

MAGAZINE  
**SECONDS**

**SECONDS #36, 1996 • interview by George Petros**

# YOKO ONO



*Photo by Michael Lavine*

*Your opinion of YOKO ONO is a litmus test not only of your aesthetic orientation but also of your potential for posturing — because chances are the “media” has been influential in the shaping of your opinion.*

*You cannot think of Yoko without also thinking of soulmate John Lennon — John and Yoko, splendid in their solitude, dizzyingly cool, a Royal Couple of Rock. That was a long time ago ... Yoko, now solo, is alone but not tragic; after what she has seen she should only be able to cry, but instead she somehow sings — from screams to dreamy songs — and it comes out sounding like laughter, and that’s beautiful.*

*Yoko’s work was not in synch with Lennon’s, but their respective styles were somehow mated. Unlike The Beatles’ diddies, Ono’s stuff was way beyond even the furthest limits of Pop Culture. She taught one important lesson — a singer might as well scream. She irritated consumers who were force-fed large doses of her work in the course of receiving an unending flow of Beatle juice. Yoko imposed her confrontational voice upon that captive audience of Beatle fans who’d tackle anything the Fab Four threw at them — for at least one retail sales cycle.*

## ***“I was not an easy artist to accept.”***

**SECONDS:** *As you began to find your own identity, how did that fit into Japanese life?*

**ONO:** My family was not as traditional as you think. My mother’s side was very traditional — but in a sophisticated way. My father’s side of the family was Westernized in many ways. They didn’t mind that I was interested in music — in fact, they encouraged me to be interested in music, but they would’ve probably liked me to become a concert pianist playing Classical Music in a traditional sense. I think I went too far on the fringe side and I don’t think they appreciated that.

**SECONDS:** *Was there a post-war problem of being Japanese in America?*

**ONO:** I think the post-war situation of America and Japan was almost like a love affair. The Japanese loved everything American and of course Americans got curious about Japan. The post-war situation wasn’t bad at all. Some people fell in love with the Oriental culture and some people didn’t even know if Japan had cars and phones. Those were questions asked of me when I was at Sarah Lawrence College. “Do you have phones in Japan?” “Yes, yes . . .” Always questions about Mt. Fuji and the geishas. The questions didn’t seem to go past that. It’s very much like right now. Everybody asks me about the Beatles — “Did you break up the Beatles?” The question is always the same. Now, I think the understanding between the two countries is much better, mainly because Japan became an economic power. It’s a different age.

**SECONDS:** *What was the state of art in 1950?*

**ONO:** A lot was happening, even before the Hippie movement. I think the artists were into a lot of things that later were credited to the Hippies. Artists were a different type of people from the general public. Of course, you know there was a Beatnik movement and then gradually the big Hippie movement. Between all that, movements like Fluxus were on such a fringe that it was not really recognized in the big picture — though we felt like we were the center of the world.

**SECONDS:** *You were one of the first functional Pop Culture feminists —*

**ONO:** It’s true. Therefore, there was a struggle and pain of trying to be accepted as myself. I wasn’t helping, either; I was self-abasing in one way and arrogant in another. I was not an easy artist to accept.

**SECONDS:** *Did the self-abasement and arrogance balance out?*

**ONO:** I don’t know, I never thought of myself as a balanced person. Basically, I was an obsessed artist. I was obsessive about my beliefs about my work and I was inspired to create. That’s the most enjoyable part of my life — that I work. Work means a lot to me.

**SECONDS:** *Your early stuff was quite wild, even by today’s standards.*

**ONO:** I was driven. I felt I didn’t want to get into self-censorship, which is the most dangerous thing you can do. Going against the stream of things is one of the most organic things an artist does. I was a rebel. It’s an innate part of me to be a rebel. I couldn’t help being that.

**SECONDS:** *You were representing something that just wasn’t present in the American psyche.*

**ONO:** I had this idea that unless you have something new to offer, then there was no point in offering. New ideas were crucial to me. Coupled with the fact that my environment was not financially strong, I had to find ways to make things and express myself. The fact that there was a certain poverty in my life and I had to find a way to create things within that limitation was very challenging. That suited me a lot and directly lead to creating certain kinds of work where the function of the work itself was based on lack of resources.

**SECONDS:** *Some of those early artforms you undertook are what we’ve come to call performance art.*

**ONO:** It’s amazing that there’s now a label.

**SECONDS:** *There was a bit of a precedent with Futurist theater, but what you did was more confrontational.*

**ONO:** There was a confrontational element and a reciprocal element. I’d say I asked the audience to directly participate. There was a chance element I couldn’t control. Like the *Cut Piece* — I’m sitting on a stage, asking the audience to cut a piece of my clothes off me. Anything could’ve happened — I wouldn’t do that now. At the time, I had this feeling that I still hold — that art perceives everything. When I was on a stage, I’d never think in terms of, “Is it going to be dangerous for me?” When I was on stage, I felt I was confronting gods and goddesses within the audience — that within them were gods and goddesses.

**SECONDS:** *Did you want to draw those archetypes out?*

**ONO:** I wanted to present what I considered

## YOKO ONO

the highest offer I could make. For instance, with that *Cut Piece*, it was at a time where I didn't have many clothes, but I would always wear my best suit.

**SECONDS:** *When someone cuts someone else's clothes off, there's a sexual dynamic.*

**ONO:** I wasn't thinking in terms of sex; I was thinking what a woman goes through in society. We take a passive position and allow the society to communicate with us in the way they want to.

**SECONDS:** *So what you did symbolized what happens to women in a larger sense.*

**ONO:** It's still happening. It's a very interesting thing in the sense of yin and yang. In a way, you can say you're being abused but the other side of it is you're actually being an incredible power.

**SECONDS:** *Were you angry?*

**ONO:** I think there was a certain degree of anger throughout my life, just as there's a certain degree of love. Anger we interpret as anger towards something specific but the fact is birth is the first violence we encounter. You're suddenly sent out into the world and they slap your butt and cut your umbilical cord. It's a bloody affair. All of us are born that way, so why are we not angry? It's totally logical and natural that all of us are. From that day on, we're victims of the society that we inherited from the generation before, from this long history, which was a history of misjudgment, illusion and injustice. It's wrong to take it out on your family or close friends, thinking they're the object of our anger. We share this rage and if we don't hide rage, it's a beautiful energy. Instead, we try and hide it. It makes us angrier and that makes the society sick. The first thing we have to do is say, "We're alright. You're alright, I'm alright." I've been saying that since the beginning.

**SECONDS:** *Was society back in those days even more uptight than it is now? The stereotype of the Fifties is a regimented, militaristic world.*

**ONO:** Not really. It depends on the people. Did F. Scott Fitzgerald and Zelda live a conformist life? I think the texture of freedom changed. There was always freedom and always conformity. Even now, we live in a very rigid society.

**SECONDS:** *Would you say there's always freedom there for people willing to take it?*

**ONO:** I suppose. It was expressed more quietly than in the Sixties, but I'm sure that

mode of conduct was there. Now, we're forced to have a different kind of sexual behavior because of the epidemic, because of the street violence — there's a certain unpredictability about people. We're all intimidated in many ways. It's a different age.

**SECONDS:** *You work with AIDS research, but in the Fifties, there weren't causes in art.*

**ONO:** Exactly. It was like nice wallpaper.

**SECONDS:** *Yet you had formulated a political philosophy.*

**ONO:** I think being an outsider was an easy position to be in. I think my strength, even now, is being an outsider. I'm very lucky because I've lived long enough to see that my work's got some appreciation. Where I'm from, all artists were miserable. They were not appreciated in their lifetime and they died.

**SECONDS:** *Back when your involvement with the Avant-garde was at its peak, what was the drug scene like?*

**ONO:** There was a lot of drugs then but I was really naive, you know? I was the nerd who didn't know what was going on. At one point, I was living in a loft. A cop would often come up and ask, "Are you alright?" Once my artist friends were there making tea and there was a knock at the door and a cop came in. I said, "Do you want to join us? We're having tea." He said, "No, I'm just patrolling around here" and he left. Later, they told me they were brewing tea that was not normal, you know? They were totally frightened I invited a cop in, but I was naive.

**SECONDS:** *Did you ever indulge in that?*

**ONO:** At that point, no. It didn't start until I left London and went to Paris and that's when I encountered drugs. Some people say *Grapefruit* was written during a lot of high moments — but I was totally straight. I didn't even smoke cigarettes. When I met John, of course, he was taking everything. That's when I started smoking cigarettes, because he used to smoke. So until thirty-four, I didn't even smoke.

**SECONDS:** *That must have been quite a transition.*

**ONO:** It's amazing that I survived, both physically and mentally, and it's amazing that I'm still creating things. I'm very thankful. Many people are not that lucky; many people didn't survive.

**SECONDS:** *What music were you listening to back then?*

**ONO:** I was into Classical music — Berg, Schoenberg, and the Twelve-tone people.

**“Anger we interpret as anger towards something specific but the fact is birth is the first violence we encounter.”**

**SECONDS:** *I've seen it quoted that you were “well established in the Avant-garde.” What did that mean in those days?*

**ONO:** People who liked Avant-garde works started to appreciate my work. Then the Avant-garde thought I was getting too commercial and they dropped me. My name was getting too big or something.

**SECONDS:** *How was your emotional state in the early Sixties?*

**ONO:** The early Sixties were really fun. There was a lot of action in terms of my work and I was very excited. It's like a message that comes through you; it's very exciting.

**SECONDS:** *Were you excited by the space program and advances in science?*

**ONO:** Oh yes. Each new discovery gives us a different perspective of life and it's quite exciting. My feeling is that I'd love to stick around to see to what extent we become wise. With the progress of science, we will start to use more of our brains. If we can do this much with ten percent of our brains, how much could we do with a hundred percent?

**SECONDS:** *And it was exciting then, too —*

**ONO:** It was exciting then, too. My feeling is, instead of being down on the human race, it's a beautiful race and it's a fun race too and I'd like to see it go on. Some people say that without the human race the world would be a better place but I don't see it that way.

**SECONDS:** *That's refreshing to hear in this nihilistic era.*

**ONO:** I know that some people might become angry just for me saying that but I really think we can make it.

**SECONDS:** *During the Fifties to the early Sixties, what would be the one underlying sentiment you wanted to convey?*

**ONO:** Well ... the word “confrontation” comes to mind. I think it was to wake people up to their higher potential.

**SECONDS:** *Then, in 1966, John comes into the story. Without asking you, “What was John like?” — obviously there's a point where I need to discuss both of you —*

**ONO:** Don't be nervous about it. It's fine. I don't mind it.

**SECONDS:** *It did help to put you on the map.*

**ONO:** A very important time in my life, and the hardest time in a way.

**SECONDS:** *How did John like your art? Did he get it?*

**ONO:** Yes. He got it totally.

**SECONDS:** *By the standards of the day, you certainly didn't fit the stereotype of a Rock Star's girlfriend. With your feminist sensibilities, you came into a very macho world —*

**ONO:** That's something that I just never noticed. There's many things I was not cognizant of. It was a protective measure taken by fate. I met John and thought he was a beautiful representative of the male species and he was real sensitive

— that's the side I saw first. I didn't know the mechanisms of the Rock world; I didn't even know he was part of the Rock world. But I knew the Beatles were very important in London — people whispered when they talked about the Beatles. After opening night of my exhibition, John left and an assistant whispered, “I think he is one of the Beatles.” Music scene professionals knew the Beatles were macho guys but to the public their image was lovable, sweet and gentle, with a sense of humor. That's how I perceived John, but once we got together, this whole system started to work on us. When I was just a girlfriend, we saw each other covertly. When we became public about it and started to live together, the people around him suddenly changed their attitudes. I was a girl who invaded into their camp and they started to treat me differently. I didn't see that in the beginning.

**SECONDS:** *Your attempt to influence Rock Music with your Avant-garde sensibilities did not meet with a good response.*

**ONO:** I understand what you're talking about. I was into the new. At that stage in my life, I was more interested in the form of art. I wanted to keep revolutionizing the form of art and thereby stimulate people.

I wanted to explore new possibilities. Now I'm more interested in expressing emotion.



## YOKO ONO

Before, I was still expressing emotion, but I was interested in how I expressed the emotion. Now, for instance, I don't mind writing songs like "Goodbye, My Love," which you certainly can't call Avant-garde. That is daring for me.

**SECONDS:** *What magic conspired to get John and you together?*

**ONO:** In the beginning, there was an incredible magic between us. It's a classic falling-in-love situation, like seeing a person on the other side of a room and immediately falling in love — classic stuff. I was very shy — and John was, too — and both of us were married to somebody and both had a child. John had an incredible setup that he was in and in a way, I did too.

**SECONDS:** *You had your own credentials ...*

**ONO:** Yes, credentials, and a family. Also, I think John was — as most rockers do — having brief encounters and he didn't mind. With me, it didn't work out that way. It was too big for both of us to think we'd just have a casual thing, so we didn't have a casual thing. We met in '66. We had contact, emotions built, but we didn't come together —

**SECONDS:** *So you didn't become lovers until '68?*

**ONO:** By lovers, you mean going to bed, right?

**SECONDS:** *Yeah. Sex was different then, wasn't it?*

**ONO:** It was an easier time for artists and musicians. The thing with us, we didn't do it from '66 to '68, almost like a year and a half, and that was very strange. There was a dynamic, a half-intention, but I was hesitant and he was too. We instinctively knew that this was a big one — that's how John was putting it in interviews — so we couldn't just casually do it.

**SECONDS:** *After a year-and-a-half wait, it must have been great —*

**ONO:** Like one of those soap operas — "When are they gonna make it?"

**SECONDS:** *Once you hooked up, what happened?*

**ONO:** I wasn't trying to destroy anything, I wasn't trying to change anything. It was just fate that I didn't have any control over.

**SECONDS:** *There was a Darwinian struggle there. You represented the Eastern, feminist, Avant-garde side versus the Western, male, Pop side the other Beatles represented —*

**ONO:** He went with me. It was a time for change for him, too. It wasn't like "Which one do you want?" He was with The Beatles for a long time and it was time for him to

take flight. This whole story about "I saw John in Japan and from then on was determined to get him and I went to London to get him" didn't happen that way. I went to London, never expecting to meet John. It's an interesting story but it didn't happen that way. The fact that I didn't know about my fate was important. It was a coincidence that I met him, but as you know, a coincidence isn't a coincidence — that was the magic of it, I never expected it to happen. If I'd known then that it would've happened and

created all of this — like the fact I had to go through a painful experience being the wife of John Lennon and being attacked by the whole world — would I have gone through it? For instance, John and I did the *Bed-In*. We never thought we'd be attacked so much for it. If we knew we were going to be attacked, we probably wouldn't have done it. We didn't think we were going to be applauded for it, either. You don't think about those things, you don't think about the reaction you get. When an artist makes his or her work, they're not considering what kind of reaction they'll get.

**SECONDS:** *So it sprang from an innocent and unpretentious beginning?*

**ONO:** Totally.

**SECONDS:** *People don't want to believe that, do they?*

**ONO:** No. If they don't want to believe that, fine. People don't want to believe in miracles.

**SECONDS:** *Ringo was in the Plastic Ono Band, so I can't help but feel he was*



## **“After opening night of my exhibition, John left and an assistant whispered, ‘I think he is one of the Beatles.’”**

*accepting of you. Mick Jagger was on one of your records —*

**ONO:** Well, I think Mick was there because he was a friend of John’s and into John. It just kind of happened. Ringo, Klaus Voorman, that Plastic Ono Band situation — I think they probably wanted to be counted on.

**SECONDS:** *I assume by that time you’d come a long way from the days when you didn’t recognize the smell of pot in your loft.*

**ONO:** That’s right.

**SECONDS:** *Did you go through the spectrum of drugs?*

**ONO:** Oh yes. It was amazing.

**SECONDS:** *Did LSD help your work?*

**ONO:** I don’t know. They talk about so much myth about acid, but — sometimes it’s a bad trip and sometimes it’s a good trip. In my case, there was no bad trip and it was a longer version of mushrooms. It makes you feel warm and that everything’s alright. These “visions” and this and that — I didn’t go through any of that.

**SECONDS:** *Is that mostly hype?*

**ONO:** When you’re straight, you can have experiences that can be considered a vision. On acid, I felt it was a more physical experience. It’s considered a mind-altering drug, but it didn’t alter my mind to the point I felt was dangerous. Also, I don’t advocate taking too much acid, really. Coming from the Sixties, I know so many who just stayed there.

**SECONDS:** *Camille Paglia said that some of the smartest people of recent generations burned out on drugs —*

**ONO:** Yeah, burning out, I don’t advocate that. I also don’t advocate smack. Life is exciting without it.

**SECONDS:** *Did you like smack or acid better?*

**ONO:** Both of them are very physical experiences. When you’re experiencing it, it’s nice, but it’s not a creative situation. You have to come down to create something ... it wasn’t like we were on drugs all the time. Also, John had a very strong will. One day, he’d say, “Let’s just get off” and we’d just go cold turkey. It’s so painful and I think it’s good that it’s painful so you don’t wanna go back to it again. We did go back, but we didn’t go back many times because it was too painful.

**SECONDS:** *Did smack come to interfere with your art and your music?*

**ONO:** No, strangely enough, it didn’t do that. Acid does. I think on acid, I just had the experience and that’s it. On smack, you

can still create things, but I just don’t think it’s necessary. The tolerance level gets high so quickly that you’re spending most of your life scoring and sleeping. I think it’s very counter-productive.

**SECONDS:** *It’s a great drug for sex, though.*

**ONO:** Some people say on smack ... eventually you can’t do it.

**SECONDS:** *Tell us about the time you got busted in London.*

**ONO:** That was weird. We got a phone call from a friend saying that the cops are going around and arresting people, so we should be very careful. We had some grass, a huge bowl, and that was it. We cleaned out the bowl — I don’t know why we never thought of just throwing the bowl away — and everything was alright. So they came in and we said, “Okay, check it out.” They went downstairs to the kitchen and were even looking into bags of tea. We were pretty confident we didn’t have anything. Suddenly, they found this big thing.

**SECONDS:** *Did they plant it?*

**ONO:** Yes! It’s a real story. The sergeant was later indicted for planting evidence against many people. We were arrested, and we had a record of arrests. So when we were in the United States, they felt we should not be here because we had a record. A lot of people here have Green Cards even when they have a record in another country. It was the kind of thing used to kick us out of the country.

**SECONDS:** *Kick out those undesirables!*

**ONO:** Undesirable not because of the drugs, but because we were anti-war. I don’t even want to talk about that period — it just scares me.

**SECONDS:** *Let’s talk about your records on Apple and Zapple. They were a little East, a little West, some Jazz, some Rock. You must be quite proud of those albums.*

**ONO:** I think *Plastic Ono Band* was pretty good.

**SECONDS:** *The public wasn’t really ready for them —*

**ONO:** No, but that’s understandable. It’s like going to Middle America and trying to find sushi.

**SECONDS:** *But other non-Japanese were able to bring weird forms of music into the public arena and not be subjected to the same hostility.*

**ONO:** What I’m saying is that instead of introducing it in the Avant-garde world, we introduced it in the Rock world.

**SECONDS:** *And the Rock world is very*

## YOKO ONO

conservative.

**ONO:** Yeah, you can say that, but people like Jimi Hendrix were really doing something far out at the time. I never thought it would happen, but now they have the ear to hear it.

**SECONDS:** *At the time of The Wedding Album most people weren't even willing to accept it as being quaint and eccentric —*

**ONO:** We had fun doing it and we were laughing —

**SECONDS:** *You demanded something of listeners. Many others were thinking, "How can we make it easy for people to digest this?"*

**ONO:** As I said before, I was into pushing the limits of the form. At the time, I thought it was an important thing to do.

**SECONDS:** *What did you want to achieve with your singing? I know you have a fascination with bird singing — it sounds random but it's not —*



**ONO:** Right. You can't really write it down as musical notes because there's a certain magic that disappears when you translate it into musical notes. I went through that classic training of singing Opera and that kind of thing and it's trying to push that horizon to get into more interesting sounds. When you're doing the work to create something new, it's very important that you don't try and please a lot of people.

**SECONDS:** *Did you see parallels between what you were looking for and what Ornette Coleman was doing?*

**ONO:** Yeah. Ornette was a rebel and had a very rebellious side. He invited me into his concert. I was in Paris and he asked would I come join him for a whole concert. So I said if I could do my own thing, fine.

**SECONDS:** *You didn't want to just be supporting a guy's music —*

**ONO:** When I said that, he kind of giggled.

**SECONDS:** *Why didn't you work together again?*

**ONO:** Because right after that John came back from India and I got totally involved with John. Ornette's an amazing, creative guy.

**SECONDS:** *Did you outgrow the Avant-garde?*

**ONO:** I consider myself Avant-garde even now; you can't get out of that label; you can't get out of what you were doing twenty years ago. I'm just changing, that's all ...

**SECONDS:** *With an album like Approximately Infinite Universe, if there had been no stigma of having a relationship with one of the Beatles, would the public have been more accepting of it?*

**ONO:** Probably. I would have gone out and promoted it more. It's a classic woman thing — you create within the environment you're in. Most women can tell you that if they didn't have the husband and the kids, they would have been much freer and done more in terms of their career. But you do fall in love and have children and that's part of life. Before that, there was a time when I was just enjoying aloneness and being an artist.

**SECONDS:** *A lot of hostility directed towards The Beatles was easier to take out on you. When they were mad at John, they could be mad at you instead. But when he was with Cynthia, we never heard, "Cynthia's all over him."*

**ONO:** Paul was okay by everybody

because Paul was a guy.

**SECONDS:** *It's like you just resign yourself to it, right?*

**ONO:** That's the only choice I have. If I have any anger about it, that would just affect my body. It's bad for me, so I have to let it go. In that sense, I'm a very pragmatic person.

**SECONDS:** *Describe your emotional state in 1970.*

**ONO:** It was a time when John and I started to do things together and it was a very exciting time. "Whirlwind" is the expression. Creatively, it was exciting but there were a lot of big attacks. We were two people just trying to survive through it. It was a very hard time because I lost Kyoto and all that, too.

**SECONDS:** *You did a show with Zappa that's on Sometime In New York —*

**ONO:** Frank Zappa liked it so much that he did some remixes later. I liked Zappa because he was like a soulmate to us. We were people

**“When you’re doing the work to create something new, it’s very important that you don’t try and please a lot of people.”**

going from place to place. It wasn’t like we planned things — and that’s good.

**SECONDS:** *What about the breakup of 1973?*

**ONO:** In 1973, we were totally clean and started to live in the Dakota. I made *Feeling The Space* and John made *Mind Games*. We were together twenty-four hours a day up till then. John wanted it that way, too. I felt we were suffocating each other and needed to give each other space. John was feeling that, too, but didn’t want to make a radical change. I thought radical change was good and said, “You should go to LA.” We were having a very nice conversation in bed.

“It’s better that you go and relax a little.” It was a very nice and gentle conversation. It didn’t come out of tension and bitterness. We were in a very fine situation. It was a warm feeling we had for each other; I just felt it was important to give space to each other and that really worked. John wasn’t very happy in LA and obviously got into a drinking binge. Later, we felt it was a very good separation.

**SECONDS:** *Tell me about Feeling The Space.*

**ONO:** *Feeling The Space* was a feminist album. I wanted to discuss the different lives of women.

**SECONDS:** *How did feminists react to it?*

**ONO:** The fact that I was married to a famous man made me not a candidate for feminism, in certain feminists’ eyes. I think there was not very much reaction from the feminist group of people. I knew that my songs were affecting ordinary women — I knew that.

**SECONDS:** *Why did you stop recording after that?*

**ONO:** We got back together and we both felt it was very important that we put some energy into our relationship instead of our work. I became pregnant and it became very important for me to take care of my body. After Sean was born, we decided I would look after the business. There was an understanding that we not create anything.

**SECONDS:** *What was your emotional state?*

**ONO:** I didn’t think it was going to be that good. When I met John, he was this beautiful guy but he was pretty macho, really. Gradually he started to understand a woman’s plight and we decided to live separately for awhile. When he came back, he was a different person. He was a very gentle, understanding and loving person. That was a

big difference.

**SECONDS:** *Was that your influence?*

**ONO:** I think that while we were separated he did some soul-searching and really felt he wanted to make it work with me. It was good we had that separation to clear our heads.

**SECONDS:** *Then you got back together and did “Walking On Thin Ice” —*

**ONO:** There’s some songs that start to affect our life. I found that it’s true with many of my works. After I wrote “Walking On Thin Ice,” my life was literally like walking on thin ice.

**SECONDS:** *Were you aware of Punk music?*

**ONO:** I wasn’t thinking in terms of labels like that; I was just doing my own thing. Being an outsider, and having an acute feeling that I’m an outsider, makes that kind of sound.

**SECONDS:** *Your next record was Season Of Glass. I could imagine you staring out the window for a long, long time. How’d you get through that?*

**ONO:** It’s not a matter of how I got through that period or how I made that album, but if I didn’t make that album I would’ve gone insane. It was like a security blanket, something I held onto to come out of drowning.

**SECONDS:** *Then there was your juggling act between the music and the business end. How do you separate Yoko Ono from John and Yoko?*

**ONO:** And also from Yoko Ono Lennon — I wear many hats and that’s part of the game. I had to do it and I did it as well as I could, and I hope that was good enough.

**SECONDS:** *In his biography of John, what was Albert Goldman’s agenda?*

**ONO:** I remember he came to interview John and I when we were staying at a hotel. He was a nice enough person, I thought —

**SECONDS:** *But what was it he was trying to say about you?*

**ONO:** I hope he was having fun doing it. It was like literature and very strange. It had to do with some people who resent us a lot and concocted a reality. All of us have pride and you get humiliated. Then I thought, “Am I taking myself too seriously?” Maybe it’s just vanity that one does not want people to think of you as such.

**SECONDS:** *They can make a game out of it.*

**ONO:** A horrible game. It was that kind of horrible game he played. I always want to think, “What is the benefit?” The benefit I got from it was that there’s not much else

## YOKO ONO

they can write that's so horrible. If there's another book, are people going to get excited? They've heard the worst. Also, it gave me a different perspective about history. I read all these history books and think, "Who was the fired employee?" History is unreliable, and that was a big awakening for me. There was something in the book that said I smell and I got very upset with that. That's the kind of thing they can't prove to people.

**SECONDS:** *You look really strong in the book. Whether you're a nice person or not is another issue, but you look like the winner...*

**ONO:** It probably helped to make people stay away from me. I don't need a bodyguard ...



**SECONDS:** *Then again, there's people who are attracted to power.*

**ONO:** That's interesting ...

**SECONDS:** *Was "It's Alright" you reconciling yourself with the world, saying it is alright?*

**ONO:** No. It's funny, "It's Alright" came when there was a bomb scare, they were going to bomb me in the recording studio and the Dakota. Sean and I were staying in a hotel room with bodyguards and we didn't know when they were going to bomb us. We had a piano there and I was saying, "It's alright" like a mantra. It was made at the scariest moment. Not only was there a bomb scare, but we found an incredible number of things were stolen from our household and somebody was trying to sell John's diaries. It was a frightening period and that's why I wrote "It's Alright."

**SECONDS:** *What was your state of mind while recording Starpeace?*

**ONO:** My state of mind was pretty low.

**SECONDS:** *It's a grand title, so you were either feeling really up or really down.*

**ONO:** The reason I was down was because people around me at the time were advising me there was no way I could make an album because there was no demand out there and the only thing that might help was to have another person produce it and a DJ might play it because of the producer's name.

**SECONDS:** *So who did you get?*

**ONO:** Bill Laswell. He picked my mood up. So, I went on a *Starpeace* world tour to promote the album and everywhere I go, a newspaper article preceded me that says

something like, "The Black Widow is coming." In Berlin, we did a great concert but the next day in the paper — "Yoko's concert with empty seats." I thought, "Where did they get this picture?" It was a full house ...

**SECONDS:** *They took it at soundcheck.*

**ONO:** Right. That's how bad it was. They really tried to twist me around and it was because of *Starpeace* — people didn't want peace during Reaganomics. "Peace" was a dirty word in this country. Again I was going against the stream. That's one side of the concert tour. The other side was I was digging it.

**SECONDS:** *That brings us to the present day. Politically speaking, what you fought for in 1970 — how much of it has come to pass?*

**ONO:** I think a lot. From the Seventies, we've come a long way. A lot of people are aware that in war, both sides lose. It's a totally different concept from what we had in the Fifties, when people admired soldiers with medals — that's not here anymore. Ninety percent of the people in the world believe in world peace. The whole concept of how we perceive war is different. We've progressed a lot.

**SECONDS:** *What is the most pressing issue right now?*

**ONO:** Lack of faith — I'm not talking about religious faith — in ourselves and in the world we live in. A general depressive mode is prevailing. I wanted to come out to say it's alright. It's alright to be ourselves. Because we were conditioned for a long time that

## **“History is unreliable, and that was a big awakening for me.”**

it’s not alright to be ourselves, there’s a lot of anger, confusion and loss of faith. First, we have to say we’re alright and start from there.

**SECONDS:** *Have you found peace? If a family member asked, “Yoko, how are you feeling tonight?” what would you say?*

**ONO:** I’m not okay just as you’re not. We’re all not okay. That’s life. I’m starting to enjoy life in a strange way. The human race has come a long way. I’d like to see more things happen; I’d like to be here to witness the turn of the century and more — the remarkable development of the human race. All my life, I enjoyed looking at the sky. The sky is constantly changing; the colors are changing; the weather is changing — and that was my security blanket. Even in the middle of the war when the city was all bombed out, the sky was always there.

**SECONDS:** *Even though the sky also brought enemy bombers.*

**ONO:** It is that, too, but I didn’t think of it that way. The bombers were intruders.

**SECONDS:** *How about your reconciliation with the Beatles?*

**ONO:** I never had a down feeling about them at all. I have the same respect towards them that all of you have. It’s obvious what they did for the world was incredible. They were the first revolutionaries in the music world. What they did was not just music, but a social revolution. On the level of artists,

I understand what they did and I have an incredible respect and love for them. It’s too bad people think, “Let’s not talk about The Beatles in front of Yoko because she hates

them” because that’s not true. The instigator of the group happens to be my husband, who I love very much. He created the band and was basically the leader of The Beatles. Of course I think it was a great thing.

**SECONDS:** *And you’re friends with them now?*

**ONO:** Somedays it’s good and somedays bad. It’s not like a soap opera — “Now we are friends, and friends forever...” You can say it’s a better time but it’s not like what people thought. Paul is the most outspoken one about how he was pissed off by it all ... but there’s a complicated history there. Not only did he lose a group but he lost a partner. But you know, we talk a lot on the phone.

**SECONDS:** *If you were starting off today, what level of success could you reach if you didn’t meet a John Lennon?*

**ONO:** It’s funny you say that, because in the late Seventies John was saying, “Do you know if you were a guy, people would take you seriously. Should we say you’re actually a guy and we got together because I’m a homosexual?” We had a great laugh about that. If it was today, it would be different. But we have to have people who pave the way for others. A lot of people paved the way for us, too. Yeah, sometimes I regret that it was so difficult for me, but then I wouldn’t be me — I’m hoping that my life will be a bit easier now. I think I deserve that — don’t you? ●●●

