

One to One (John and Yoko) [15]

2024 UK 100 mins

UK released **11 April 2025**

Director **Kevin Macdonald; Sam Rice-Edwards**

Cinematography **David Katznelson**

Music **John Lennon; Yoko Ono.** Music coordinator
Barnaby Duff

Cast **John Lennon; Yoko Ono** (as themselves), plus
archive footage

When John Lennon and Yoko Ono left the stately pile of Tittenhurst Park outside Ascot to move into a modest two-room apartment on Bank Street in New York's West Village, they installed a TV at the foot of the bed, got in, and never turned it off. For Lennon, the TV was a window on to the culture, the popular conversation, but also company.

Kevin Macdonald (Marley, 2012; Whitney, 2018) and co-director Sam Rice-Edwards come close to giving 1971's TV output equal prominence to John and Yoko, constantly weaving in ads, news reports and vox pops as context and chorus. At times the stream of televisual consciousness can't help but hit overfamiliar notes: has any documentary about America in the 60s and 70s not featured newsreel footage of Vietnamese jungle being napalmed to a pop soundtrack? But the quantity here gives it a new quality, as items on the Attica riots, ads for a \$375 calculator or Coke give way to clips of The Waltons (1972-81), the attempted assassination of George Wallace, or a man in his underpants clutching a suitcase full of cash to be delivered to the hijackers of Delta Flight 841.

The narrative arc is one of disillusionment – with a certain strand of would-be radicals at least. Enamoured with activists such as Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman, fired up by the release of White Panther John Sinclair on drug charges, we watch Lennon planning the 'Free the People' tour as one big bail party, in which a portion of each night's gate would be used to free people awaiting bail at the local jail. Lennon cools on the cause as he realises its potential for violence ahead of the Republican Party convention in Miami, but

also because of its latent, blatant chauvinism. “Where are the women?” he wonders at one point. “Where’s Mrs Hoffman?”

It’s at this moment that a quieter kind of activism supervenes – and one that comes to Lennon via television. A news report by the young Geraldo Rivera on the appalling neglect and mistreatment of 6,000 disabled children at Willowbrook school in Staten Island leads to Lennon organising a festival and the benefit show at Madison Square Garden that proved to be his only full solo concert after leaving The Beatles.

One to One is very much in the show-don’t-tell tradition, with no voiceover or present-day interviews, just a bare minimum of narratorial captions. This means that a rolling cast of countercultural oddballs comes and goes with little context, such as A. J. Weberman, with his surreal, antagonistic ‘fandom’ of Bob Dylan. Paranoid about being bugged by the American authorities, Lennon and Ono tape their own calls, giving Macdonald a rich supply of audio to draw on.

Many of these recordings play over a meticulous reconstruction of the couple’s Bank Street bedroom – a move reminiscent of Errol Morris (about whom Macdonald made a film in 1999). After Peter Jackson’s *The Beatles: Get Back* (2021), and David Tedeschi’s recent *Beatles ’64* (2024), Macdonald’s film could easily feel subsumed in an ever-widening project to document every moment of The Beatles’ existence and after-life, but in shining a light on a kind of interstitial moment, an in-between period of definite endings and uncertain beginnings, this year (and a bit) in the life of John Lennon and Yoko Ono finds just enough new angles and details.

Sam Davies, *Sight and Sound*, 11 April 2025 (abridged)

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