

"Pull the troops out now, or there'll be another Plastic Ono Band album by Christmas!"



THE US VS JOHN LENNON **12A**

Give John a chance: ol' speccy takes on Uncle Sam...

OPENS 8 DECEMBER

Director David Leaf, John Scheinfeld
Starring John Lennon, Yoko Ono
Screenplay David Leaf, John Scheinfeld
Distributor Lionsgate
Running time 100 mins

WHAT'S THE STORY?

After he met Yoko Ono and split from the Beatles, the always-outspoken John "We're more popular than Jesus" Lennon blossomed into a fervent anti-war activist. This doc details his busiest years as a razor-sharp celebrity thorn in the Nixon administration's side, and the right-wing campaign to get him deported back to Blighty...

Ah, the late '60s and early '70s: a time of political and social upheaval, flower power, black power, and a hippy pop star sitting in a hotel bed with his performance-artist girlfriend for days on end, strumming a guitar and wafting on about peace and love. If you think that sounds dippy, you should hear the questions the world's press lobbed at Lennon and Ono during their infamous bed-ins. The couple may have been pilloried as much as praised for their publicity-whoring pacifism, but they didn't care so long as somebody was listening.

You can see it all in David Leaf and John Scheinfeld's engaging documentary, which deploys a slick, VH1 *Behind The Music* approach (the music channel co-produced) to focus on Lennon's relentless badgering – through song, concert and talk-show appearances – of US involvement in Vietnam, and the

American right's waspish response (led by FBI tyrant J Edgar Hoover).

While a meaty line-up of talking heads – from former Black Panther Bobby Seale to right-wing nutter G Gordon Liddy – whiz through a hit-parade of the era's main events, the film also serves as a gripping trawl through Lennon's later life in music: the soundtrack is wall-to-wall solo material, plus three Beatles tracks. There's plenty of resonance to be found too in the archive footage of Lennon's activism, legal scraps and home life – much of it seen for the first time, and showing his wicked sense of humour in action ("Well, it's like they say, time wounds all heels," he says to a reporter who asks what he thinks of his critics).

Leaf and Scheinfeld's approach feels a little deferential at times, with plenty of sympathy but not enough insight into their impassioned, witty subject, and the film lacks any real smoking-gun revelations. Without overstating Lennon's position as rock poet and counterculture saint, however, try imagining *any* of today's pampered popstrels (okay, the Dixie Chicks) taking on the powers-that-be with as much fearless abandon.

Matt Mueller

VERDICT

A compelling time capsule that casts an adoring eye back at Lennon's peace-mongering. Give it a chance!

