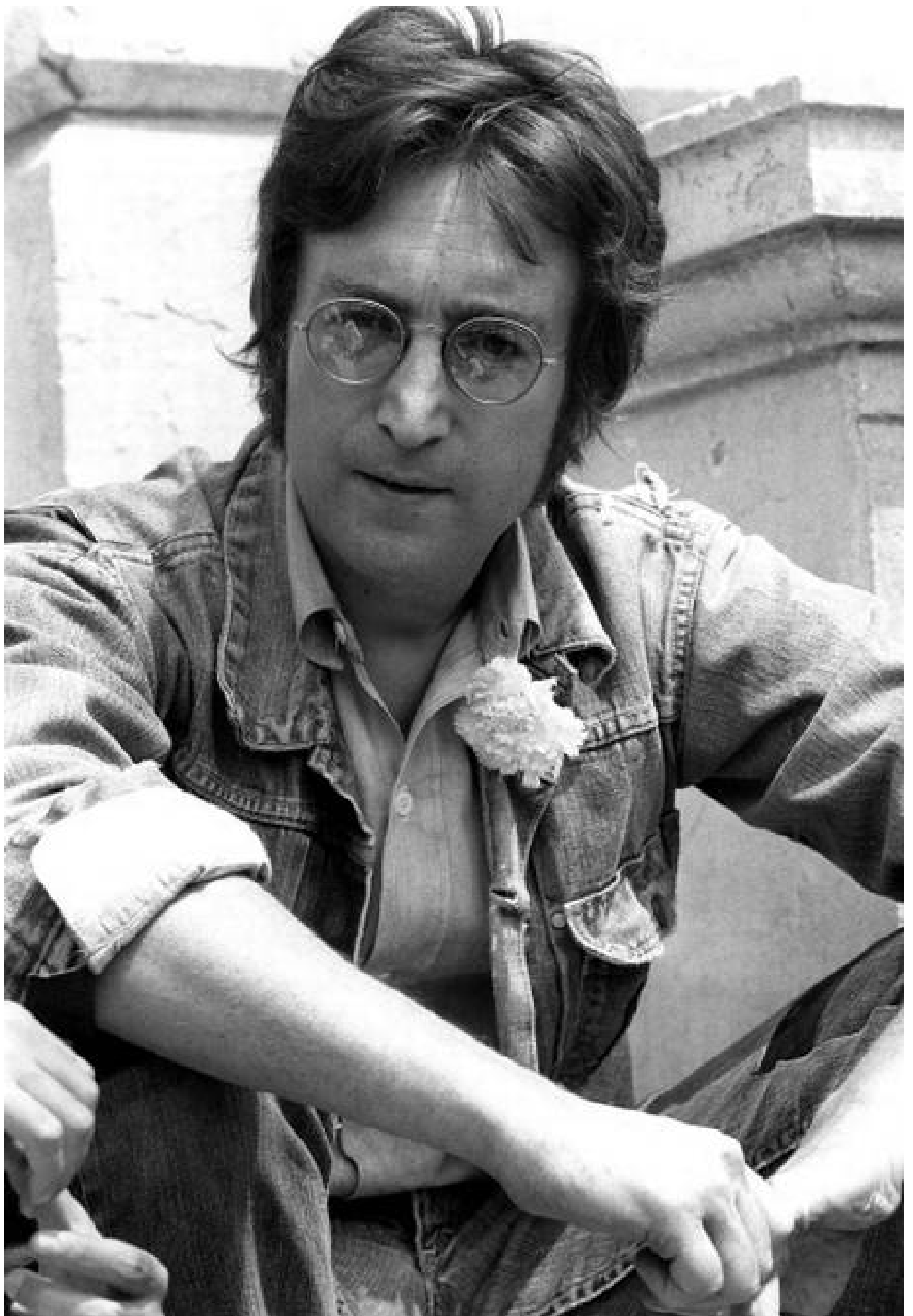


METROPLUS

A fairy tale called 'Imagine'



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CHENNAI:, DECEMBER 07, 2015 16:07 IST

UPDATED: DECEMBER 07, 2015 20:47 IST

Thirty-five years after John Lennon's death, the world continues to draw inspiration from his famous song.

It's been decades since I read my last fairy tale. But there is one fairy tale that I've never really outgrown and this is how the story goes – “Once upon a time, in the hard, scrappy, port town of Liverpool, there lived a boy who was abandoned by his parents. While he was still a teenager, he formed a band which would go on to become the greatest Rock N Roll band of all time. He gained fame and fortune beyond his wildest dreams. At the height of his fame, he was perhaps the most influential figure on the planet. He made **music** that millions of people would love. He sang songs about hope, peace and love and he asked the world to imagine.”

Thirty-five years ago, this story came to an end in a most un-fairytale-like manner, when John Lennon was shot dead outside his home in New York.

I was 16 when that happened, and there has never been a time since then when I'm not reminded of Lennon in some way or another. It's either a song playing in a restaurant, an article, a poster or a song on the radio.

Just a few weeks back, I was watching the TV coverage of the Paris terrorist attacks, when a group of mourners were caught off-guard, when a German pianist set up his grand piano outside the Bataclan Concert Hall, where most of the killings happened, and began playing a heartrending version of Lennon's 'Imagine'. That video went viral.

Lennon's 'Imagine' seems to be the 'go to' song in a crisis, or whenever the world requires solace and a bit of hope. Stevie Wonder gave his rendition of 'Imagine' during the closing ceremony of the 1996 Summer Olympics, as a tribute to the victims of the Centennial Olympic Park bombing. In 2001, Neil Young performed 'Imagine' at a 9/11 memorial concert. Madonna performed her version of 'Imagine' during the benefit concert, Tsunami Aid. Peter Gabriel performed the song during the 2006 Winter Olympics opening ceremony. Every year, for the last ten years, the song has been played before the ball drop at New York's Time Square on New Year's eve. On October 9, 1990, more than one billion people listened to a broadcast of the song on what would have been Lennon's 50th birthday. Earlier this year in January, an impromptu version of 'Imagine' was sung in Paris by hundreds of people at a rally after the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks.

But 'Imagine' is not a song that tells you that things will get better. It's a song that tells you to look inwards and go to the source of the problem. It asks you to look at everything –

your relationship to possessions, country and religion. Do your possessions own you, rather than the other way around? Is your religion, which preaches love, actually creating hate?

We live in troubled times. These are days when the difference between a patriot and terrorist depends on which side you're on. And the people who are mourning these senseless murders seem to understand this.

A German pianist playing an instrumental take of an Englishman's song to a group of French mourners, is telecast to people all over the world – many of whom don't speak a word of English – and everyone knows what the song is about. Jimmy Carter said, "In many countries around the world, you hear John Lennon's song 'Imagine' used almost equally with national anthems."

It is one of the most covered songs of all time, and there are numerous versions in all genres, ranging from Jazz to Western Classical to Pop, Rock and Rap. But for me, the best version is still the stripped down, eloquently simple one that John Lennon did.

Thirty-five years after his death, I can clearly remember how I first felt when I heard that nasal, thin reedy voice singing – "Imagine there's no countries. It isn't hard to do. Nothing to kill or die for, and no religion too..."

We believe in fairytales not because they tell us that dragons exist, but because they tell us that dragons can be beaten... and that most of the dragons and demons are inside us. This is perhaps why, even though John Lennon is no longer with us, the world still believes in a fairytale called 'Imagine'.

Printable version | Nov 14, 2018 10:25:19 AM |

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