

= Instant Karma ! =

" Instant Karma ! " ? sometimes referred to as " Instant Karma ! ( We All Shine On ) " ? is a song written by English musician John Lennon , released as a single on Apple Records in February 1970 . In the UK , the single was credited to " Lennon / Ono with the Plastic Ono Band " . The song reached the top five in the British and American singles charts , competing with the Beatles ' " Let It Be " in America , where it became the first solo single by a member of the band to sell a million copies .

" Instant Karma ! " was written , recorded and released within a period of ten days , making it one of the fastest @-@ released songs in pop music history . The recording was produced by Phil Spector , marking a comeback for the American producer after his self @-@ imposed retirement in 1966 , and leading to him being offered the producer 's role on the Beatles ' Let It Be album ( 1970 ) . Recorded at London 's Abbey Road Studios , " Instant Karma ! " employs Spector 's signature Wall of Sound technique and features contributions from George Harrison , Klaus Voormann , Alan White and Billy Preston . The B @-@ side was a song composed and performed by Yoko Ono , titled " Who Has Seen the Wind ? " Recently shorn of the long hair synonymous with their 1969 campaign for world peace , Lennon and Ono promoted the single with an appearance on Britain 's Top of the Pops .

" Instant Karma ! " has appeared on many Lennon compilations , including Shaved Fish ( 1975 ) , Lennon Legend ( 1997 ) and Power to the People : The Hits ( 2010 ) . A version recorded at the " One to One " concerts in August 1972 was included on his posthumously released Live in New York City album ( 1986 ) . The song continues to receive critical praise as one of the finest recordings from Lennon 's solo career . Paul Weller , Duran Duran and U2 are among the acts who have covered " Instant Karma ! " , the chorus of which inspired the title to Stephen King 's 1977 novel The Shining .

= = Background = =

Together with his wife , Yoko Ono , John Lennon spent New Year 1970 in Aalborg , Denmark , establishing a relationship with Ono 's former husband , artist Tony Cox , and visiting Cox and Ono 's daughter Kyoko . The visit coincided with the start of what Lennon termed " Year 1 AP ( After Peace ) " , following his and Ono 's much @-@ publicised Bed @-@ Ins and other peace @-@ campaign activities throughout 1969 .

To mark the new era , on 20 January 1970 , the couple shaved off their shoulder @-@ length hair , an act that Britain 's Daily Mirror described as " the most sensational scalpings since the Red Indians went out of business " . Lennon and Ono pledged to auction the shorn hair for a charitable cause , having similarly announced on 5 January that they would donate all future royalties from their recordings to the peace movement . Also while in Denmark , the Lennons , Cox and the latter 's current partner , Melinde Kendall , discussed the concept of " instant karma " , whereby the causality of one 's actions is immediate rather than borne out over a lifetime . Author Philip Norman writes of the concept 's appeal : " The idea was quintessential Lennon ? the age @-@ old Buddhist law of cause and effect turned into something as modern and synthetic as instant coffee and , simultaneously , into a bogey under the stairs that can get you if you don 't watch out . "

= = Composition = =

On 27 January 1970 , two days after returning to the UK , Lennon woke up with the beginnings of a song inspired by his conversations with Cox and Kendall . Working at home on a piano , Lennon developed the idea and came up with a melody for the composition , which he titled " Instant Karma ! " .

The song employs a similar chord structure to that of " Three Blind Mice " and " Some Other Guy " , after Lennon had used the same progression in his 1967 composition for the Beatles , " All You Need Is Love " . Later in 1970 , he would adopt the melody of " Three Blind Mice " , an English

nursery rhyme , for his song " My Mummy 's Dead " .

In their book *The Words and Music of John Lennon* , Ben Urish and Kenneth Bielen suggest that in the first verse of " Instant Karma ! " , Lennon rebukes his listeners with the sarcastic lines : " Get yourself together / Pretty soon you 're gonna be dead . " Norman comments on the " hippie catchphrase of the moment " contained in the first of these two lines , which together provide a warning that is " obviously not to be taken literally " . Author Mark Hertsgaard notes the lyric " Why in the world are we here ? " as a further example of Lennon " asking what purpose his life on earth was to serve " , after his 1966 composition " Strawberry Fields Forever " .

As with " Give Peace a Chance " and " Power to the People " ? Lennon singles from 1969 and 1971 respectively ? the chorus has an anthem @-@ like quality , as he sings : " We all shine on , like the moon and the stars and the sun . " Norman describes the chorus as Lennon restating his message of " peace campaigning and non @-@ violent , optimistic togetherness " . Lennon biographer John Blaney writes that the song is an appeal " for mankind to take responsibility for its fate " and that it was " Lennon developing his own brand of egalitarianism " .

Lennon completed the writing of " Instant Karma ! " in an hour . He then telephoned bandmate George Harrison and American producer Phil Spector , who was in London at the invitation of the Beatles ' Apple Corps manager , Allen Klein . According to Lennon 's recollection , he told Spector : " Come over to Apple quick , I 've just written a monster . "

= = Recording = =

Although still officially a member of the Beatles , Lennon had privately announced his departure from the group in September 1969 . He was now keen to issue " Instant Karma ! " immediately as a single , the third under his and Ono 's Plastic Ono Band moniker . The recording session took place at Abbey Road Studios in north @-@ west London , on the evening of 27 January . Lennon 's fellow musicians at the session were Harrison , Klaus Voormann , Alan White and Billy Preston ? all of whom had performed at the December 1969 Peace for Christmas Concert , as part of the Plastic Ono Supergroup . The recording engineer for " Instant Karma ! " was EMI mainstay Phil McDonald . Spector produced the session , arriving late after Harrison had found him at Apple 's office and persuaded him to attend .

According to author Bruce Spizer , the line @-@ up for the basic track , before overdubs , was Lennon ( vocals , acoustic guitar ) , Harrison ( electric guitar ) , Preston ( organ ) , Voormann ( bass ) and White ( drums ) . Lennon later recalled of the recording : " Phil ( Spector ) came in and said , ' How do you want it ? ' And I said , ' 1950s ' and he said ' Right ' and BOOM ! ... he played it back and there it was . " The song uses a similar amount of echo to 1950s Sun Records recordings .

The musicians recorded ten takes , the last of which was selected for overdubbing . To create what Spector biographer Mark Ribowsky terms a " four @-@ man Wall of Sound " production , Lennon added grand piano onto the basic track , while Harrison and White shared another piano and Voormann played electric piano . In addition , Beatles aide Mal Evans overdubbed chimes ( or tubular bells ) and White added a second , muffled drum part . With Lennon feeling that the chorus was missing something , Preston and Evans were sent to bring in a group of people from a nightclub to provide backing vocals . These newcomers and all the musicians , along with Allen Klein , then added chorus vocals , with Harrison directing the singing .

Although Lennon and Spector disagreed over the bass sound , Lennon was " ecstatic " about the producer 's work on " Instant Karma " , author Peter Doggett writes . White 's drums assumed the role of a lead instrument , positioned prominently in the mix , of which Spector biographer Richard Williams would write in 1972 : " No Beatles record had ever possessed such a unique sound ; Spector had used echo to make the drums reverberate like someone slapping a wet fish on a marble slab , and the voices sounded hollow and decayed . " Spector wanted to add a string section to the track in Los Angeles , but Lennon insisted that the recording was complete .

Having only recently returned to producing , after the commercial failure of Ike & Tina Turner 's 1966 single " River Deep ? Mountain High " in America , Spector had " passed the audition " , according to Beatles Forever author Nicholas Schaffner . " Instant Karma ! " was the first of many

Beatles @-@ related recordings that Spector worked on during the early 1970s , starting with the band 's final album release , Let It Be ( 1970 ) .

= = = " Who Has Seen the Wind ? " = = =

As with the Plastic Ono Band 's previous singles , " Give Peace a Chance " and " Cold Turkey " , Lennon and Ono recorded an Ono composition as a B @-@ side . Produced by Lennon , " Who Has Seen the Wind ? " was recorded at Trident Studios in central London , also in late January 1970 . The opening verse , sung a cappella by Ono , is from a work by nineteenth @-@ century English poet Christina Rossetti . The instrumentation on the recording includes Lennon playing acoustic guitar ; John Barham , Harrison 's regular collaborator and arranger , on harpsichord ; Ono on flute ; and various percussion instruments . Spizer suggests that Harrison may also have participated , on acoustic guitar .

= = Release = =

" Instant Karma ! " ranks as one of the fastest @-@ released songs in pop music history , arriving in UK record stores just ten days after it was written . Lennon remarked to the press that he " wrote it for breakfast , recorded it for lunch , and we 're putting it out for dinner " . Apple Records issued the single on 6 February 1970 in Britain ? credited to the Plastic Ono Band ? and on 20 February in America , where the A @-@ side was retitled " Instant Karma ! ( We All Shine On ) " and credited to John Ono Lennon . Spector remixed " Instant Karma ! " for the US release without Lennon 's knowledge .

As with " Cold Turkey " , the single 's standard Apple Records A @-@ side face label carried the words " PLAY LOUD " , in both the UK and America . Reflecting the tender sound of " Who Has Seen the Wind ? " , the B @-@ side label read " PLAY QUIET " ( or " PLAY SOFT " in the US ) . The front of the US picture sleeve featured a black @-@ and @-@ white photo of Lennon along with a prominent producer 's credit for Spector , while the reverse had a similar picture of Ono .

= = = Promotion = = =

Following a year of highly publicised peace campaigning by the Lennons in 1969 , Apple press officer Derek Taylor was concerned that they had exhausted the media 's interest in their causes . On 4 February 1970 , Lennon and Ono donated a large plastic bag full of their hair , along with Apple 's poster for the new single , to north London @-@ based black power activist Michael X , in return for a pair of Muhammad Ali 's bloodstained boxing shorts . The " final proof " of the Lennons ' " overexpose [ ure ] " , according to Taylor , was that there was a large press turnout for the event yet " nobody printed anything " .

On 11 February , Lennon and Ono filmed an appearance on BBC Television 's Top of the Pops to promote " Instant Karma ! " , accompanied by White , Voormann , Evans and BP Fallon . While the other musicians mimed their contributions , Lennon sang a live vocal over a mix of the song 's instrumental track , prepared by EMI engineer Geoff Emerick . This was the first appearance on the program by any member of the Beatles since 1966 , as well as the public unveiling of the Lennons ' new cropped look . Two versions of " Instant Karma ! " ? known as " knitting " and " cue card " ? were taped for Top of the Pops , and aired on 12 and 19 February , respectively .

The clips differ from one another in terms of Lennon 's attire and the nature of Ono 's role as , in author Robert Rodriguez 's description , " an onstage focal point around which all activity was staged " ; in addition , Lennon 's vocal was treated with echo for the 19 February broadcast . In the " knitting " clip , Lennon is wearing a black polo @-@ neck jumper as Ono sits beside his piano , blindfolded , and knitting throughout . In " cue card " , Lennon wears a flower @-@ pattern shirt under a denim jacket , while Ono holds up a series of cryptically worded cue cards , the messages on which include " Smile " , " Hope " and " Peace " , as she speaks into a microphone . Although Ono appears to have a more active role , she is again blindfolded and the words she speaks cannot

be heard . Rodriguez describes both clips as " terrifically engaging , providing suitably dynamic visuals to a powerful song " , yet he considers that the " cue card " performance " captures much more of the ambience , with frequent shots of White 's stellar work and the studio dancers " .

= = = Commercial success and aftermath = = =

" Instant Karma ! " was commercially successful , peaking at number 3 on America 's Billboard Hot 100 chart , number 2 in Canada , and number 5 on the UK Singles Chart . The single also reached the top ten in several other European countries and in Australia . The release took place two months before Paul McCartney announced the break @-@ up of the Beatles , whose penultimate single , the George Martin @-@ produced " Let It Be " , Lennon 's record competed with on the US charts . " Instant Karma ! " went on to become the first single by a solo Beatle to achieve US sales of 1 million , earning gold certification by the Recording Industry Association of America on 14 December 1970 . Until Lennon 's death in December 1980 , " Instant Karma ! " remained his sole RIAA @-@ certified gold single .

Despite the stated intentions for Lennon and Ono 's Year 1 AP , the proceeds from the auctioning of their hair benefited Michael X 's Black House commune rather than the peace movement , and , in the words of Beatles Diary author Barry Miles , the pledge to donate their royalties was also " discreetly forgotten " . In March 1970 , Lennon publicly split with the organisers of the planned Toronto Peace Festival , as he and Ono began treatment under Arthur Janov 's Primal Therapy . Before heading to California in April for intensive therapy through the summer , Lennon accused McCartney of using the Beatles ' break @-@ up to sell his album McCartney , and admitted that he wished that he himself had announced the break @-@ up months before to promote his own solo release .

= = Critical reception = =

On release , Chris Welch of Melody Maker declared : " Instant hit ! John Lennon is singing better than ever . With a beautiful rock ' n ' roll echo chamber on his mean but meaningful vocals and some superb drumming , it makes up the Plastics ' best piece of boogie yet . " Writing in the NME in 1975 , Charles Shaar Murray wrote of the song 's " volcanically desperate optimism " and rated it " a classic " . Shaar Murray added , with reference to " Cold Turkey " also : " I can 't remember anybody else who put out two such utter killers in a row over the same period of time . "

Village Voice critic Robert Christgau has described " Instant Karma ! " as Lennon 's " best political song " , while other reviewers consider it his finest post @-@ Beatles recording . In their 1975 book The Beatles : An Illustrated Record , Roy Carr and Tony Tyler describe " Instant Karma ! " as a " snappy little rocker " that " owes as much to the skilful production of Phil Spector as to the vitality of the overall performance " , on which " [ d ] rummer Alan White excels . " Carr and Tyler remark that " Who Has Seen the Wind ? " " would have made a marvellous soundtrack for the movie of Henry James ' ' The Turn of the Screw ' , being a somewhat sinister ditty sung à la Wunderkind " . Bruce Spizer describes Ono 's song as " evok [ ing ] images of minstrels at a Renaissance fair " and considers the single " a far cry ? and welcome relief from the avant @-@ garde discs issued by John and Yoko in 1969 " .

Another to highlight White 's drumming amid the " collective genius " of all the participants on " Instant Karma ! " , author Robert Rodriguez concludes of Lennon 's activities on 27 January 1970 : " Not many days in the history of rock and roll proved as everlastingly fruitful . " In 1981 , NME critic Bob Woffinden wrote of the single : " It was excellent . Lennon was characteristically simple and direct , but this time on a song with one of those magically catchy refrains . "

Among Lennon 's biographers , Ben Urish and Kenneth Bielen view " Instant Karma ! " as " a chiding though positive message for humanity " , while Jon Wiener praises Lennon 's " rich , deep voice " on a recording where the sound is " irresistible " . Philip Norman describes the song as " similar to ' Cold Turkey ' in tempo but far more relaxed and humorous " , adding that Spector 's production gave Lennon 's voice " a taut expressiveness it had not had since ' Norwegian Wood ' " .

While noting the significance of the session for George Harrison 's career , author Simon Leng praises the recording as being " full of urgency and sheer excitement " .

In 1989 , Rolling Stone magazine ranked " Instant Karma ! " the 79th best single of the previous 25 years . In NME Originals : Beatles ? The Solo Years 1970 ? 1980 , David Stubbs lists the song second among Lennon 's " ten solo gems " ( behind " Cold Turkey " ) , with the comment : " ' Instant Karma ! ' epitomises the Lennon paradox , melding hippie idealism and rock 'n'roll primal energy in an exhilarating mix . " Matt Melis of Consequence of Sound placed it third on his 2009 list of " Top Ten Songs by Ex @-@ Beatles " . According to the website Acclaimed Music , " Instant Karma ! " has also appeared in the following critics ' best @-@ songs lists and books , among others : Dave Marsh 's The 1001 Greatest Singles Ever Made ( 1989 ; at number 638 ) , 1000 Songs that Rock Your World by Dave Thompson ( 2011 ; number 56 ) , the NME 's " The 100 Best Songs of the 1970s " ( 2012 ; number 77 ) , and Q magazine 's " The 1001 Best Songs Ever " ( 2003 ; number 193 ) . The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame includes the track among its " 500 Songs That Shaped Rock and Roll " .

= = Re @-@ releases and live version = =

" Instant Karma ! " ' s first appearance on a Lennon album , albeit slightly edited in length , was the 1975 compilation Shaved Fish . Urish and Bielen observe that the " advertising hyperbole " inherent in the song 's title , through the inclusion of an exclamation mark , is given extra emphasis on this album cover . The song has featured ? often with the full title " Instant Karma ! ( We All Shine On ) " ? on numerous posthumous compilations , including The John Lennon Collection ( 1982 ) , the Lennon box set ( 1990 ) , Lennon Legend ( 1997 ) , Working Class Hero : The Definitive Lennon ( 2005 ) and Power to the People : The Hits ( 2010 ) . " Who Has Seen the Wind ? " appeared as a bonus track on the 1997 Rykodisc reissue of the couple 's third album of experimental music , Wedding Album ( 1969 ) .

Lennon played " Instant Karma ! " at his last full @-@ length concert performance ? the One to One benefit shows held at Madison Square Garden , New York , on 30 August 1972 . His backing band comprised the group Elephant 's Memory , in addition to Ono and drummer Jim Keltner . The 1986 album and video Live in New York City contains the afternoon performance of the song .

In July 1992 , " Instant Karma ! " was re @-@ released as a single in the Netherlands , backed by " Oh My Love " . Originally , copies of it were given away with early editions of The John Lennon Video Collection . When released in the rest of Europe ( barring the UK ) , this single reissue gained two extra B @-@ sides : " Mother " and " Bless You " .

Of the two 1970 Top of the Pops performances , the " cue card " version appeared on The John Lennon Video Collection in October 1992 , while the " knitting " performance was remixed and extended for release on the Lennon Legend DVD ( 2003 ) . The " knitting " version was also included on the 2003 UK single " Happy Xmas ( War Is Over ) " , released on 8 December that year .

= = Cover versions and cultural references = =

Artists who have covered " Instant Karma ! " include Toad the Wet Sprocket , Paul Weller , Duran Duran , Tater Totz with Cherie Currie and Tokio Hotel . In 2007 , the song provided the title for Amnesty International 's multi @-@ artist compilation of Lennon compositions , Instant Karma : The Amnesty International Campaign to Save Darfur , for which U2 recorded a cover version .

The title of Stephen King 's horror novel The Shining ( 1977 ) came from Lennon 's line " We all shine on ? " King has said that he was going to call the book The Shine , before realising that " shine " had been used as a derogatory term for black people .

In 1988 , Ono allowed the footwear and apparel company Nike to feature " Instant Karma ! " in an advertising campaign , after a public outcry the previous year had forced her to withdraw permission for the use of Lennon 's Beatles composition " Revolution " . Instant Karma Records was named after the song , and the Flaming Lips recorded their track " I Don 't Understand Karma " in 2009 as a

reply to " Instant Karma ! "

= = Personnel = =

The following musicians contributed to the recording of " Instant Karma ! " :

John Lennon ? lead vocals , acoustic guitar , piano , backing vocals

George Harrison ? electric guitar , piano , backing vocals

Klaus Voormann ? bass guitar , electric piano , backing vocals

Alan White ? drums , piano , backing vocals

Billy Preston ? organ , backing vocals

Yoko Ono ? backing vocals

Mal Evans ? chimes , handclaps , backing vocals

uncredited ? tambourine

Allen Klein and several dozen revellers from London 's Hatchett Club ? backing vocals

= = Charts and certifications = =