

Now And Then - John Lennon's Forgotten Masterpiece

Written by Andy Owen



It was November 1978.

John Lennon was in the kitchen of his luxury apartment at the Dakota Building in New York City.

He was preparing dinner for himself, Yoko and Sean.

Sean was just over 3 years old, having been born on John's 35th birthday, October 9th 1975.

John was alone and as he was chopping up some vegetables, he started to hum a tune. It was a new tune that had entered his consciousness a few minutes earlier.

He was already mentally structuring the song as he concentrated on it - and soon had a verse and a large part of a chorus. He left the kitchen and walked to his music room and grabbed his small cassette player.

He checked it was working OK and dropped a new cassette tape into the machine and hit record.

He hummed the tune, using gobbledegook words and, when he'd done, casually returned down the hall to the kitchen.

What he didn't realise then, was one of his greatest songs had just been born.

But, what is truly amazing about this song, is that most people in the world never got to hear it. And, as I'm writing this in March 2021, most people in the world have still not heard it.

If you stay with this article, you won't be one of them. And, if you have any emotion in your body, when you hear it, it will hit you very hard.

Yes, it's that good.

More of that, later. First, let me paint a picture.

You will have heard of John's 'lost weekend'. He left Yoko and went on a wild, alcohol and drug-induced bender. His main partner in crime was Harry Nilsson.



Why it was referred to as a 'weekend', I have no idea. It was quite a lot more than a weekend.

It lasted from the summer of 1973 until early in 1975.

After 4 years of marriage, John and Yoko's relationship was in trouble. John moved out and started an affair with the assistant that worked for them - May Pang.



Funnily enough, Yoko was happy with the split. She told The Telegraph in 2012:

"The affair was not something that was hurtful to me," I needed a rest. I needed space. Can you imagine every day of getting this vibration from people of hate?

You want to get out of that." This was a reference to many fan's belief that she was the main reason The Beatles broke up.

"John became a little restless on top of that, so I thought it's better to give him a rest and me a rest. May Pang was a very intelligent, attractive woman and extremely efficient. I thought they'd be OK."

Lennon and Pang's relationship was strong. It was also very sexually charged and they split their time between her New York City apartment and a house they rented in Los Angeles.

Away from Yoko, John began drinking heavily and taking drugs. In Los Angeles, he started to work closely with producer Phil Spector.



Despite the substance abuse, John was musically productive during this period.

He completed three albums, 'Mind Games', 'Walls and Bridges' and 'Rock 'n' Roll', as well as producing LP's for Nilsson and Ringo. He released the single 'Whatever Gets You Through the Night', from Walls and Bridges - and it became John's first solo number 1 hit in the U.S.

Elton John played piano on the track and provided backing vocals.

John and Harry were living on the edge most of the time and, for obvious reasons, the media were never far away.



Probably the most famous incident of the 'lost weekend' happened in March 1974.

John and Harry were at the legendary Troubadour club in West Hollywood for a performance by the Smothers Brothers.

The story goes that John was introduced to Brandy Alexanders for the first time on that night - and he was taking drugs as well. He was pretty high.

So was Harry, who apparently encouraged him to misbehave. And misbehave John did. It was not pretty to watch.

John heckled the brothers constantly. He was warned a couple of times, but continued.

John and Harry were both thrown out.

The pictures of this unsavoury incident were flashed around the world.



All through this wild period, John was in regular telephone contact with Yoko. Some say daily. In late 1974, they were having talks about a reconciliation.

Yoko was very worried about John. She saw the images from *The Troubadour* and heard other similar stories too. She knew he was in need of help to get him off this seemingly headlong dive into oblivion.

She wanted him to come home to their apartment at *The Dakota* in New York, to try and work it all out. They talked about it many times - and finally John succumbed.

In early 1975, John left May Pang and went back to Yoko.

Sean Ono Lennon was born in New York on October 9th, 1975.



This was to start five years of domestic calm for the Lennon family.

"The number one priority is the family," he told *Playboy*. " Everything else revolves around that."

He took a five-year hiatus from the music industry and became a house-husband. He raised Sean, while Yoko took care of all John's business affairs.



Many years later, Sean described the relationship with his father...

"I have a lot of memories of just talking with him, hanging out and watching TV. I recall we watched the Muppets a lot. Dad loved the Muppets.

Saying "Good night" to me was an intimate moment.

It was just me and him. There was something so soothing about his voice. And he did this really cute thing:

He would flick the lights on and off in rhythm to whatever he would say. He would say, "Good night, Sean" and the lights would go click, click, click.

It just made me feel so cosy".

The song that came into John's head in the kitchen in 1978 had moved on from its initial outline. John had taken it from the hummed basics into a nearly completed song.

He called it 'Now And Then'.

He recorded it simply as a solo vocal track with piano, on to a cassette.

He had done this with other songs too.

In January 1994, Paul McCartney was given two tape cassettes by Yoko. They included home recordings of some of the songs John never completed or released commercially.

The songs on one of the tapes were 'Free as a Bird' and 'Real Love'.

I'm sure you will know the story of what happened with these two songs.

Using the extraordinary talents of Jeff Lynne, these very basic recordings were cleaned up and then enhanced with new overdubs and rewritten sections from Paul, George and Ringo.



The result was astonishing. Two new Beatles songs, released 25 years after the band split up - and 15 years after John was murdered.

The two songs on the other tape given to Paul, were 'Grow Old With Me' and 'Now and Then'.

'Grow Old With Me', was a love song for Yoko and was eventually released on John and Yoko's album 'Milk and Honey', four years after John's death.

This second tape allegedly had scribbled on it 'For Paul'. Many people have since taken this to mean that 'Now and Then' was written about Paul.

I don't think so. And I'll give you my reasons a bit later.

'Now and Then' has a real mystery about it.

Apparently, as was the case with 'Real Love', a 60-cycle mains hum can be heard throughout the basic demo recording. However, it was noticeably louder on 'Now and Then', making it much harder to remove.

In March 1995, Jeff Lynne, Paul, George and Ringo began work on 'Now and Then' by recording a rough backing track that was to be used as an overdub.



However, after only two days of recording, all work on the song stopped. Any plans for a third reunion single were scrapped permanently.

Jeff Lynne said at the time, that sessions for 'Now and Then' consisted only of "one day—one afternoon, really — messing with it. We did the backing track, a rough go that we really didn't finish."

During a Jeff Lynne documentary I saw in 2012, Paul McCartney said about the song: "And there was another one that we started working on, but George went off it. That one's still lingering around, so I'm going to nick in with Jeff and do it. We'll finish it, one of these days."

Heavy and consistent press reports in 2005 and 2006 speculated that Paul and Ringo would release a complete version of the song in the future.

On 29 April 2007, the *Daily Express* reported that the song might be released to coincide with the Beatles catalogue being released for the first time via digital download.

Additional reports circulated that same year, that Paul was hoping to complete the song as a 'Lennon–McCartney composition' by writing new verses, laying down a new drum track recorded by Ringo - and utilising archival recordings of George's guitar work.

In February 2009, the same version of Lennon's recording was released on a bootleg CD, taken from a different source, with none of the buzz which hampered the attempted Beatles recording of the song in 1995.

Then, a popular mix surfaced in 2007 called the "1995 edit". This consists of John's original demo along with instrumental overdubs (claimed to be by an artist by the name 'iamaphoney').

It has been suggested by some, that this mix does contain the work that the three surviving members of the Beatles recorded in 1995. I don't think so.

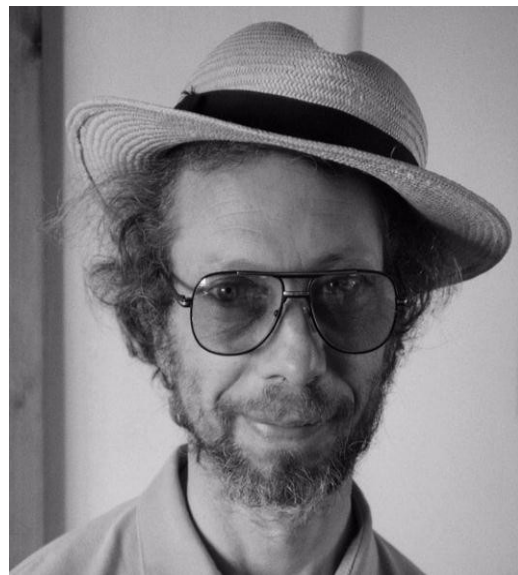
But, here's where it gets even more interesting...

Recent reports on the Internet Beatles grapevine, say the song WAS finished by Paul McCartney a number of years ago.

Apparently, there were a number of sessions by Paul over a two to three-year period. Former Beatle engineers Ken Scott and Eddie Klein have both said publicly, that the song was finished and sounds very 'Beatley'



Ken Scott



Eddie Klein

Klein actually engineered the sessions during which McCartney embellished and finished the song. All four Beatles are on the track, according to Klein and Scott.

But a cloak of mystery still envelops this song. Why, it's difficult to understand.

Whatever the truth is about this song, one thing is certain.

'Now and Then' is a John Lennon *masterpiece*. Yes, I know. 'Masterpiece' is a massive word.

But this is a massive piece of art. It is up there with his very best.

The pure emotion of it, will take your breath away.

It will probably make you cry.

It is haunting, beautiful and majestic.

Here it is, in its original form.

Just John, at his piano in The Dakota, recorded over 42 years ago, into a cheap cassette player.

Now and Then

Here are the original unfinished lyrics:

'Now and Then'

I know it's true, it's all because of you
And if I make it through, it's all because of you
And now and then, if we must start again
Well we will know for sure, that I love you

I don't want to lose you – oh no, no, no
Lose you or abuse you – oh no, no, no, sweet doll
But if you have to go, away
If you have to go...
Now and then, I miss you
Oh now and then, I...
I know it's true to me...

I know it's true, it's all because of you
And if you go away, I know you...

I don't want to lose you – oh no, no, no
Abuse you or confuse you – oh no, no, no, sweet darl'
But if you had to go, away
Well I won't stop you babe
And if you had to go

So, who was this song aimed at?

Paul?

I really don't think so. The words don't fit.

I think the words 'For Paul' scribbled on the tape, were more about letting Paul see if he can do anything with these basic songs.

Nothing more than that, in my humble opinion.

In my view, this song was written about a woman. The choice of words and the emotion of the song, very much point this way.

There are two obvious candidates - Yoko and May Pang.

In October 1980 John released the single '(Just Like) Starting Over,' ahead of the November release of his album Double Fantasy, his last studio album before he was murdered by Chapman the following month.

On that album was a track called 'Woman'. Clearly, this was written about Yoko.

But, little has been written about the fact that May Pang remained in close contact with John until his death.

She married record producer Tony Visconti in 1989 and the couple had two children. They divorced in 2000.

In a 2015 interview, Pang referred to her split with John at the end of the 'lost weekend,' as a 'grey zone.'

She recalled that at in early 1975, they were looking at buying a home in the Hamptons - but then, suddenly, John returned to Yoko.

May Pang has said she remained romantically involved with John for several years after their split - and the last time she saw him was in the winter of 1978.

Around the time he wrote the song...

