



ALL TOGETHER NOW: Will the real John please stand up?

# Strawberry Fields, Back in Bloom

Twenty-eight songs. Nine actors. One white piano—and one extraordinary life. An exclusive look at the new musical 'Lennon,' as it finds its voice in San Francisco.

BY MARC PEYSER

IT'S A LITTLE-KNOWN FACT—AND, frankly, a little hard to imagine—but back in 1979, John Lennon and Yoko Ono started writing a Broadway musical. It was an oddly frivolous genre for the "angry" Beatle and a woman who once recorded her own orgasms, but love often led Mr. and Mrs. Lennon down unusual paths (see primal screams, bed-ins, etc.). Like much of their music, the show was a journey through their lives. "Predictably, we even had a title for it: 'The Ballad of John and Yoko,'" says Ono, sitting at the kitchen table in her apartment in the Dakota building in Manhattan, drinking from an IMAGINE coffee mug. They wrote some songs, including "Real Love" for the scene where the couple

was pretty experimental and avant-garde, but at the same time it was a happy story because there was no unhappy ending," says Ono. "We didn't know the ending then, did we?"

John and Yoko's musical died on a tragic day in 1980, of course. But last week, a \$7 million bio-musical called "Lennon" opened in San Francisco, with hopes to debut on Broadway in July. It's not the show John and Yoko envisioned, but a new and relatively simple production: nine actors, a white grand piano and 28 songs ("Give Peace a Chance," "Mother," "Beautiful Boy") culled



YESTERDAY: Lennon in New York City, 1974

will be surprised by "Lennon." For one thing, very little is heard from Paul, George and Ringo, though there's lots and lots of John. His dialogue is taken verbatim from his interviews and writings. There are also two unreleased Lennon songs—"India, India" and "I Don't Want to Lose You"—that Ono gave to Don Scardino, the show's writer-director. What's more, at various points, all nine actors put on the owlish glasses to play Lennon himself, including the four women and two black men. It's a theatrical trick Lennon would have loved. He didn't sing "I am he