bars moving from Am / E to Dm and Dm / C , finishing with G , G11 then G7 , before resolving back to C . The 8 @-@ bar choruses progress from F to G to C , then Cmaj7 and E before ending on E7 , a C chord substituted for E7 in the final bar . The 4 @-@ bar outro begins with F , then G , before resolving on C . With a duration of 3 minutes and 3 seconds and a time signature of 4 / 4 , the song 's tempo falls around 75 beats per minute .

= = Recording and commercial reception = =

Lennon and Ono co @-@ produced the song and album with Phil Spector , who commented on the track : " We knew what we were going to do ... It was going to be John making a political statement , but a very commercial one as well ... I always thought that ' Imagine ' was like the national anthem . " Lennon described his working arrangement with Ono and Spector : " Phil doesn 't arrange or anything like that ? [ Ono ] and Phil will just sit in the other room and shout comments like , ' Why don 't you try this sound ' or ' You 're not playing the piano too well ' ... I 'll get the initial idea and ... we 'll just find a sound from [ there ] . "

Recording began at Ascot Sound Studios , Lennon 's newly built home studio at Tittenhurst Park , in May 1971 , with final overdubs taking place at the Record Plant , in New York City , during July . Relaxed and patient , the sessions began during the late morning , running to just before dinner in the early evening . Lennon taught the musicians the chord progression and a working arrangement for " Imagine " , rehearsing the song until he deemed the musicians ready to record . In his attempt to recreate Lennon 's desired sound , Spector had some early tapings feature Lennon and Nicky Hopkins playing in different octaves on one piano . He also initially attempted to record the piano part with Lennon playing the white baby grand in the couple 's all @-@ white room . However , after having deemed the room 's acoustics unsuitable , Spector abandoned the idea in favour of the superior environment of Lennon 's home studio . They completed the session in minutes , recording three takes and choosing the second one for release . The finished recording featured Lennon on piano and vocal , Klaus Voormann on bass guitar , Alan White on drums and the Flux Fiddlers on strings .

Issued by Apple Records in the United States in October 1971 , " Imagine " became the best @-@ selling single of Lennon 's solo career . It peaked at number three on the Billboard Hot 100 and reached number one in Canada on the RPM national singles chart , remaining there for two weeks . Upon its release the song 's lyrics upset some religious groups , particularly the line : " Imagine there 's no heaven " . When asked about the song during one of his final interviews , Lennon said he considered it to be as strong a composition as any he had written with the Beatles . He described the song 's meaning and explicated its commercial appeal : " Anti @-@ religious , anti @-@ nationalistic , anti @-@ conventional , anti @-@ capitalistic , but because it is sugarcoated it is accepted ... Now I understand what you have to do . Put your political message across with a little

honey . " In an open letter to Paul McCartney published in Melody Maker , Lennon said that " Imagine " was " ' Working Class Hero ' with sugar on it for conservatives like yourself " . On 30 November 1971 , the Imagine LP reached number one on the UK chart . It became the most commercially successful and critically acclaimed album of Lennon 's solo career .

= = Film and re @-@ releases = =

In 1972 , Lennon and Ono released an 81 @-@ minute film to accompany the Imagine album which featured footage of the couple in their home , garden and the recording studio of their Berkshire property at Tittenhurst Park as well as in New York City . A full @-@ length documentary rock video , the film 's first scene features a shot of Lennon and Ono walking through a thick fog , arriving at their house as the song " Imagine " begins . Above the front door to their house is a sign that reads : " This Is Not Here " , the title of Ono 's then New York art show . The next scene shows Lennon sitting at a white grand piano in a dimly lit , all @-@ white room . Ono gradually walks around opening curtains that allow in light , making the room brighter with the song 's progression . At the song 's conclusion , Ono sits beside Lennon at the piano , and they share a quaint gaze , then a brief kiss .

Several celebrities appeared in the film , including Andy Warhol , Fred Astaire , Jack Palance , Dick Cavett and George Harrison . Derided by critics as " the most expensive home movie of all time " , it premiered to an American audience in 1972 . In 1986 , Zbigniew Rybczy?ski made a music video for the song , and in 1987 , it won both the " Silver Lion " award for Best Clip at Cannes and the Festival Award at the Rio International Film Festival .

Released as a single in the United Kingdom in 1975 in conjunction with the album Shaved Fish , " Imagine " peaked at number six on the UK Singles Chart . Following Lennon 's murder in 1980 , the single re @-@ entered the UK chart , reaching number one , where it remained for four weeks in January 1981 . " Imagine " was re @-@ released as a single in the UK in 1988 , peaking at number 45 , and again in 1999 , reaching number three . It has sold 1 @,@ 640 @,@ 000 copies in the UK as of June 2013 , making it Lennon 's best @-@ selling single . In 1999 , on National Poetry Day in the United Kingdom , the BBC announced that listeners had voted " Imagine " Britain 's favourite song lyric . In 2003 , it reached number 33 as the B @-@ side to a re @-@ release of " Happy Xmas ( War Is Over ) " .

= = Recognition and criticism = =

Rolling Stone described " Imagine " as Lennon 's " greatest musical gift to the world " , praising " the serene melody ; the pillowy chord progression ; [ and ] that beckoning , four @-@ note [ piano ] figure " . Included in several song polls , in 1999 , BMI named it one of the top 100 most @-@ performed songs of the 20th century . Also that year , it received the Grammy Hall of Fame Award and an induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame 's 500 Songs that Shaped Rock and Roll . " Imagine " ranked number 23 in the list of best @-@ selling singles of all time in the UK , in 2000 . In 2002 , a UK survey conducted by the Guinness World Records British Hit Singles Book ranked it the second best single of all time behind Queen 's " Bohemian Rhapsody " . Gold Radio ranked the song number three on its " Gold 's greatest 1000 hits " list .

Rolling Stone ranked " Imagine " number three on its list of " The 500 Greatest Songs of All Time " , describing it as " an enduring hymn of solace and promise that has carried us through extreme grief , from the shock of Lennon 's own death in 1980 to the unspeakable horror of September 11th . It is now impossible to imagine a world without ' Imagine ' , and we need it more than he ever dreamed . " Despite that sentiment , Clear Channel Communications included the song on its post @-@ 9 / 11 " do not play " list .

On 1 January 2005 , the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation named " Imagine " the greatest song in the past 100 years as voted by listeners on the show 50 Tracks . The song ranked number 30 on the Recording Industry Association of America 's list of the 365 Songs of the Century bearing the most historical significance . Virgin Radio conducted a UK favourite song survey in December 2005 ,

and listeners voted " Imagine " number one . Australians selected it the greatest song of all time on the Nine Network 's 20 to 1 countdown show on 12 September 2006 . They voted it eleventh in the youth radio network Triple J 's Hottest 100 Of All Time on 11 July 2009 .

Jimmy Carter said , " in many countries around the world ? my wife and I have visited about 125 countries ? you hear John Lennon 's song ' Imagine ' used almost equally with national anthems . " On 9 October 2010 , which would have been Lennon 's 70th birthday , the Liverpool Signing Choir performed " Imagine " along with other Lennon songs at the unveiling of the John Lennon Peace Monument in Chavasse Park , Liverpool , England . Beatles producer George Martin praised Lennon 's solo work , singling out the composition : " My favourite song of all was ' Imagine ' " . Music critic Paul Du Noyer described " Imagine " as Lennon 's " most revered " post @-@ Beatles song . Urish and Bielen called it " the most subversive pop song recorded to achieve classic status " . Fricke commented : " ' Imagine ' is a subtly contentious song , Lennon 's greatest combined achievement as a balladeer and agitator . "

Authors Ben Urish and Ken Bielen criticised the song 's instrumental music as overly sentimental and melodramatic , comparing it to the music of the pre @-@ rock era and describing the vocal melody as understated . According to Blaney , Lennon 's lyrics describe hypothetical possibilities that offer no practical solutions ; lyrics that are at times nebulous and contradictory , asking the listener to abandon political systems while encouraging one similar to communism . Author Chris Ingham indicated the hypocrisy in Lennon , the millionaire rock star living in a mansion , encouraging listeners to imagine living their lives without possessions . Others argue that Lennon intended the song 's lyrics to inspire listeners to imagine if the world could live without possessions , not as an explicit call to give them up . Blaney commented : " Lennon knew he had nothing concrete to offer , so instead he offers a dream , a concept to be built upon . "

Blaney considered the song to be " riddled with contradictions . Its hymn @-@ like setting sits uncomfortably alongside its author 's plea for us to envision a world without religion . " Urish and Bielen described Lennon 's " dream world " without a heaven or hell as a call to " make the best world we can here and now , since this is all this is or will be " . In their opinion , " because we are asked merely to imagine ? to play a ' what if ' game , Lennon can escape the harshest criticisms " . Former Beatle Ringo Starr defended the song 's lyrics during a 1981 interview with Barbara Walters , stating : " [ Lennon ] said ' imagine ' , that 's all . Just imagine it . "

The morning after the November 2015 Paris attacks , German pianist Davide Martello brought a grand piano to the street out in front of the Bataclan , where 89 concertgoers had been shot dead the night before , and performed an instrumental version to honour the victims of the attacks ; video of his performance went viral . This led Katy Waldman of Slate to ponder why " Imagine " had become so frequently performed as a response to tragedy . In addition to its general popularity , she noted its musical simplicity , its key of C major , " the plainest and least complicated key , with no sharps or flats " aside from one passage with " a plaintive major seventh chord that allows a tiny bit of E minor into the tonic " . That piano part , " gentle as a rocking chair " , underpins lyrics that , Waldman says , " belongs to the tradition of hymns or spirituals that visualize a glorious afterlife without prophesizing any immediate end to suffering on earth " . This understanding is also compounded by the historical context of Lennon 's own violent death , " remind [ ing ] us that the universe can run ramshod over idealistic people " . Ultimately , the song " captures the fragility of our hope after a violent or destructive event ... [ bu ] t also reveals its tenacity " .

= = Notable performances and cover versions = =

In December 1971 , Lennon and Ono appeared at the Apollo Theater in Harlem . Lennon performed " Imagine " with an acoustic guitar , yielding the earliest known live recording of the song , later included on the John Lennon Anthology ( 1998 ) . In 1975 , he sang " Imagine " during his final public performance , a birthday celebration for Lew Grade .

Elton John performed the song regularly on his world tour in 1980 , including at his free concert in Central Park , a few blocks away from Lennon 's apartment in the Dakota building . On 9 December 1980 , the day after Lennon 's murder , Queen performed " Imagine " as a tribute to him during their

Wembley Arena show in London . On 9 October 1990 , more than one billion people listened to a broadcast of the song on what would have been Lennon 's 50th birthday . Rataou Mike Makhalemele covered the song on an EP of Lennon covers in 1990 . In 1991 ? 92 , Liza Minnelli performed the song in her show at Radio City Music Hall . Stevie Wonder gave his rendition of the song , with the Morehouse College Glee Club , during the closing ceremony of the 1996 Summer Olympics as a tribute to the victims of the Centennial Olympic Park bombing . In 2001 , Neil Young performed it during the benefit concert America : A Tribute to Heroes . Madonna performed " Imagine " during the benefit Tsunami Aid : A Concert of Hope . Peter Gabriel performed the song during the 2006 Winter Olympics opening ceremony .

Since 2005 , " Imagine " has been played prior to the New Year 's Eve ball drop at New York City 's Times Square . Beginning in 2010 , the song has been performed live ; first by Taio Cruz , then in 2011 by CeeLo Green and in 2012 by Train . However , Green received criticism for changing the lyric " and no religion too " to " and all religions true " , resulting in an immediate backlash from fans who believed that he had disrespected Lennon 's legacy by changing the lyrics of his most iconic song . Green defended the change by saying it meant to represent " a world [ where you ] could believe what [ you ] wanted " . The event got media attention outside of the US , with Britain 's The Guardian stating " Lennon 's original lyrics don 't praise pluralism or interchangeable religious truths ? they damn them " .

More than 200 artists have recorded cover versions of " Imagine " . Joan Baez included it on 1972 's Come from the Shadows and Diana Ross recorded a version for her 1973 album , Touch Me in the Morning . In 1995 , Blues Traveler recorded the song for the Working Class Hero : A Tribute to John Lennon album and Dave Matthews has performed the song live with them . A Perfect Circle covered the song for the album eMOTIVE , released in 2004 . Dolly Parton recorded the song for her 2005 covers album Those Were the Days . A cover version of the song , performed by Italian singer Marco Carta , entered the top 20 in Italy in 2009 , peaking at number 13 . Seal , Pink , India.Arie , Jeff Beck , Konono N°1 , Oumou Sangaré and others recorded a version for Herbie Hancock 's 2010 album The Imagine Project .

Hancock performed it with Arie , Kristina Train and Greg Phillinganes at the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize Concert on 11 December . On 13 February 2011 , the recording ? with Pink , Seal , Malian singer Oumou Sangaré , India.Arie and Jeff Beck won a Grammy award for Best Pop Vocal Collaboration .

The song was performed as part of the closing ceremony of the 2012 Summer Olympics . Performed by the Liverpool Philharmonic Youth Choir and the Liverpool Signing Choir , the choirs sang the first verse and accompanied Lennon 's original vocals during the rest of the song . A cover performed by Emeli Sandé was also used by the BBC for a closing montage that ended its coverage . " Imagine " subsequently re @-@ entered the UK Top 40 , reaching number 18 .

In 2015 , American singer / songwriter Lady Gaga performed the song at the 2015 European Games opening ceremony . The song was played for 70 @,@ 000 people in Baku , Azerbaijan that served as host of the event .

= = Personnel = =

John Lennon ? vocals , piano  
Klaus Voormann ? bass  
Alan White ? drums  
The Flux Fiddlers ? strings

= = Charts and certifications = =

= = = Documentaries = = =