

Janis Ian – Bio

Janis Ian [real name Janis Eddy Fink] was born in a Bronx hospital on April 7th 1951, and raised in various locations in New Jersey. Janis began taking classical piano lessons from the age of two, and quit eight years later. Discovering the *portability* of a guitar [as opposed to a grand piano], at the age of twelve Janis began writing songs – “Hair Of Spun Gold” was her first, and the Fink family settled in Manhattan the following year. “Hair Of Spun Gold” was published in Broadside Magazine. Janis went on to enrol at New York’s High School of Music and Art, but only remained there for six months. By then however, Janis Ian had been *born*. Aged thirteen her brother’s middle name became her adopted surname, as a songwriter and performer, and Janis went on to adopt it legally.

By the age of fourteen Ian was performing in school shows etc. and Greenwich Village folk clubs. Although Elektra Records initially showed interest the deal ran aground, and in 1966 Janis was signed by the Verve/Forecast label resulting in her, George “Shadow” Morton produced, debut album “**Janis Ian.**” The album gained Janis her first Grammy nomination in the category, Best Folk Performance. Her debut single “Society’s Child,” featured a, *for-the-times*, controversial lyric concerning interracial love and was released in August 1966. Ignored on that occasion, when Ian appeared, almost a year later, on the Leonard Bernstein special “**Inside Pop : The Rock Revolution**” the reactivated single reached # 14 on the US Pop Chart. Ian went on to record three more albums for Verve Folkways, but no further hit singles resulted. Barely eighteen by the time “**Who Really Cares**” appeared, in the liner booklet to “**The Verve Recordings,**” Janis recalls that having moved out of her parent’s home, and living in a hotel [probably The Chelsea], the period was, for her, exceedingly unhappy. Her relationship with Verve/Forecast deteriorated, and after losing her recording contract Janis spent some time at Bell Sound in Philadelphia learning studio engineering. Moving on to California to study composition and orchestration, a sole album for Capitol Records, “**Present Company,**” appeared in 1971.

Signed next by CBS, in the period 1974 – 1981, the imprint released seven studio albums by Janis. In addition, in Japan and Australia only, a live double album titled “**In Concert**” appeared in 1978. The first CBS album “**Stars,**” included Ian’s song “Jesse,” which had been a US Top 30 chart single, the previous year, for Roberta Flack. At the 1975 Grammy Awards, the platinum selling album “**Between the Lines**” Janis won the “Best Pop Vocal Performance, Female” category for the track “At Seventeen” and the disc also scored in the “Best Engineered Recording – Non-Classical” category. Released as a single, “At Seventeen” scored Janis a Top Three single on the US Pop Chart.

Not restricted by one particular genre of music, the Mel Torme album “**Mel Torme & Friends**” scored Janis and Mel a 1978 Grammy nomination for “Best Jazz Vocal Performance, Duo or Group” for Ian’s song “Silly Habits.” In 1978 Janis married Tino Sargo, a Portuguese by birth, and the couple remained together for five years. In 1982 Janis sang “Ginny The Flying Girl” on the CBS children’s album, “**In Harmony 2,**” and the disc scored a “Best Children’s Recording” for producers Lucy Simon and David Levine

Through the eighties Ian was silent as a recording artist, apart from the album “**Uncle Wonderful,**” which, until the following decade, was only available in Australia. By way of broadening her compositional skills, during this time Janis studied various facets of the arts with Stella Adler and other teachers. By 1986 Janis was commuting to Nashville to write songs, initially with Rhonda Kye Fleming, and in 1988 Ian settled in Music City, Tennessee and remains a resident to this day. In 1989 Janis met Patricia Snyder and they became a couple. Having been cast aside by CBS in 1981, in Europe, it was that label which released the album that marked the beginning of Phase III [or was it Phase IV] of Ian’s recording career in 1993. In truth “**Breaking Silence**” possessed a dual meaning, and the album subsequently gained a Grammy nomination for “Best Folk Performance.”

Co-produced with John Jennings “**Revenge**” was issued by Beacon Records. “**Live On The Test 1976**” appeared only in the UK courtesy of BBC Records, while the 2CD collection “**Society’s Child : The Verve Recordings**” featured Ian’s four 1960’s albums for Verve. The studio albums “**Hunger**” and “**God & The FBI**” were made for Windham Hill/BMG, while the famous New York venue issued “**The Bottom Line Encore Collection : Janis Ian – Live 1980.**” Annually, since 1999 Janis has self-issued CD’s featuring, mostly, previously unavailable songs, namely “**Unreleased 1 : Mary’s Eyes,**” “**Unreleased 2 : Take No Prisoners**” and “**Unreleased 3 : Society’s Child.**” Last year’s “**Lost Cuts 1**” was a five song, mini album. “**Working Without A Net,**” a 2 CD *live* recording was issued in the

States by Oh Boy Records and in the UK by Cooking Vinyl in the early Fall of 2003, and was followed in February 2004 by her latest studio album "**Billie's Bones.**" The title track was a tribute to the late Billie Holiday.

Janis has scored or contributed songs to movies such as "**Four Rode Out**" [1969], "**Betrayal**" [1977], "**Virus**" [1980] "**Falling From Grace**" [1992] and more. Produced by Giorgio Moroder "Fly Too High," a cut on "**Night Rains,**" was featured in the Jodie Foster movie "**Foxes**" [1980], and scored an international single hit for Janis. In 2001, proving that some things have changed for the better, the song "Society's Child" was inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame. Ian's songs have been covered by Stan Getz, Bette Midler, Glen Campbell, Cher, Joan Baez, Vanilla Fudge and many others. In August, 2003 in Toronto, Canada Janis and Pat Snyder were married. Featured in Issue 1 [July/August 1993], since 1994 Janis has been a regular columnist for **Performing Songwriter** magazine.

The Cooking Vinyl label, in the U.S.A. and the U.K., simultaneously released "**Folk Is The New Black**" in late February 2006. When Ian toured the U.K. during the late Spring of 2006 she intimated to audiences that she would be taking some time 'off the road' to write her autobiography. Curiously, but also intentionally, "**Folk Is The New Black**" featured a track titled "My Autobiography." Janis' book, "**Society's Child: My Autobiography**" [ISBN: 978-1-58542-675-1] was published by Penguin/Tarcher in late July 2008. Released concurrently by Ian's own label, Rude Girl Records, "**Best of...The Autobiography Collection**" was a 2CD collection that reprised her four decade recording career and included previously unreleased material.

Discography :

Solo : "**Janis Ian**" [1967] ; "**For All The Seasons Of Your Mind**" [1968] ; "**The Secret Life Of J. Eddy Fink**" [1968] ; "**Who Really Cares**" [1969] ; "**Present Company**" [1971] ; "**Stars**" [1974] ; "**Between The Lines**" [1975] ; "**Aftertones**" [1976] ; "**Miracle Row**" [1977] ; "**Janis Ian**" [1978] ; "**In Concert : Recorded Live In Australia & Japan**" 2 vinyl disc live recording, only issued in Japan and Australia [1978] ; "**Night Rains**" [1979] ; "**Restless Eyes**" [1981] ; "**Uncle Wonderful**" [1983] ; "**Up Till Now**" [1993] ; "**Breaking Silence**" [1993] ; "**Revenge**" [1995] ; "**Live On The Test 1976**" issued in the UK only [1995] ; "**Society's Child : The Verve Recordings**" compilation of 1967 to 1968 releases [1995] ; "**Hunger**" [1997] ; "**The Bottom Line Encore Collection : Janis Ian – Live 1980**" [1999] ; "**God & The FBI**" [2000] ; "**Unreleased 1 : Mary's Eyes**" self-released album [1999] ; "**Unreleased 2 : Take No Prisoners**" self-released album [2000] ; "**Unreleased 3 : Society's Child**" self-released album [2001] ; "**Lost Cuts 1**" 5 song, self-released mini album [2002] ; "**Working Without A Net**" 2 CD live recording [2003] ; "**Billie's Bones**" [2004] ; "**Folk Is The New Black**" [2006] ; "**Best Of...The Autobiography Collection**" 2CD retrospective [2008] :

DVD

"**Janismania 2004**" [2004] ; "**Live At Club Cafe**" [2004] ; "**Janis Ian '79: Live In Japan And Australia**" [2007] ; "**Through The Years: A Retrospective**" [2007] :

Note.

"**Unreleased 1**" "**2**" and "**3,**" plus "**Lost Cuts 1**" are available for purchase on Janis' web site at <http://store.janisianstore.com/cds.html>

Arthur Wood

Kerrville Kronikles 10/03, 02/04, 01/06 & 10/08

[1105 words]