

My Yoko Ono

by Con Chapman

Physicists currently believe that all rock bands—nay, all human groups composed of four men—can be broken down into elemental particles first identified by study of The Beatles through an electron microscope.



There is the Cute One—Ringo. The Dreamy One—Paul. The Actual Musician—that would be George. And the Verbal One—John. It fell to me, as a charter member of Otis & the Elevator Company who was neither cute, dreamy nor a good guitar player—to be the Verbal One.

None of us said, as John Lennon did, that we were more popular than Jesus, but if any of us *had* said it, it would have been me. My mouth has been getting me into trouble since before I possessed the power of speech—it kept me out of National Honor Society until I was a senior. And for one bright and shining week of my existence—the five school days after we beat The Ostentations and The Del-Vikings in my high school's first-ever Battle of the Bands—we *were* more popular than Jesus, except among the Baptists who weren't allowed to dance and the Good Kids on the Student Council.



Jesus welcoming me home after a hot day building recreational vehicles at Klasic Trailers.

We should have used that stunning victory—to which we were powered by a potent hybrid fuel composed of equal parts soul music (the “Otis” part) and psychedelia (the “Elevator” part)—as a springboard to gigs at the premier venues in town, such as the Dew Drop Inn, which we had heard paid as much as *\$500 a night!* Instead, something happened that, as with the Beatles, planted the seed that grew the weed in the band's garden.



Otis Redding
I met my Yoko Ono.

Beatles fans will recall the grim details of Lennon's first encounter with Ono, whose name, conspiracy theorists like to remind us, is an anagram for "Oo—nooky!" In November of 1966 Lennon visited an exhibition of Ono's at a London art gallery. She passed him a card that said simply "Breathe"—thereby taking credit for *something he was already doing*. He then explored a work of hers—"Ceiling Painting"—described in the exhibit's catalog as follows: "The viewer is invited to climb a white ladder, where at the top a magnifying glass, attached by a chain, hangs from a frame on the ceiling. The viewer uses the reading glass to discover a block letter 'instruction' beneath the framed sheet of glass — it says 'Y E S.'"



Ono: "Er--what were you planning on doing with that hammer?"

Pretty powerful stuff, huh? Not clear how anybody could resist it, and Lennon fell for Ono like a ton of bricks, despite the fact that she was—to put it diplomatically—not as easy on the eyes as your typical rock groupie. Beatles' fans ever since have blamed Ono for the group's demise. Why did John have to be such a stupid intellectual, they ask, taking up with the conceptual artist generally credited

with making the worst vocal recording in the history of the world? I quote verbatim from a highly *favorable* review of Ono's *Plastic Ono Band*: “contains no actual words. [Ono] expresses herself here through wordless howls.” So do the dogs in my neighborhood, but that doesn't make them rock singers.

My Yoko Ono was a girl sitting across the room at one of those teen drinking parties where the boys are trying to develop a taste for beer and the girls are drinking sweet cocktails such as sloe gin fizzes, rum & Cokes and screwdrivers. Everyone else was sitting around looking cool when she proceeded to do an imitation of a cat . . . washing itself.

If John Lennon fell for an intellectual chick who communicated by the words “Breathe” and “Yes,” how, I ask you, was I supposed to resist that?

My Yoko Ono was short and draped in hippie clothes that bespoke an artistic nature, or a desire to be perceived as such. My sister didn't like her and didn't find her attractive. Still, when one hears the siren call of artsy high school love, there's not much one can do except go ahead and crash on the rocks, sending incense sticks and candles flying.



I could already hear lines of poems arranging themselves in my head—like geese falling into formation—when I saw her. I borrowed liberally from the Song of Solomon in composing them, but what the hell—it's in the public domain.

The other guys viewed the new addition to our entourage as a blot on our reputation. If you're the best band in the school, you should be consorting only with girls from the top shelf, head cheerleaders, fast girls who held “mattress parties,” and bombshells like

Elizabeth, the most beautiful girl in our class who was lusted after by both the cute guy and the dreamy guy. She made it clear that the only organ she would make available for sexual purposes until she was married (or at least engaged with a humongous rock to show for it) was her hand—and still the guys fought over her!

Into this mix I introduced someone who wanted to be Gertrude Stein, or at least Alice B. Toklas.



Kahlil Gibran

There was the obligatory beret, the constant book of poetry (Kahlil Gibran) under one arm, the third-world handbag. In short, the full bohemian starter kit.

Things fell apart, to borrow a line from Yeats I would read my first year in college, and which I probably used in a letter home to my Yoko Ono, who stayed behind in our small town. We drifted apart as we grew in different directions, and she took up with an autodidact high school dropout who supposedly knew karate. I hate to criticize a woman for her taste in men—especially after she's dated me—but I began to wonder what I ever saw in her.

Still, she was right for me at the time, and she had one huge advantage over the real Yoko Ono.

Except when we were making love, she didn't express herself in wordless howls.

From "Barefoot Boy With Tongue in Cheek"

