John Lennon and the POZ Connection

As fate would have it POZ magazine founder, Sean Strub, was among the first people on the scene when John Lennon was tragically shot.

December 8, 2020 By Shawn Decker

Tuesday, December 8 marks forty years since John Lennon's murder at the age of 40. In the frantic moments that immediately followed the tragedy, Sean Strub was among the first people on the scene. He was 22 at the time and five years removed from an HIV diagnosis, though he started to show symptoms earlier that same year. Unaware of his own future of leadership and vision for a not-yet-named pandemic, Sean astutely described what he saw to the media as millions of people worldwide sat in stunned silence on the coldest of winter days...

I wanted to catch up with Sean to commemorate the anniversary of John Lennon's death. But not to ask the morbid details that he shared so many years ago—and has certainly relived hundreds of times since—but to talk a little bit about the thing that introduced us all to John Lennon in the first place: music.

What was the first piece of music and/or band that you remember loving?

Sean: The jingle for President Kennedy's campaign in 1960, when I was still in my crib. (For real!)

That's wildly appropriate. When do you first remember hearing The Beatles?

On the bus going to kindergarten at William Penn Elementary School in North Liberty, Iowa in 1963. She Loves You was on a hand-held transistor radio that a 6th grader, Kenny Yeries, had on the bus. The portable radio was a fascination unto itself.

Great tune. In 6th Grade one of my best friends, Jared Lambert, really got into The Beatles. This was six years after John passed. Jared had three older brothers and direct access to a larger catalogue of cool music than I did. Seeing his reaction to The Beatles was the first time I saw true fandom for a musician.

Do you have a favorite song by The Beatles?

Strawberry Fields Forever.

Man, that music video and song could come out today and people would love it.

Just as Lennon was a gift to music, you've been a gift to the HIV community, Sean, and I've always felt like we would have had a strong ally in John Lennon, had he still been alive during the early days of the epidemic. It's one of the reasons why me and Gwenn did a Bed In on World AIDS Day once... it felt like a nice way to honor his spirit of love.

Would you and Xavier ever consider doing a Bed-In at the Fauchere in Milford?

A public bed-in? Sure!

You copycat. Do you think John Lennon would have been active in the HIV/AIDS cause, too?

Definitely, both because he had a history of social justice activism, had many gay men in his life and we saw how engaged Yoko got in HIV advocacy.

Sean Strub, Yoko Ono and David Drake

Yeah, people need to back the fuck up off of Yoko. So what does the Mayor of Milford listen to after a long day on the job?

By default, it is typically Maria Callas because that is who Xavier (Sean's husband) usually has on in the house in the early evening. You know me, I'm musically illiterate and rarely put on music myself. But I like hearing Xavier's opera. Otherwise, I like folk songs from the 1970s.

But you once told me that you owned the largest collection of Rufus Wainwright music in Pike

County…

Hah, I do love Rufus Wainwright, so you're right, that is one artist whose work I occasionally seek out and listen to.

He's a solid choice for a discerning dabbler in the musical arts. Oh, you should also look up Sean Lennon's work. It's wonderful. OK, you're running a town while I've got my Xbox game on pause, thanks so much for the chat, Sean.

You bet!

Thanks for reading! By the way, I'm no Rufus Wainright, but if you'd like to download my cover of The Beatles song, "And I Love Her", you can do so for free here. The song is also available on Spotify (Synthetic Division "And I Love Her"). Music has often been the glue that's kept me in mostly one large, misshapen piece, and singing this song was a pure joy.

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