

The Love Of John Lennon's Life - And It Wasn't Cynthia or Yoko

Written by Andy Owen



It was January 12th 1964.

The Beatles were rehearsing at the London Palladium for their appearance that evening, on the top TV show, *Val Parnell's Sunday Night at the London Palladium*.

They had first appeared on the show on October 13th 1963.

But, only three months on from that debut, a massive change had taken place.

Their profile had gone supersonic in that short time - as the scenes outside the theatre had shown. 'Beatlemania' was in full swing.

Argyll Street was wall-to-wall with noisy Beatles fans from early morning. And they stayed there all day...



Their incredible popularity was also reflected in their fee for that performance - which had risen from £250 to £1,000.

The Beatles topped the bill, which was broadcast at prime time, from 8.25pm to 9.25pm.

Sunday Night At The London Palladium was an ATV show and attracted enormous viewing figures in the UK.

The show was compèred by Bruce Forsyth - and all the acts appeared live.

After doing a short skit with Bruce Forsyth earlier, the group closed the show with a five-song set - *I Want to Hold Your Hand*, *This Boy*, *All My Loving*, *Money* and *Twist and Shout*.

Also on the bill that night, were singer Alma Cogan and comedian Dave Allen.

This was the first time The Beatles had met Alma Cogan.

Alma was a big star in her own right and extremely popular. She was called the "Girl with the Giggle in Her Voice" and she had been the highest paid British female entertainer of her era.



By the late fifties, she had enjoyed massive success. She had topped the bill at the Palladium - and she clocked up 20 hit records, more than any other British female singer. Her records were in the charts for an astonishing total of 109 weeks.

Her hits included, *Sugar In The Morning, Sugar In The Evening, Sugar At Suppertime, Dreamboat, I Can't Tell A Waltz From A Tango, Twenty Tiny Fingers* and *Cowboy Jimmy Joe*.

She also had a hit in Iceland with *Never Do a Tango with an Eskimo* and a number one in Japan with *Just Couldn't Resist Her And Her Pocket Transistor*.

She dazzled audiences with her infectious smile, bouncy novelty songs and huge glittery dresses. On certain occasions, she would make as many as eleven dress changes during one show.

As well as the comedy records, she also recorded more serious songs from the US, including country, show tunes and pop and jazz standards.

But, despite her fame and fortune, Alma always kept her feet on the ground. She lived at home with her mother and sister Sandra in a flat in Kensington High Street.

After the Palladium show, Alma invited the boys back to her flat, as she regularly liked to do, with fellow performers, friends and colleagues.

Over the years, the flat had seen many notable visitors from theatre and show business, including Sir Noel Coward, Audrey Hepburn, Michael Caine, Frankie Vaughan, Tommy Steele, Danny Kaye, Ethel Merman, Sammy Davis Junior, Cary Grant and many more.

Clearly, the Cogan family loved to be great hosts, as the lounge was set up as a room for entertaining, being a large room full of Italian leather furniture.

There were red lampshades, which gave the room a soft rosy feel, pink napkins - and wine arrived continually in red glasses.

In the car on the way to Alma's flat, you can imagine the conversation that took place, as all four Beatles expressed their surprise at what a 'great gal' Alma was.

Surprise was the key word, as Alma used to be the butt of many jokes, in the previous few months. John, especially, used to distastefully 'take the mickey' out of her and pull crazy expressions on his face to try to imitate her.



But, during the rehearsals at the Palladium a few hours earlier, he spent a fair amount of time with her - chatting, laughing and having fun.

He felt a strong sexual attraction - and Alma did nothing to deter him.

Quite the opposite, in fact...

Within weeks, John and Alma had started a passionate affair. John was head-over-heels in love with her.

Both heavily disguised, they took to meeting for passionate sessions in anonymous West End hotel suites, where they often registered as 'Mr and Mrs Winston' (John's middle name).

While the affair was going on, all four Beatles, with girlfriends and Cynthia in tow, visited Alma's flat many times.

In an interview many years later, Paul remembers the visits to the flat, with great affection.

"They were very nice, Alma and her sister Sandra. It was there that I learned how to be a guest. It was there that we learned to play charades, and we started to do it at our own parties. It was a learning curve for us.

We'd never seen anything like it before, but we always liked a laugh, so we played charades with Stanley Baker and with Bruce Forsyth. Bruce was absolutely great.

They were all a little older than us, probably ten, twelve years older than us, but they were great fun, very confident showbiz people who welcomed us into their circle. It was exciting for us, we would hear all the showbizzy gossip and meet people there that we hadn't met before - Lionel Bart would sometimes be there, Tommy Steele and Lionel Blair - he would nearly always be there."



It was at one of these early visits, that Lennon's first wife, Cynthia, records: "John and I had thought of her as out-of-date and unhip.

He used to make fun of her. We remembered her in the old-fashioned cinched-in waists and wide skirts of the Fifties.

But in the flesh she was beautiful, intelligent and funny, oozing sex appeal and charm".



Cynthia watched John and Alma's interactions during the evening and started to sense something was going on between them.

"It was easy to see the sexual tension between them," she recalled, "and how outrageously she flirted with him.

By the end of the evening, I was convinced they were lovers.

I had no real grounds for suspicion - just a strong gut feeling."

Her suspicions were correct. John was totally smitten - and Alma truly loved John.



They had discussed the future and were both totally committed to take their relationship to the next level, when they were hit with a bombshell.

Alma was diagnosed with ovarian cancer.

It was very serious. Both of them were devastated.

Alma began treatment immediately and they both agreed that their plans would have to be postponed for a while.

John supported Alma and called her many times a day, but, they did not get together as often - and John's plans for divorcing Cynthia, were put on hold.

In a 1989 interview, released after her death, Cynthia felt that John saw Alma as a replacement for his mother and auntie.

"Now that I think about it, with all the emotion gone out of it, I can see the attraction. Alma was about eight years older than John and very much the Auntie figure"

Whether this was true, or just the comments of a wife whose husband had fallen in love with someone else, is impossible to say. But Cynthia said something similar about Yoko later, which could suggest she was trying to find an excuse for her husband's infidelity.

My view, for what it's worth, is John and Alma were just two people who became besotted with each other, enjoyed a very strong sexual chemistry and then fell hopelessly in love.

The affair lasted two years and came to a tragic end on 26th October 1966.

In a private room at London's Middlesex Hospital, Alma lay in a coma. Her face, once so alive and radiant with health and vitality, was virtually unrecognisable. She had lost so much weight, she was skeletal.

Ovarian cancer had ravaged her - and her young life ended, when her body didn't have the strength to fight any more. She was only 34.

Her death was greeted with shock and incredulity by the nation. John was crippled with grief. "John was absolutely potty about her," George Harrison revealed later.

Two weeks after Alma died, John Lennon, still in a highly vulnerable state, met Yoko Ono - the woman who was to control and dominate the rest of his life.

Yoko was much the same age as Alma had been. She was the sort of dominating woman that John needed at that time. Remember, John had largely been brought up by his strict Aunt Mimi, who was the sister of his mother, Julia.

Cynthia felt that John had found his new 'Aunt Mimi replacement' in Yoko Ono.

She also believed that if Alma hadn't died from ovarian cancer in 1966, he would never have fallen for - and subsequently married - Yoko.



This is what she said:

"He met Yoko when he needed to, just a fortnight into his grief. She was this obsessive fan who'd turn up and follow him around," she explained.

"She irritated the life out of John to begin with. But Alma died and something odd happened to John. Things turned. Yoko was John's new Aunt Mimi. She worked out what John needed in a woman, right under my nose, and she reinvented herself."

From all that I have read over the years, it seems pretty clear to me, that if Alma hadn't contracted cancer, John would have divorced Cynthia and married Alma, as they had already discussed and planned this.

He wouldn't have given Yoko a second look.

Just think about that for a minute and how it might have impacted on two things:

The Beatles as a band - and John Lennon personally.

John marries Alma so there is no Yoko.

Tensions in the Beatles would have been much reduced because of this. History has shown, that Yoko played a key part in many disagreements in the band that eventually led to the break-up.

All things point to the fact that there would have been a better than even chance that the group might not have broken up in 1970.

I don't think they would have.

This would have meant, that Abbey Road would not have been their last album.

The greatest rock band the world has ever seen, would have made more music together. Probably much more. They had loads of material, all of them. (*Check out my article about Hot As Sun*)

Just the thought of that, is sending shivers...

Because of their love, John would have stayed in England to live with Alma.

That means, that New York, the Dakota Building, Mark David Chapman and the tragic event of December 8th, 1980, would never have happened.



Just the thought of *that*, is sending shivers of a different kind...

Just think what John would have given to us - and hopefully would continue to be giving us to this day - if he was still here.



There would have been some gems. Without any doubt. Possibly masterpieces.

As he got older, he would probably have been writing with Paul again.

There would have been live gigs. Collaborations. Books.

And much more...

How I fucking hate cancer and Chapman for taking John from us...

'There are places I'll remember, all my life, though some have changed

Some forever not for better, some have gone and some remain

*All these places have their moments, with lovers and friends
I still can recall*

Some are dead and some are living

In my life, I've loved them all..'