

# Arena



Imagine IMAGINE

***ARENA: Imagine IMAGINE***

**Saturday 20 September 2003 9:00pm**

**BBC TWO**

Director: **FREDERICK BAKER**

Film Editor: **DAVID HOWELL**

Executive Producer for ORF: **FRANZ GRABNER**

Arena Series Editor: **ANTHONY WALL**

**A BBC/ORF Co-Production**



## **ARENA: Imagine IMAGINE**

*Arena* examines the extraordinary popularity of the song *Imagine*, the poignant **John Lennon** classic which inspires love and loathing in equal measure. It first appeared as the title song of the classic album in 1971, it was subsequently released as a single three times. *Imagine* was voted the Nation's Favourite Song Lyric in a BBC poll and has to be one of the best known songs in world history.

At the centre of the film is **Yoko Ono**, now acknowledged as co-author of the song. She has commissioned *Imagine* billboards in Times Square and Piccadilly Circus, and has developed a range of *Imagine* baby products. She recently opened the renamed Liverpool John Lennon Airport, whose branding strap line is "*above us only sky*", the fourth line of the song.

"John is no longer with us," Yoko says. "I will use any means I can to get his message across". *Imagine* is the most perfect expression of that message. The film re-examines the intense creative relationship between the ultimate rock star and the little known concept artist to become the true ballad of John and Yoko. The story of how they met is a set English language text in Japanese schools.

*Imagine* rescued the Austrian broadcaster **Rainer Waigmann** from an alcohol driven suicide, gave hope to photographer **Yuri Mechitov**, former Leninist, now

‘Lennonist’, during the Georgian civil war, and is interpreted by the **Reverend Kemmyo Taira Sato**, Buddhist priest, as a Buddhist text.

For **John Carey**, Merton Professor of English at Oxford University it’s a hymn, for **Wilfrid Mellers**, Emeritus Professor of Music at York University, it’s a lullaby and **Dr Raj Persaud** of the Maudsley Hospital contends that the sentiments expressed in the song fill the void left by the decline in organised religion – he says it could be the start of a new religion.

Broadcaster and journalist **Robert Elms** detests the song, thinking it the worst ever written; for **George Galloway**, Labour MP for Glasgow Kelvin, it is the new socialist anthem and Nobel Prize-winning chemist **Professor Harry Kroto** cherishes it as a hymn to atheism. **Klaus Voorman**, who played the bass recalls Lennon’s state of mind during the recording.

Producer/director Frederick Baker says, “I think *Imagine*’s power lies in its simplicity and its ambiguity, which allows it to be appreciated all around the world by people of different faiths and beliefs.”

*Arena* explores the world of the song that may just be the true anthem of the new millennium.

## QUOTES FROM Imagine IMAGINE

*That's the one I like best - just on the piano.*

John Lennon - of *Imagine*

*Imagine Dr. King, Imagine Ghandi, Imagine John Lennon, Imagine Mandela...All the people living in peace.*

Rev. Jesse Jackson, Stop the War March, London, February  
2003

*Even though I listen to it every day it can still move me. You can find yourself going into a trance...and it's beautiful each time.*

Sandra Quayle, Curator The Beatles Story, Liverpool

*It's mawkish, it's sentimental... It's like a Victorian melodrama of a song.*

*It really doesn't deserve the status it has.*

Robert Elms, Journalist and broadcaster

*I have three religions: one atheism, Amnesty Internationalism and the third one is humanism. That's why my last record is by John Lennon - Imagine.*

BBC Radio: Desert Island Discs  
Sir Harry Kroto, Nobel prize-winning Chemist

*I had this extraordinary sense that someone was putting into poetry exactly my own beliefs. It was almost like a rush of blood when I first heard it... we played it ten times.*

George Galloway, MP and 'Lennonist'

*The key for this song to work, for many of its followers, is the credibility of John Lennon.*

Dr. Raj Persaud, Consultant Psychiatrist, Maudsley Hospital,  
London

*I feel as if the whole song is a Buddhist text. John Lennon talks about no religion, no heaven, no hell, no possessions - because all these things are illusions.*

Rev. Kemmyo Taira Sato, Buddhist Priest

*It's like a lullaby.. and lullabys put little children to sleep or even quite big ones and when you're asleep ...things that seem pretty impossible to deal with can be dealt with.*

Wilfrid Mellers, Emeritus Professor of Music, University of  
York

*I was going to kill myself and then Imagine came into my heart, into my soul - I can say John saved my life.*

Rainer Waigmann, Radio broadcaster, Vienna

*I think in the end it's a hymn, yes, a hymn.*

John Carey, Merton Professor of English Literature, Oxford  
University

*It's very important that people hear the song Imagine all around the world.*

Yoko Ono