

DYLAN, LENNON, MARX AND GOD

Bob Dylan and John Lennon are two of the most iconic names in popular music. Dylan is arguably the twentieth century's most important singer-songwriter. Lennon was founder and leader of the Beatles who remain, by some margin, the most covered songwriters in history. While Dylan erased the boundaries between pop and poetry, Lennon and his band transformed the genre's creative potential. The parallels between the two men are striking but underexplored. This book addresses that lack. Jon Stewart discusses Dylan's and Lennon's relationship; their politics; their understanding of history; and their deeply held spiritual beliefs. In revealing how each artist challenged the restrictive social norms of their day, the author shows how his subjects asked profound moral questions about what it means to be human and how we should live. His book is a potent meditation and exploration of two emblematic figures whose brilliance changed Western music for a generation.

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DYLAN, LENNON, MARX
AND GOD

JON STEWART



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In memory of my dad, George R. Stewart

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Preface

One hundred thousand Americans are dead from a virus. A feat of space flight demonstrates American ingenuity. In cities across the country, protests sparked by racial injustice are showing an ugly side of America to the world. In November voters must choose between a Republican running on a law-and-order platform, and an uninspiring vice-president running for the Democrats. The year is 1968. It is also 2020.

The Economist, 6 June 2020

This book explores three themes in popular music and society – protest movements, cultural history and the psychology of belief. These perennial topics become increasingly urgent during periods of crisis, and in that context a book discussing the struggles of the 1960s and 1970s could not be more prescient. The times, it seems, are a-changin’ at a rapid pace; yet the concerns Dylan and Lennon articulated half a century ago remain pressing imperatives today. A climate emergency is undermining the sustainability of global capitalism. The COVID-19 pandemic has drawn attention to the very fragility of human existence, triggering unprecedented economic instability and accentuating political polarisation. Two decades after the enormous worldwide demonstrations against the 2003 invasion of Iraq, mass mobilisation has once again become an agent of change as Black Lives Matter, Extinction Rebellion, the Hong Kong protests, the Women’s March and the *gilets jaunes* take to the streets. Meanwhile, social media has enabled influential figures to communicate directly and instantly with their audiences, allowing musicians, sportspeople and other celebrities to make increasingly bold political interventions. It is tempting to ‘Imagine’ how John Lennon might use such platforms today as the tensions brought forth in his biggest post-Beatles song – between faithful and secular, left and right, global and local, rich and poor – remain entirely unresolved.

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