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ANTHONY BARNETT

UNNATURAL MUSIC

JOHN LENNON & YOKO ONO

IN CAMBRIDGE

1969

Account of the Circumstances Surrounding
Their Appearance at the Natural Music Concert

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ANTHONY BARNETT

UNNATURAL MUSIC:

JOHN LENNON & YOKO ONO IN CAMBRIDGE 1969
ACCOUNT OF THE CIRCUMSTANCES SURROUNDING THEIR
APPEARANCE AT THE NATURAL MUSIC CONCERT

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A5, pb, 64 pages, 21 photos and documents
including a drawing to the author by John Lennon
on the inner sleeve of the author's copy of Zapple 01

On 2 March 1969 the author produced the *Natural Music* concert of improvised music at Lady Mitchell Hall in Cambridge with some 15 musicians incl. John Tchicai, in which John Lennon and Yoko Ono participated, Lennon's first public performance away from the Four.

John Lennon and Yoko Ono's part of the concert was released as "Cambridge 1969" on Zapple *Unfinished Music No. 2: Life with the Lions*.

Accounts of how the concert came about and its aftermath by Lennon, Ono, Tchicai, and other commentators, in books and online are garbled.

After forty-seven years of mostly authorial silence the complete true story of the circumstances surrounding their appearance is now told.

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JOHN TCHICAI
UNNATURAL MUSIC

IN McLAUGHLIN
MONGEZI
FEZA
IN CAMBRIDGE 1969

TREVOR
WATTS

CHRIS

JOHN STEVENS

A+B

LOUIS
MOHOLO

Additions and corrections to this book

7 May 2016

Correspondent Lloyd Mills has suggested that “Cambridge 1969” was not the first public performance by Lennon–Ono together, nor Lennon’s first public performance away from the Four as Lennon said, but the second. This suggestion is not correct. They had, it is true, performed together in front of an audience, as members of Dirty Mac, in *The Rolling Stones Rock and Roll Circus*, three months earlier, on 11–12 December 1968, intended for BBC TV but withheld. The small audience was privately invited. Sound and footage was first released in 1996. It includes “Yer Blues”, played by Dirty Mac, with Ono lying on the floor covered in a black sheet, and “Whole Lotta Yoko”, in which Ono screeches a duet with indifferent improvisations by concert violinist Ivry Gitlis, backed by Dirty Mac.

As with “Cambridge 1969”, it is all posted one way or another on YouTube.

17 May 2016 / 18 September 2016

The alto saxophonist described in the photo caption on p.55 as unidentified is believed to be Chris Francis. / Violinist Mike Piggott confirms definitely Chris Francis, with whom he played in the group Naima.

—Mike Piggott, email, 18 September 2016

17 May 2016

“I can still remember the duo and how outrageous it was, in the sound, in the muscled roadies and recording crew and then their sudden disappearance as though it had been rehearsed.”

—Barre Phillips, email, 17 May 2016

28 May 2016

“I got to know Yoko at first with her husband and child as they had a house opposite or near Regent’s Park Mosque. I remember everything being painted white inside. I was also at the Ornette concert she performed at. And of course heard her screams in Cambridge too. Nuff said.”

—Trevor Watts, email, 28 May 2016

7 July 2016

David Toop, *Into the Maelstrom: Music, Improvisation and the Dream of Freedom Before 1970* (Bloomsbury, 2016) incl. chapter “Postscript: The Ballad of John and Yoko” in which Fred Frith recalls, with errors, and Toop discusses, “Cambridge 1969”.

11 November 2016

Unfinished Music No. 2: Life with the Lions incl. “Cambridge 1969” has this day been rereleased on CD and LP Secretly Canadian [a USA label] SC290. See, for example, article at <http://mobile.nytimes.com/2016/10/30/arts/music/yoko-ono-album-reissues-interview.html> —thank you Pierre Crépon for heads up

28 December 2016

Norman Sheffield, *Life on Two Legs: Setting the Record Straight* (London, Trident, 2013), Chapter 3, “Lord of the Ringlets”, reveals that Norman Sheffield, founder of Trident Studios, and his brother Barry were the Apple engineers at Cambridge. Sheffield reveals that Lennon and Ono’s part was also videotaped and he provides a lengthy account of his confusion, before Lennon’s intervention, about how to master “Cambridge 1969”. [The video is not thought to be extant. Most Trident tapes were dumped in the 1980s and if Ono had it she would surely have released it by now.] —thank you Axel Korinth for heads up

28 December 2016

A private tape of the so-called *Get Back Sessions* is circulating in which Lennon talks to the other Beatles, in particular Paul McCartney, about the forthcoming Cambridge concert. It is clear that Lennon and Ono intended major disruption. It was recorded 23 January 1969 at Apple Studios, 3 Savile Row: “It’s great, ’cause she’s just been invited to do some avant-garde in Cambridge and I’ll go along. And I’ll try to get Eric [Clapton], or whoever is around to do a big rock show! It’s great, that! Like Dylan at the Folk Festival. With his electric band. Can’t wait! ’Cause they all do that. And all written down, too! The whole fucking thing written, that’s the thing that gets me. Forty years writing in, studying at the School of Music!” —thank you Axel Korinth for heads up

28 December 2016

p. 58, par. 3: *read* At some point, [*not* After the concert,]

21 February 2017

pp. 20–21, *read* [. . .] for about six months, mostly in a house which included Nick Totton, a contributor to *Nothing Doing in London One*, and to which Ian Patterson was a frequent visitor. Both poets were studying at the University. —thank you Nick Totton and Ian Patterson

21 February 2017

p. 40, *read* [...] for a forty-five minute broadcast. [...] The programme aired at 20:00 on 26 July 1969 [*not c.* sixty minute broadcast. [...] If I remember correctly the programme went out in August.] —thank you Axel Korinth

Reviews extracts

☞ There is something appealing about a music memoir that opens, “I do not have to tell you how disgraceful John’s attitude was and Yoko’s is”. The author of *UnNatural Music* is the poet Anthony Barnett who produced the *Natural Music* concert in Cambridge in 1969, “Lennon’s first public performance away from the Four”. In particular, Mr Barnett has it in for Yoko, a “superficial hood-winker” (he sweetly calls her). When invited to participate in the concert, in which a score of musicians from different countries played three hours of unrehearsed music, Yoko agreed, but said she wanted to bring her own band. This turned out to be John Lennon, which would have delighted almost anyone, but not Mr Barnett. [. . .]

—J. C. [James Campbell], *Times Literary Supplement*, London, 20 May 2016

☞ In the closing lines of this attractively produced little piece of history Anthony Barnett refers to Yoko Ono as Eiko and thereby brings back into focus another little fragment of history. Some eight years ago I received an email from Michael Rumaker, Black Mountaineer who had been taught by Olson in the 1950s, in which he commented upon my determination to locate and read his first novel, *The Butterfly*:

“You mentioned you plan to read my *Butterfly* this weekend with an eye to comparing it to Douglas Woolf’s *Wall to Wall*. I’m glad I have the chance to warn you the comparison will not stand up. *Butterfly* was my first novel and as with all first novels is riddled with flaws, and in this case, excessive emotion and not as direct as I would have written it in a later time. That, despite its being highly autobiographical, and also perhaps its being of some historical interest, since the character of ‘Eiko’ is actually Yoko Ono (no secret anymore since Albert Goldman wrote about that fact in his 1988 *The Lives of John Lennon*) and the character of ‘Alice’ is actually Joyce Johnson, former girlfriend of Jack Kerouac who was with him when *On the Road* hit it big.”

When Barnett’s recent publication was reviewed in *The Times Literary Supplement* on May 20th J. C. opened his piece with a fine piece of tongue-in-cheekery:

“There is something appealing about a music memoir that opens ‘I do not have to tell you how disgraceful John’s attitude was and Yoko’s is’. The author of *UnNatural Music* is the poet Anthony Barnett who produced the *Natural Music* concert in Cambridge in 1969 [. . .]”

The tongue-in-cheekery is of course that Barnett does have to tell us and what he tells is clear and to the point. His historical reconstruction, a past that never simply gets swallowed up in a present, is immaculate and the whole book is presented in a style that over many years Anthony Barnett has made his own: a type of signature publishing dish. Buy a copy NOW!

The historical reconstruction undertaken here is not simply about that concert in 1969; we enter into a spectral world of the past as the book opens with the words “For a while from 1965 I worked at Better Books, New Compton Street, round the corner from their Charing Cross Road shop. That section of New Compton Street no longer exists. A redevelopment covers it.” We are immediately drawn into a world that will include *Nothing Doing in London One*, “which included a music score by John Tchicai”; the letterpress literary and arts loose-leaf folio review also included work by Samuel Beckett and Anne-Marie Albiach. In January 1968 *Nothing Doing in London Two* appeared with work by George Oppen as well as Yoko Ono’s “On Paper”. [. . .] Needless to add that both are now collectors’ items!

Rumaker’s novel opens in a hospital which conveys a haunting sense of the prophetic for Ken Kesey’s later masterpiece, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*:

“The low stucco buildings of the hospital with their harsh green windows and heavy wire screening stretched out in all directions as far as the eye could see.”

Anthony Barnett’s magical reconstruction of long gone days comes off the page with similar focus.

—Ian Brinton, *Tears in the Fence* online blog, 29 May 2016

☞ [. . .] La lecture de ce livre m’a édifié : j’ignorais combien le statut d’icône *rock* pouvait provoquer à ce point l’indifférence, voire le mépris, pour des musiciens de jazz ! A l’appui de cette démonstration, Anthony Barnett nous donne à lire quantité d’entretiens menés juste après ou bien après cet événement. [. . .] Un livre d’un homme honnête, patient, passionnant et passionné !

—Olivier Ledure, *Impro Jazz*, Paris, June 2016

⌘ Undertitlen er: "En redegørelse for omstændighederne omkring deres optræden ved Natural Music Concert". Barnett havde blandt andet spillet perkussion med den danske (dengang) altsaxofonist John Tchicai. Marts 1969 producerede skribenten og musikeren en koncert med fri improviseret musik i Cambridge, UK. På programmet stod udover Barnett blandt andre Willem Breuker, Mongezi Feza, Trevor Watts, John Stevens, Louis Moholo, Barre Phillips, Johnny Dyani, Chris McGregor, Peter Lemer og John Tchicai. John McLaughlin og Derek Bailey måtte melde afbud. Desuden medvirkede John Lennon og Yoko Ono—samtidig med at The Beatles de facto var i opløsning. Barnett havde været i kontakt med Yoko Ono tidligere, men det var på foranledning af Tchicai at *performance*-kunstneren Ono blev kontaktet i 69. På det tidspunkt kendte de færreste til forholdet mellem Ono og Lennon. I modstrid med Natural Music-projektets intention insisterede hun (med Lennon som skjult dukkefører) på at få sin egen afdeling af koncerten—og arriverede på dagen med John Lennon som "eget band". Ono skreg som en sirene, mens Lennon med ryggen mod publikum lavede feedback mellem guitar og forstærker i 15–20 minutter, hvorefter de kørte væk i Rolls-Royce-kareten uden at høre resten af koncerten.

En del af musikken er udkommet i forskellig forklædning og med mangelfuld kreditering. Seancen har været refereret og omtalt både i mytiske og nedladende vendinger i forskellige medier gennem årene, når de to medvirkende kendisser har været interviewet. Fakta er blevet forvansket, og Barnett har nu følt det timeligt at gøre rede for sin rolle, og hvad han ser som de faktiske omstændigheder.

Den lille bog skal ikke refereres i detaljer her. Men Barnett går igennem alle tilgængelige kilder og vurderer deres betydning—som ansvarlig producer er han selv en primær kilde, som ikke har fået megen spaltepads i førnævnte medier.

Efter at have læst bogen forsvinder noget af det florumvundne omkring John Lennon og Yoko Ono. Ingen tvivl om at Barnett har følt sig misbrugt af begge, og man fornemmer en vis bitterhed.

—Cim Meyer, *Jazz Special*, Copenhagen, June–July–August 2016

☞ [. . .] The Natural Music happening was a gathering of prominent *avant-gardeists* of the time including Willem Breuker, Johnny Dyani, Maggie Nicols, Dudu Pukwana, Mongezi Feza, Chris McGregor, Louis Moholo, John Stevens, John Tchicai, Yoko Ono, Trevor Watts and others. Produced by Anthony Barnett the thought of such a gathering almost 50 years later is the stuff of dreams. But in 1969 this was Lennon's first public appearance post Beatles and so it became fodder for documentation. This work is Barnett's attempt to set the record straight and begins with his first meeting with Ono in 1966. Following this account is a description of the concerts, the tapes and issuance of the recordings. From the beginning nothing went smoothly as Barnett was at first caught off guard by the assumptions of celebrity and ensuing commercial interests. Throughout Barnett inserts other published accounts and interviews of the 3/2/69 event. Fascinating reading and it highlights the very different worlds of rock and jazz as they existed in 1969. The tapes are now in Barnett's possession slated to be deposited, along with his papers, to the University of Cambridge.

—Bob Rusch, *Cadence Magazine*, online, July 2016

☞ The subtitle for this book is *John Lennon & Yoko Ono in Cambridge 1969*, which is a nod to a track recorded in the celebrity couple's second LP, *Unfinished Music No. 2: Life with the Lions*. And there lies the rub—or at least part of it. The track was recorded at a concert held by the young innovative jazz percussionist Anthony Barnett [. . .] in March 1969 [. . .] Barnett is now a Lewes resident, and has published this beautifully designed book to set the record straight [. . .] If Barnett was impressed [*sic*] by the music, he certainly wasn't by the couple's behaviour before, during and after the concert, which you might be able to surmise from the book's opening line: "I do not have to tell you how disgraceful John's attitude was and Yoko's is."

—AL [Alex Leith], *Viva Lewes*, July, 2016

« L'histoire pourrait être anecdotique si elle n'était – notamment depuis la parution du livre *Rencontres avec John & Yoko* de Jonathan Cott – l'objet de (différents) fantasmes : elle est celle du concert donné par John Lennon et Yoko Ono à Cambridge le 2 mars 1969, que raconte aujourd'hui [. . .] son organisateur, Anthony Barnett – percussionniste aussi, qui se fera par exemple entendre dans le *Cadentia Nova Danica* de John Tchicai. Pour revenir sur la première apparition « sur scène » d'un Lennon post-Beatles, Barnett s'appuie sur ses souvenirs, qu'il augmente d'extraits d'interviews données par le couple, de comptes-rendus du concert en question et, pour ce qui est des images, de photos et de documents concrets (lettres, affiche et ticket de concert . . .).

En 1968, Yoko Ono donnait de la voix auprès d'Ornette Coleman au Royal Albert Hall : pour la connaître un peu, Barnett lui propose de se joindre l'année suivante aux musiciens de (free) jazz qu'il projette de faire jouer à Cambridge. Elle accepte et, le jour dit, arrive sur place en compagnie de John Lennon. « Natural Music », dit l'affiche, pour une rencontre qui le sera moins : celle du couple et de John Tchicai & John Stevens – les « two Johns » cités au dos de la pochette d'*Unfinished Music No. 2: Life With the Lions* –, mais aussi Willem Breuker, Johnny Dyani, Chris McGregor, Maggie Nicols, Barre Phillips, Dudu Pukwana, Trevor Watts . . .

De cet étonnant aéropage Derek Bailey et John McLaughlin auraient dû être aussi. Leur présence aurait-elle empêché les micros du naissant label Zapple de recueillir presque exclusivement les notes à sortir de la guitare de Lennon, accroupi dos au public, convaincu de participer à une expérimentation dont sa seule présence assurait la qualité – Barnett raconte ainsi que l'endormi du Dakota Building (attention, il ne s'agit pas là de prendre parti) considéra ses partenaires d'un jour comme des poseurs d'une nouvelle espèce et son public comme une association d'intellos. Suivront d'autres bassesses et d'autres mégotages, qu'Anthony Barnett raconte avec autant d'humour que de précision : merci alors, pour la belle histoire.

—Guillaume Belhomme, *Le son du grisli*, online canalblog, September 2016

☞ *UnNatural Music* is a slight book (a little over 60 pages) about a relatively obscure topic that probably escaped the attention of most Americans. That is, unless they (unfortunately?) happened to pick up a copy of Lennon and Ono's record *Life with the Lions*. The book is about a concert that the author had organized that inadvertently turned into a bit of a circus when the "band" Yoko Ono brought turned out to be John Lennon.

Barnett, a poet, musician, and magazine editor, was the organizer of what was to be the first international concert of free improvisation in Britain. Barnett had invited a large number of extraordinary improvisers including Danish saxophonist John Tchicai; South Africans Dudu Pukwana, Mongezi Feza, Johnny Dyani, Louis Moholo, and Chris McGregor; and a Dutch contingent with Willem Breuker and Peter Bennink. Also included were British players John Stevens, Trevor Watts, and Peter Lemer. To followers of international improvisers' music, this, in retrospect, is a very impressive group of musicians. At the time, however, they were barely known. Nor was conceptual artist, filmmaker, singer Yoko Ono. Barnett was friendly with Ono (he published one of her conceptual pieces in his art magazine) and decided to invite her based on her having played with Ornette Coleman's group at Albert Hall the previous year. She accepted the invitation with the proviso that she would bring her "band," something that Barnett accepted with trepidation. It turned out the band was John Lennon in his first live performance away from the Beatles. Although it wasn't quite the media circus it would have been had it happened today, it served the purpose of throwing the concert off-balance.

This is an odd book. Nearly fifty years later Barnett seems to have carried a lot of resentment regarding this event and its subsequent fallout. It reads almost as if he has a score to settle with the Onolennons. Reading this book, one can understand why. They performed as a duo for roughly twenty minutes with Yoko screaming and Lennon feedbacking on his guitar, but they did not interact with the other improvisers. Once some came in and joined in on their duo, they packed up their instruments and walked off, leaving the others to continue . . . which they did . . . probably with more impressive results. Subsequent reviews were mixed, some favorable, some dismissive and, in the case of Val Wilmer's (one of Britain's finest writers on this type of music) review, some rather vituperative words about John and Yoko.

Barnett also includes a number of excerpts of subsequent interviews with

Lennon through the years in which he dismissed the entire enterprise as just so much “intellectual crap,” labelling the audience of two hundred as “artsey-fartseys from Cambridge.” Referring to Ono’s earlier performance with Ornette Coleman, he speaks of “Coleman intellectualizing that jazz, which is just, to me, intellectual literary crap. . . .” Lennon’s insecurities (which seemed to crop up at various points in his career to his detriment) got the better of him when reflecting on a place where he was clearly out of his element. His dismissive disrespect of his fellow musicians is particularly galling. For his part, saxophonist John Tchicai has always spoken favorably about both Lennon and the occasion.

Barnett had all sorts of problems releasing this music. In the end, only the John and Yoko part wound up issued on *Life with the Lions*, on the Beatle’s Zapple label. Barnett has finally put his side of the story out there for all to read. It should be taken with a grain of salt: it is one person’s side of the story after all. But it’s an entertaining read. A marginal event both in Beatle-iana and in the history of international free jazz, but as marginal events go, it is a fascinating one that makes for an interesting read.

— Robert Iannapolo, *ARSC Journal*, Durham, NC, Fall 2016

© Anthony Barnett has published a rather unusual sixty-page booklet about the appearance of John Lennon and Yoko Ono at a “Natural Music Concert” in Cambridge, England, on March 2, 1969. Barnett, who produced the concert, has been asked many times about this “surprise” appearance, their first, and has some rather strong opinions about the two of them and how he was subsequently treated.

— Tim Brooks, *ARSC Journal*, Durham, NC, Fall 2016