

One of the Things We're Saying— Is Give Peace a Chance

BY PENN JILLETTE

I DO A COMEDY MAGIC SHOW IN A CASINO IN Las Vegas. It's the toppermost of the poppermost for a juggler/magician/comedian. "Toppermost of the poppermost" is the phrase the Beatles used to cheerlead themselves on to fame and fortune. It was a call and a response — "Where are we going Johnny?" "To the toppermost of the poppermost."

I've been thinking about John Lennon lately.

We share our stage at the Rio Hotel in Vegas with a show called "Showgirls." It's a feathers and tits show. One of the reasons I got into show-business was to be backstage with topless six-foot-tall women. I'm 6'6" and to me, the greatest sentence in the English language is, "Oh, I could wear heels with you."

Our Green Room is across the hall from the Showgirls singers' dressing room. The other night they were across the hall practicing an accapella version of the Star Spangled Banner. A few days before, they'd asked our piano player if he could help give them some "hip" harmonies, like "Take Six." (Try to remember that it was innocent showgirl singers that put "hip" and "Take Six" in the same sentence, not me, okay?) We listened to them practice a bit and then Teller said, "I guess they're working on their war show." There was a moment of silent sadness and then I banged four times on the table and chanted, "Everybody's talking about bagism, dragism, fagism, shagism, thisism, thatism, isn't it the most." Teller and our piano player Jonesy joined me on the chorus, "All we are say-ing, is give peace a chance." I happen to know all the nonsense verses so I chanted them and Teller and Jonesy joined me on the choruses. Backstage at a casino, the National Anthem sung by young sexy professional singers in short skirts mixed Charles Ives-style with three middle-aged men in button-up shirts singing "Give Peace a Chance."

John was the smart Beatle, which is a little like being the fat jockey. He played a mean rhythm guitar with his legs spread and had a voice that could sound sincere and break your heart even when singing "Here come old flattop, he come groovin' up slowly...." When I was 17, I had long curly hair past my shoulders, wire-rim glasses, and nail polish on

my fingernails. I thought John Lennon was very smart. I was against the war in Vietnam.

I'm now knocking on 48. I have long curly hair past my shoulders, wire-rim glasses, and nail polish on my fingernails. I think John Lennon was just a dirt-dumb rock star, but I now have a deep empathy for people who have showbiz skills with not a lot of political savvy. This single-serving pot isn't going to call a past monster cauldron "black."

I'm against a U.S. war in the Middle East. When I was 17 and it looked like I was draftable for Vietnam, I told people that I would still be against that war if I were 47 and there was no chance I'd be drafted. So there.

I'm no more qualified than The Walrus to be against the war. I don't really follow politics as much as I should. Being a Libertarian can make you lazy. The answers are all easy for us; we just keep saying left on sex and right on money and we're done. Less government is more freedom, what else do you need to know?

Less government also means not being the world cop. One of the reasons we all believe in the Invisible Hand is we know we're too stupid individually to figure out the correct price for grapes. The interactions of supply and demand are too complicated and move too fast for any committee to figure out what to do. Global cop policy is to the price of grapes what Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring" is to "Take Six." You're gonna need more than the piano player across the hall.

When I was the 17-year-old longhaired freak, I thought there was a "war machine" and a "pig power structure." Believing in evil power is more reassuring than chaos. Even if it's someone evil, at least someone is in control. Now that I'm a 47-year-old longhaired freak, I don't think there's any conspiracy. I don't think Bush wants to do Iraq just for oil. Sadly, I believe the bigger horror: He thinks he's doing the right thing. Cynicism is youth's reassurance. I think people are good, and that's worse. Believing people are doing what they think is best is infinitely sadder.

The sexy showgirls think it's a good idea to show their patriotism. John Lennon is dead. And a lot more people are going to be dead too. Everybody's talking 'bout revolution, evolution, masturbation, flagellation, meditation, United Nations, congratulations. All we are saying—



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