

A conversation with John Lennon and Yoko Ono

London, October 1969
by Robbie Dale



In October 1969, Robbie Dale interviewed John Lennon and Yoko Ono in the executive offices of the Apple corporation, Saville Road in London. They told him freely about their new band, the Plastic Ono Band, their new records and their then-current plans. The interview was lost for over 35 years and now is published for the first time.

The following conversation took place between John Lennon of the Beatles, his wife Yoko Ono, and Robbie Dale in the executive offices of the Apple corporation, Saville Road in London. Robbie Dale encountered the Lenon's sitting down to a linen, crystal and silver spread for a mid-afternoon breakfast.

The interviewer, Robbie Dale, otherwise known as the Admiral, is a former English pirate disc jockey from Radio Caroline. He currently has his own television show for the second year in Holland. Titled "Jam," a monthly, hour-long show. It features British and American pop groups, current fashion and pop news. He continues to work for radio on a nationwide pop station, has recently released his own record and is the owner of the Admiralty Publishing company in London. Robbie Dale's opening remarks carried greetings from Amsterdam, the site of their last meeting. John Lennon's reply went: "Dank u wel [Dutch for thank you] and hot chocolate.

Robbie Dale: Last time we met was when you were on your honeymoon lying in bed in Amsterdam. That had a great reaction from the Dutch people and the results, I'm

sure, gave you a great sense of achievement.



Yoko Ono: Oh yes, we had a beautiful time.

John Lennon: We miss Amsterdam already. It's like remembering Paris in the springtime without even getting out of bed. We really miss the window and the view from the top floor of the Hilton Hotel. We did another bed-in in Montreal. It was different. It was great, but a completely different atmosphere.

Robbie Dale: Which was the better bed-in?

John Lennon: They were completely different. Amsterdam was romantic because it was the honeymoon. Montreal was much tougher and more like hard work because there were a lot of Americans there and the pressure was much greater.

Robbie Dale: Well, since then, you have formed your Plastic Ono Band and the record "Give Peace A Chance" was a great hit in many countries and a number one in Holland.

John Lennon: Great! Fantastic!

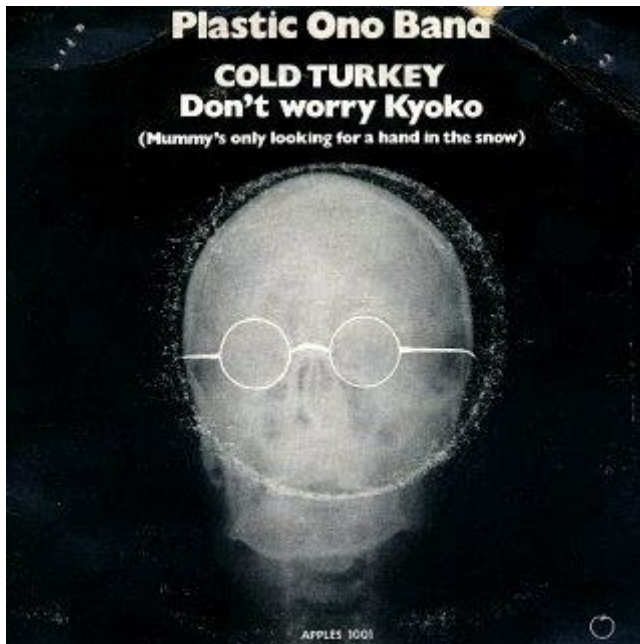
Robbie Dale: Can you tell me a little about the conception of the Plastic Ono Band?

John Lennon: It originally started off as Yoko's idea as a band a kind of joke, a concert band that didn't exist. Like people manufacture the Monkeys or the so-called bubblegum groups in the States. You know, where a guy gets a bunch of lads together and then gets a computer to write the music. And then they put it out and have hits. It's valid music, of course. But Yoko came up with the idea for a band that were really plastic. They were physically plastic, transparent, like ghosts. So we made that band and it played tapes and records and it even had television. It was like a giant juke box in a way. We hoped to go on tour with it.



Yoko Ono: All this materialized with John's help, of course. It always happens this way whatever we do because most of my ideas are conceptual and when they are just about ready to disappear, we pick up each others ideas and get them to materialize. It happens very nicely that way.

John Lennon: So, we turned it from a conceptual band into a real band. It really happened because we made the "Give Peace A Chance" recording in the second



bed-in in Montreal and we thought we'd already done enough publicity in a way. We built the whole the whole group so we thought why not call it the Plastic Ono Band instead of just John and Yoko for the fact that there were all sorts of people singing on it. It wasn't the Beatles, it was like a rabbi, a hotel waiter, and all things like that. It was a bit of everybody. The whole world is the Plastic Ono Band. So that's how we plugged it. And then we went to Toronto just on the spur of the moment and we performed and they announced us as the Plastic Ono Band even though we went over there as John and Yoko, Eric Clapton, Klaus Voormann and Alan White. The

announcer sort of said, "This is the Plastic Ono Band." Well, then we made the single "Cold Turkey" and we were thinking of having a new group and calling it something else, changing the name. But we decided not to change it because it was already like a household name and everybody knew of the Plastic Ono. So we're lumbered with the Plastic Ono Band.

Like, I went to the studio the other night, with George and Ringo backing Leon somebody who used to work with Delaney and Bonnie and there are half American and half British musicians, half American and half British engineers. Everybody's mixing in and even though there are contracts with record companies, everybody is playing on everybody else's records. Eric [Clapton] plays on our records. George [Harrison] plays on Eric's records. Everybody is intermingling, really breaking down the barriers. And the Plastic Ono Band is a sort of symbol of that. Anybody can be in it. So this Leon guy has a great idea. He's got Charlie Watts and Bill Wyman [Rolling Stones] backing him on one track on his album. He has got Ringo and George on another track. This idea of intermingling and "we all play together," it's not just the Beatles, The Stones, the this, the that anymore. It breaks down all that.

Robbie Dale: A title that seems to be taking over in the pop world at the moment is "supergroup" and now that you've associated yourself with Eric Clapton and others, the Plastic Ono Band is qualifying for this title. What have you to say?

Yoko Ono: It will go on being super-super, I hope.

John Lennon: Super groups are a bit of a joke. All the musicians think it's embarrassing for them to be called supergroups because Eric Clapton is super, Yoko is super and I think I'm super. But to be called a super group is a joke. It's a fad and just won't stay in the language. I think there are a lot of supergroups who were super, before some journalist dreamt up the name.

Robbie Dale: Do you think it was just an excuse to cover up for all the top groups who have recently disbanded and reformed with stronger line-ups?

John Lennon: It's not an excuse, it was just a way of explaining Elvis, Bing Crosby

and Louis Armstrong playing together. Some journalist just thought of the tag and it just caught on.

Yoko Ono: But it's alright in a sense though. I mean that I know for someone like you, John, as a musician, you don't like that kind of thing, you're being labeled and tagged.

~~The following written conversation took place~~
The following conversation ~~recorded~~ ^{took place} between John Lennon of The Beatles, his wife, Yoko Ono and Robbie Dale occurred in the executive office of ~~The~~ Apple ~~recording~~ ^{the} corporation, Saville Pond in London. Mr. Dale, on one of his frequent visits to London, from his home in Amsterdam encountered the Lennons during their mid-afternoon breakfast at a laiter linen and crystal spread for mid-afternoon breakfast. Robbie Dale, the interviewer, ~~Robbie Dale~~, otherwise known as the Admiral, is a former dive jockey on the English pirate radio station, Radio Caroline. He recently has his own ~~monthly~~ ^{called} TV show, Sam, in Holland. This is a monthly hour long ~~show~~ ^{show} featuring British and American pop groups, fashion and pop news. ~~Robbie Dale~~, a former Londoner, now resides in Amsterdam with his wife. ~~He also~~ continues to work for radio on an nationwide pop station, has recently released his own record and is the owner of the Admiralty Publishing company in London. Mr. Dale's opening remarks in ~~his interview were in Dutch~~ ^{carried greetings from} Amsterdam, the site of the Lennons' honeymoon. John Lennon replied: P

John Lennon: Yet, too much was expected of Blind Faith even though they did well. The pre-publicity on them was too much and people were expecting, miracles from them. Too much is expected of everybody.

Yoko Ono: With the Plastic Ono Band, this won't happen because we're not saying we're it. We're saying you are it. So it's not the fact that people are going to expect something from us. They must expect it from themselves.

John Lennon: It's like the new single "Cold Turkey" out any day now. It's so different from "Give Peace A Chance" and it's all Plastic Ono Band. It's a completely different sound even though Yoko and I are on it.

Robbie Dale: Let me ask you about this. As a follow up, the public were expecting big choir effect as was on "Give Peace ..." but you have progressed into a completely new sound with "Cold Turkey." People are tagging it with the label anti-drugs. Is that so?

John Lennon: It's neither anti-drugs nor anti-alcohol. It has not any connection with drugs anymore than it has with the experience you have 36 hours of rolling in pain. That's what miscarriage is, let's face it: 36 hours of rolling in pain. I caught a chill in hospital while Yoko was having a miscarriage and I had what I would term "Cold Turkey" after it. That is a fever of 100 degrees. I was hot and cold for about two days which is like 36 hours. Everybody goes through a bit of agony some time or another in their lives, what ever it is. "Cold Turkey" is just an expression that I would have thought is suitable to explain the other side of life. I'm always thinking about love and peace and now I'm thinking about agony to remind people that I'm human and that we suffer like everybody else. This is the after effects.

Yoko Ono: Yes, it is like this. There are two sides or many sides to life and it's sad

that all the famous groups have an image that is always nice. But in life, there are moments of sadness, crying and laughing. Even though we do love each other, we have moments of sadness because we are human. Much of the sadness is imposed on us from the outside world, much more than we create between us.

Robbie Dale: Let me come closer to the pair of you by asking a little about your new wedding album.

John Lennon: Ah, yes, the wedding album. The wedding album is John and Yoko's album as opposed to the Plastic Ono's album. It is a two sided LP and you are on it, Robbie.

Robbie Dale: So we can expect parts of the Amsterdam scene on it?

John Lennon: It's more like a book or a packet that happens to have a record in it. There's photographs of us from Amsterdam, all the

cartoons of us from all over the world, we collected readers letters, press releases in all sorts of languages, handouts in Dutch, English, everything. It's a really beautiful packet. It probably will cost more than an ordinary LP because there is so much packaging. That comes out in about three or four weeks. It's a love and peace album and a wedding album. Instead of us making a private wedding album, we made a public one. And we have another LP coming out in about two weeks. It's the Plastic Ono Band album which is the live recording we made in Toronto which goes from "Blue Suede Shoes" to the pure howling from Yoko. It covers the whole gamut. So we have quite a lot of product coming out.



Yoko Ono: Well, it's so difficult. John and I are often talking about constipation in a sense that both of us are always getting ideas. Like twenty ideas a day or something. It's just so difficult to get them out. Especially now that John's experienced the privilege of being one of those privileged people that whenever he does anything, it immediately comes out like a record.

John Lennon: When you make pop records, it's a pretty fast process. You can almost have it out within a week. The game Yoko was in, she would have an idea for an art show or a sculpture or something and it's so hard to break through that field because it's a closed shop. You would think that the

art world is very progressive, but it's not. It's like pre-Beatles or pre-rock and roll in the pop world. You can't get in there. It takes ten years. So she's got her ideas constipated. She's had recognition in the States and Japan and Britain in the art world but still she's constipated. She's started turning me on to have or use ideas that aren't just records. When I started to think about acorns or something like that, packages or books, it takes so long to get them out. Now we are both constipated. But even the Beatles are constipated with material for songs. George writes so many, Paul and I and Ringo are writing so many. We can't get them out fast enough. If we could get it out as fast as a daily paper, it would be beautiful. You know, if we could get a single out every day and an LP out every week like we get the Sunday colour supplement.

Yoko Ono: His acorn idea took over a year to materialize [sending acorns to all the world leaders as a peace symbol].

John Lennon: About the sculptural idea I had, they wouldn't even let us into the main gallery. All these sculptural people said that we better not put your sculpture in with the others because it's not fair to them because of all the publicity you've had. In effect, they said we just want to keep the 1880 sculpture with the thin figure, the same old piece of rock.

Robbie Dale: Can we now come up to 1969? [John Lennon: suuuuuure!] Your commercial figures have just been published and it is claimed that you have sold more than 12 million records in the first twelve months of the Apple Organization's existence.

John Lennon: Well that's beautiful. Apple is the most successful new record company in the world.

Robbie Dale: This is a tremendous achievement because in the beginning, when you started the Apple corporation, many criticized you and said you would never get it off the ground because of all the lunatic ideas you [Beatles] have. You've proved otherwise by succeeding beyond all expectations.

John Lennon: we made a few mistakes in the beginning because it was a new venture. We wanted to be the Ford Foundation of the record industry. But the way Henry Ford did it was the other way around. He started with nothing. We never did want to graft people into the ground to make the brass. We are a little bit idealistic. Apple turned out to be a beautiful thing.

Robbie Dale: Now having this report in the bag, how do you feel financially, because the last time we met in Amsterdam, you told me that you were losing money and you were not so well off?

John Lennon: Well, it fluctuates. When all the Associated Television dealing was going on with Northern Songs, one day I was a millionaire and the next day I was broke. So I couldn't tell you exactly how much money I had at the time. I can still afford to live well. Nobody has taken my home off me and I've still got a car and all the cigarettes I need, so I must be all right. But it fluctuates. It's only paper, you know, like monopoly, You can never actually cash all those bits of paper. Shares and things don't mean a thing. I sometimes get frustrated because I want to cash it all in and I've

John Lennon Interview

when: Thursday, October 23
where: In the Apple Building, Saville Road, London.
Yoko Ono included.
Atmosphere: In the executive office, during mid-afternoon breakfast spread.

Robbie: -

Lennon: Dankuvel, Hot Chocolate. you
Robbie: Last time we had a long chat was when ~~we~~ were on your honeymoon in Amsterdam. Lying in bed, ~~that~~ that had a great reaction on the Dutch people and the results, I'm sure gave you a sense of achievement.

Yoko: Oh, yes, we had a very beautiful time.
Lennon: We miss Amsterdam already, it's like remembering Paris in the Spring without even getting out of bed. We really miss the window and the view ~~xxxxx~~ from the top floor of the Hilton Hotel. We did another bed-in in Montreal. It was different, it was great, but a completely different atmosphere. (Rings ~~xxxxx~~)

Robbie: Which was the better bed-in?
Lennon: They were completely different. Amsterdam was romantic because it was the honeymoon. Montreal was much tougher and more like hard work because there were a lot of Americans there and the pressure was much greater.

Robbie: Well, since then you have formed your Plastic Ono Band and the record "Give Peace A Chance" was a great hit in many countries and No. 1 in Holland.

Lennon: Great! Fantastic!

Robbie: Can you tell me a little about the conception of the Plastic Ono B.?
Lennon: It originally started off as Yoko's idea as a band, a kind of a joke, a concert band that didn't exist, but like people manufacture the Monkeys or the so-called bubble gum groups in the States, ~~well~~, you know, where a guy gets a bunch of lads together and then gets a computer to write the music. And then they put it out and have hits, and it's valid music of course. But Yoko came up with the idea for a band that were really Plastic. They were physically plastic, transparent, like ghosts. So we made that band and ~~we~~ it played tapes and records and it even had television. It was like a giant juke box in a way. We hoped to go on tour with it.

Yoko: ~~And~~ this materialized with John's help of course. It always happens this way whatever we do because most of my ideas are to conceptual and ~~they~~ are just about to disappear when we pick up each other's ideas and ~~then~~ them to materialize and it happens very nicely that way.

John: So, we turned it from a conceptual band into a real band. It really happened ~~xxxxx~~ because we made the "Give Peace A Chance" in the second bed-in in Montreal and we thought we'd already done publicity in a way, ~~and~~ we built the whole group so we thought why not call the record Plastic Ono Band instead of just John and Yoko. For the fact that there were all sorts of people singing on it, it wasn't the Beatles, it was like a rabbi, a hotel waiter, and all things like that, a bit of everybody. The whole world is the Plastic Ono Band. So that's how we plugged it. An then we went to Toronto just on the spur of the moment and we performed and they announced us as the Plastic Ono Band even though we went over as John and Yoko, Eric Clapton, Klaus Foreman, Allen White. The announcer sort of said, "This is the Plastic Ono B." Well, then we made the single "Cold Turkey" and we were thinking of having a new group and calling it something else, changing the name, but we decided not to change the ~~if~~ name because it was already like a household name and everybody knew of the Plastic Ono. So we lumbered with the Plastic Ono Band. See all the musicians these days, like I went to the studio the other night, with George and Ringo backing Leon somebody who used to work with Delaney and Bonnie and there were half American and half British musicians, half American, half British engineers. Everybody's mixing in and even though there are contracts with record companies, everybody is playing on everybody else's records. Eric plays on our records (Clapton). George plays on Eric's records. Everybody's intermingling, really breaking down the barriers. And the Plastic Ono Band is sort of a symbol of that Anybody can be in it. So this Leon guy has a great idea.

a pile of half crowns, you know, to see it. We could always play on the street if worst came to worst. I'm always worried about the taxes, too, because they're such a big thing and I don't want to have to end like Mickie Rooney, having to work just to pay the taxes off. We're still paying taxes from a few years ago when we earned vast amounts on tour in America during the Beatlemania years and now it's very hard because we've got to earn the same kind of money to pay those taxes off. It's hard to earn the same kind of money as it was during Beatlemania.

Yoko Ono: He shouldn't end up being somebody who has to work on things he doesn't like, compromising his own work just to pay off taxes.

John Lennon: I don't want to end up doing TV ads to keep myself going. I would do it, I wouldn't be ashamed of doing it but I wouldn't want to have to write crummy commercial songs that I don't like because I've got to earn a bit of bread.

Robbie Dale: Can you give us any news on the other Beatles and what they are doing at the moment?



John Lennon: Ringo is trying to get together Ringo Star Time, his new TV show and I think he's trying to get Elvis and Frank Sinatra on his show. He's in California now. Paul's trying to convince everybody that he's not dead. Have you heard all about these rumors that are sweeping America? Yoko and I have been getting letters and they all say that he has been dead since 1966 or some rubbish like that. Actually Paul's had a baby which is the main thing he's done lately. I haven't seen the baby yet because we've either been in hospital or in the studios. And George has been recording Doris Troy at the moment and he's got a new Jackie Lomax and Billy Preston single coming

out soon. Everybody's working like the clappers. Paul was recording the Iveys and the Magic Christian soundtrack for Ringo's film. So we've all been in different studios. I've bumped into George and Ringo lately but I haven't seen Paul since the Associated Television meetings because we all had to come together for that. We had to come in every day, the four of us together and hear all these high finance talk and figures.

Robbie Dale: Do you understand all high finance stuff you've been doing?

John Lennon: If I can keep myself alert, perfectly tuned. It's like a maths or history lesson at school. If you really strain, you can just about follow what they are going on about. When he said: "What do you think now?" you've got to be really careful because it's our money they are talking about. So we've got to try and hold on to it. But it's a big strain on us because we're not financiers.

Robbie Dale: Do you think you've got the right kind of people around you now, the brains, the accountants and lawyers that you obviously need in an enterprise of this size?

John Lennon: I think it's getting better. We've gradually changed our accountants over the last few years. We now have this Allen Klein guy who we believe in, he's been with us eight months. He came just in time as far as I'm concerned and as far as the Beatles are concerned.



Robbie Dale: Anything spectacular going to happen in the near future?

John Lennon: I couldn't say because spectacular things are happening every day.

Yoko Ono: We're so impulsive, we never know what is going to happen within the next hour. We hope that the next event will be "Cold Turkey" at number one followed by the album Live Peace From Toronto.

Robbie Dale: Terrific: How would you like to introduce your new record?

John Lennon: Alright, get ready folks for the Plastic Ono Band which is going to send the horrors up your back bone, it's called "Cold Turkey" and if you dare, play the other side.

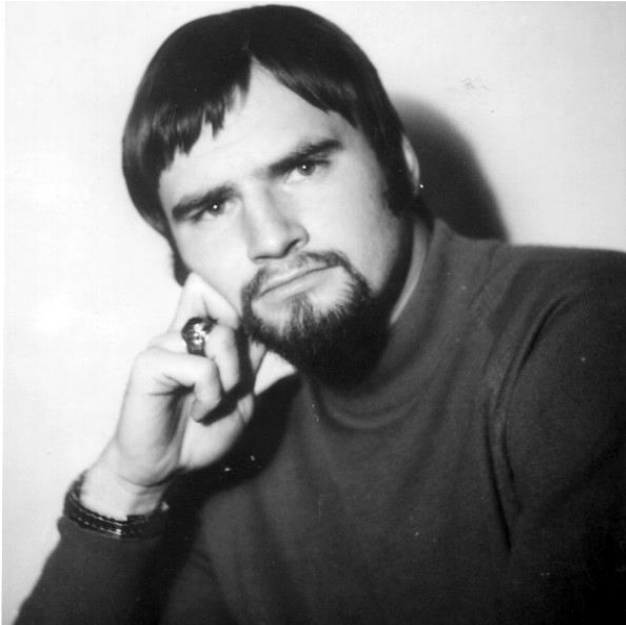
Robbie Dale: Thanks a lot, John and Yoko.

John Lennon: Love, peace, we miss you. Dankuvel and hot chocolate.

The recovery of a long lost interview

Afterword by Hans Knot

In January 2006, a lady from Amsterdam by the name of Hoodle van Leeuwen,



contacted me. My address was given her by some people at the Dutch Broadcast Archive in Hilversum. They'd advised her to contact me as I had researched and written a lot about the subject of Offshore Radio. The reason why she contacted me were a couple of boxes that had been lying in her cellar for over 35 years. The official owner was the American Dave Carmichael, who from 1968 up till late 1970 used to live in the same building at the Prinsengracht in Amsterdam as Hoodle van Leeuwen. Carmichael left the place with the promise to return in a years time, after a trip to Scandinavia. However, he never returned to Holland and so the unique material was kept

hidden in the cellar. Dave Carmichael is better known to radio listeners from Caroline in the 1960's and RNI in the 1970's as Carl Mitchell.

Carl Mitchell's archive proved to contain a lot of rare material including a typed-out version (see: appendix 1) as well as a partly handwritten transcription (see: appendix 2) of an interview with John Lennon and Yoko Ono. The interview was made in October 1969, in London by Robbie Robinson, who's better known as Robbie Dale. He had the transcription for some time at his home and then it suddenly disappeared. I've informed him that I now have recovered the interview in my archive and promised him to bring it to our meeting, in London, in the summer of 2007. My personal opinion is that Carl, who was a little swindler, tried to make some money from it. I scanned the introductory part of the handwritten section of the interview to Robbie Dale and he confirmed it was not his handwriting. Moreover, the way it was written suggests that the one who wrote the intro, was trying to sell the interview.

The boxes house all kind of letters from people complaining about having paid money to him in 1970 — after Carl advertised in the newspapers and the Dutch version of Musical Express, that a special RNI LP would be released. Those who invested in the enterprise should forget about it, as Carl took the money and left before a single album was released. Even letters from the publishing companys are found in which they ask for money, as the advertisements had not been paid for either. We can also see, from a letter from Camera Press, that he tried so sell Robbie's interview with John and Yoko to an English organisation. He tried same thing with some German magazines. However, after some 35 years, I can make Robbie Dale happy by returning the original transcription of the exclusive interview he had with John and Yoko. I myself am happy, in return, because Robbie Dale gave me the permission to publish the English version of the interview now in 2007.

