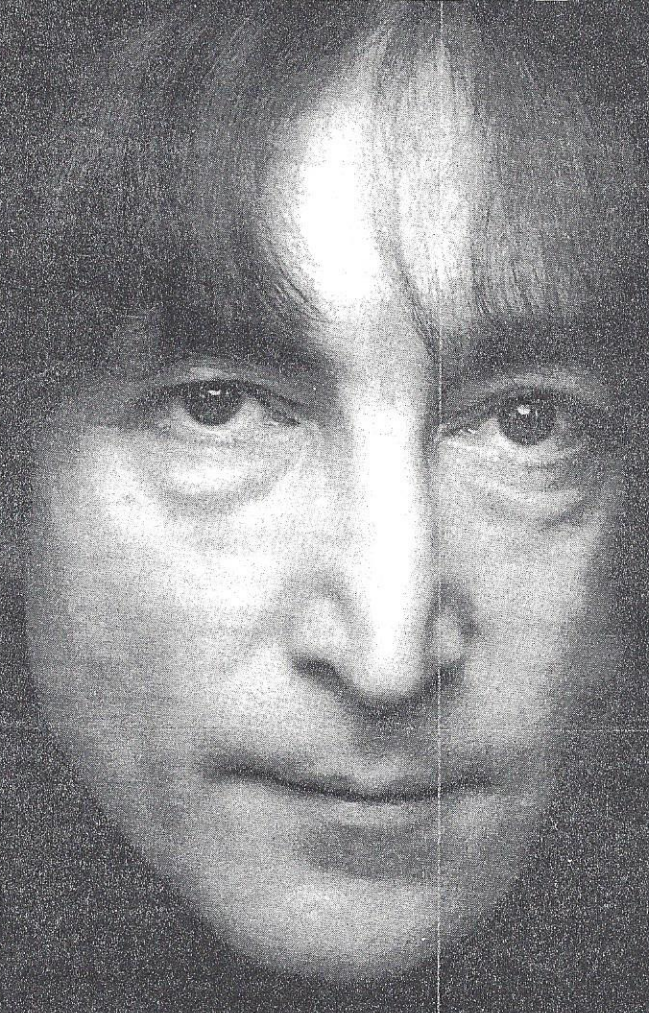


25 YEARS LATER

World keeps spinning, but it's poorer for

JOHN LENNON'S DEATH

By Daniel Durchholz
SPECIAL TO THE POST-DISPATCH

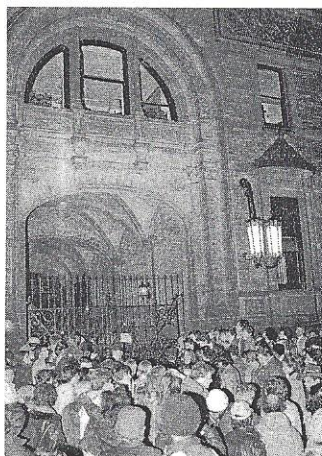
How strange it is to mark the anniversary of an assassination.

Those of us who are old enough still pause on Nov. 22 and think of where we were when we heard that President John F. Kennedy had been shot. In the case of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., it's the day of his birth that we celebrate, still keeping in mind his untimely passing on April 4, 1968.

And, for the rest of our lives, Sept. 11, 2001, will be a day that lives in infamy, just as Dec. 7, 1941, was for a previous generation.

But those are the anniversaries of attacks on leaders of church, state and our nation. Could the death of a pop star affect us just as much?

In the case of John Lennon, the answer is yes.



A crowd gathers outside the Dakota apartment building in New York City, after word got out that John Lennon was fatally shot.

It was 25 years ago Thursday that Lennon, returning with his wife, Yoko Ono, to his home in New York City's Dakota apartment building, was shot and killed by Mark David Chapman, a disturbed fan who earlier in the day had sought and received an autograph from Lennon.

The shock that registered throughout the world seems impossible to fathom now, in an age when worldwide communications make information available instantaneously and round the clock, yet somehow turn even cataclysmic events such as war, pandemics and natural disasters into just another distraction.

Click.

But in 1980 — a time of just three commercial TV networks and no Internet — many learned of Lennon's death from Howard Cosell, of all people, who read the bulletin live on "Monday Night Football." Word also traveled via radio stations, which immediately began playing Lennon's music, something most of them hadn't done in a decade. Old friends called each other and reminisced about Lennon, his life and what it all meant.

PLEASE SEE **LENNON** | E4

What is your favorite John Lennon song?

"Imagine." It asks us to put ourselves in a place that we'd really like for ourselves and the world to be, and though we may not be there at the moment, the music invites us to think of change as a real possibility."



— David Robertson,
music director,
St. Louis
Symphony
Orchestra

"Across the Universe," mostly because of the floating melody and beautiful words. But I love hearing what people think John is singing with 'Jai Guru Deva, om.' My favorite is a friend who thinks it's 'Kang-a-roo Jack, huhhhhh?'"



— Brandy Johnson, singer-songwriter

"Cold Turkey." Talk about your roots of punk rock! (It's full of angst — honest and scary at the same time. You really feel his pain from withdrawal.)"



— Joe Schwab,
owner, Euclid
Records

"I was a freshman in high school when the 'White Album' came out, and I just wore the grooves out of it. I always liked 'Julia,' which he wrote for his mother. There's a lot of weird stuff on that album but, being a ballad, that one stands out."



— Mark Klose,
radio personality,
KIHT

LENNON | FROM E1

After 25 years, world still misses him

◀ And what exactly did it mean?

For many, Lennon symbolized the '60s and all the nobler ambitions of that era: promoting peace and love, seeking life's deeper meanings, achieving a higher state of consciousness.

Because Lennon also stood for absolute truth and knowledge of self, he had to be aware of the flip side of that quest: the ravages of drugs, relationships that had been sundered and the fact that, despite our best efforts, the world keeps spinning in the same sad fashion.

Lennon was a man of many contradictions. It couldn't have escaped his attention that, even as he sang "imagine no possessions," he was a fabulously wealthy man. He sang about love, yet had coldly abandoned his first wife and child. In a particularly heart-wrenching passage in Cynthia Lennon's new memoir, "John," her young son Julian says, "Dad's always telling people to love each other, but how come he doesn't love me?"

Perhaps the impact of Lennon's death was also increased by the fact that we'd only recently gotten him back. Before the release of "Double Fantasy," his 1980 album with Ono, Lennon had been on a long self-imposed exile from recording and performing in public.

Then, too, his solo career up to that point had been a checkered one. His albums had often seemed more like therapy sessions, with Lennon exorcising demons of abandonment by his mother, his Beatles past, and the hold drugs had on him.

Still, his songs were provocative, philosophical and deep-

er than most anything heard on the radio since. "God is a concept against which we measure our pain," he sang at one point. "Woman is the nigger of the world." "Imagine all the people/Living life in peace."

That was Lennon. Simple, direct and unafraid to put an idea out there and see what came back.

Yet, the further we get from Lennon's life, the harder it is to get a clear picture of him. That much is obvious from the many books that continue to be published about him and his former mates. Some get it mostly right while others are mere hagiographies. Still others attempt to even the score against a man who is no longer here to defend himself.

And that's what's most missing: his presence. It's easy to forget now, when most rely on Lennon's music to define who he was, but he was actually someone whose art flowed through all aspects of his life. He sent it out in various forms, including songs, drawings, poems, films, press releases, full-page newspaper ads and "happenings."

It's intriguing to imagine what a 65-year-old Lennon might be like. Would he be touring the world like his former mate Paul McCartney? Would he, like McCartney, have accepted a British knighthood? Could he have made as much political impact in recent decades as he had in the '70s?

And what would he say about music being reduced to a series of zeros and ones and being carried around in a small device made by a company named, of all things, Apple, the same as his record label?

We'll never know, of course. We were robbed of that opportunity 25 years ago. His friends and family were robbed of so much more.

But for those of us who felt close to him because of who he was and what he stood for, the pain of that day and the myriad lessons of his life continue to resonate.

A library of Lennon

Thursday is the 25th anniversary of John Lennon's death; Oct. 9 marked the 65th anniversary of his birth.

The dates have been greeted by a miniboom in the publishing world. With numerous books on Lennon and the Beatles filling the shelves, here's a quick guide to help separate the fab from the drab.

"Life: Remembering John Lennon: 25 Years Later"

By Life Magazine Editors
Life Books
128 pages
\$17.95

A passable retrospective of Lennon's life, as typically told by Life magazine — with numerous photographs and scant, mostly bland text.

"John Lennon: The New York Years"

By Bob Gruen
Stewart, Tabori & Chang
176 pages
\$29.95

For nine years, Gruen was John and Yoko's personal photographer, snapping pics for the couple's own use and for posterity. Gruen's photos are both intimate and iconic; one of them is the famous rooftop shot of Lennon in his "New York City" T-shirt. Gruen's vivid tales of how many

of the photos came to offer genuine insight into some of Lennon's most private moments.

"Memories of John Lennon"

Edited and introduced by Yoko Ono
Harper Collins
310 pages
\$24.95

An odd selection of contributors — everyone from Mick Jagger, Bono and Joan Baez to Jello Biafra, actress Jane Alexander and comedian Paul Reiser — offer memories and appreciations of Lennon's life and work. Disappointingly, Yoko Ono, who edited this volume, is one person who has yet to weigh in at length on the subject.

"Lennon Revealed"

By Larry Kane
Running Press
296 pages
\$29.95

A longtime radio and TV journalist, Kane received a golden "Ticket to Ride" when he traveled in the Beatles' entourage on their 1964 tour of America. He befriended Lennon and kept in touch over the years, but his portrait of the artist is strictly boilerplate, delivering far less revelation than is promised by the title.

"John"

By Cynthia Lennon

Crown
306 pages
\$25.95

A potent reminder that there was another side to the Lennon legend, a legacy of pain and abandonment felt by Lennon's first family, wife Cynthia and son Julian. A bittersweet tale — sweet first, then bitter — "John" is a substantial upgrade from Cynthia's slight 1978 memoir, "A Twist of Lennon."

"With the Beatles"

By Lewis Lapham
Melville House
168 pages
\$12.95

In 1968, Lapham, editor of Harper's Magazine, wrote a Saturday Evening Post story on Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and the visitors to his ashram in India — among them the Beatles. This book expands on that story, recounting one of pop music's most well-intentioned misadventures.

"The Beatles: The Biography"

By Bob Spitz
Little, Brown
984 pages
\$29.95

Exhaustively researched and exhaustingly told, Spitz invests the story of a pop group from Liverpool with the gravitas of a Homerian epic. Considering that that



A mourner lights candles at a 2000 memorial to John Lennon in New York's Central Park at Strawberry Fields on the 20th anniversary of the singer's death. Tina Fineberg/The Associated Press

pop group sent shock waves through culture that still resonate today, the heft of the tome — if not always its tone — is justified.

BY DANIEL DURCHHOLZ