



Photo by Peter Cunningham

# JANIS IAN



Janis with Bruce Springsteen, Billy Joel and Ed Sclaky (1973)  
Photo by Peter Cunningham



Janis with Grammy Award  
(February 28, 1976)



Janis with Judy Collins and Leonard Cohen  
(December 1, 1974)



Top Ten single "At Seventeen", from *Between the Lines*, reached number 1 on the Billboard album chart in September 1975

She won a Grammy in 2012 for an audiobook of *Society's Child: An Autobiography*

**S**he's on the road for what she says is her last U.S. tour. Her career started at age 14, and thus at age 70, she has 56 years as a performing artist. Her debut album was in 1967. This January she produced what she says is her final album, "The Light at the End of the Line." "I've already created a body of work I'm proud of, and I'm old enough to realize that it's the light at the end of the line that matters. And I'm not calling this retiring. It's rewiring."



On the Johnny Carson Show (August 9, 1967)



*Between the Lines*, 1975



**J**anis Ian lives in our community and has for a while. But she's not here now. As of this writing, she's out in the southwest and headed to California as part of her ambitious concert tour of over 50 cities across the U.S.

After her touring out west, she comes back to Florida where she'll appear in Clearwater on March 31, then Fort Lauderdale and Stuart then New York and New England — well, let's just say she is crisscrossing the country through November, 2022, and if you want to catch her in concert, visit [janisian.com/tour](http://janisian.com/tour) for specific dates.

Via Zoom (being ultra cautious since she was set to leave in a few days), Janis says this is her last album, her last U.S. tour (though tours in the UK and Ireland are being worked on) and she's ready to take a break.

Can you blame her? Her career started at age 14 and thus at age 70 she has 56 years as a performing artist. Speaking with her, there was a certain been there, done that, aspect to the interview (totally understandable considering she's probably been interviewed hundreds of times), but also a sincerity in how carefully she chooses her words. She's thoughtful and not at all into the celebrity or living legend thing.

The "Light at the End of the Line" is the title of the album which got good reviews in a recent New York Times article which she didn't read. Amazingly, or perhaps wisely, she doesn't read any press, articles, etc. Janis explains she already knows what she said so what's the point?

When I comment that she seems so calm, that drew a response and a smile. "Wait until I tell my wife that," she laughs. Her wife is Patricia Snyder whom she married in Canada when gay marriage was still not legal in the U.S. And in another turning point in culture and social justice, the couple were the first gay couple to appear in the NYT's then new "Vows" (wedding/engagement) column in 2003. (It took until 2015 when marriage equality became law in the U.S.)

Janis has been since day one a singer-songwriter who pens "literary lyrics" as the NYT calls them. In music history, her debut album in 1967 was ahead of other female singer songwriters like Joni Mitchell, Carole King and Laura Nyro. But that's a long time ago and she's not one to dwell on the past.

There's a great quote on her website about where she is at this stage of her career. She writes, "It takes a certain amount of maturity to realize that you don't have to keep proving you can write. I've already created a body of work I'm proud of, and I'm old enough to realize that it's the light at the end of the line that matters. And I'm not calling this retiring. It's rewiring."

She was a bit of ahead of the times like when her first song, "Society's Child" was about interracial dating. Since she's also not going to brag, here are a few of the highlights of her career that I assembled: nine Grammy Award nominations and two wins (in 1976 for best pop vocal performance-female for "At Seventeen" and in 2013 for best spoken-word album for "Society's Child: My Autobiography"); performed on the same bill as Jim Morrison and the Doors, another time she was on the same bill as Big Brother and The Holding Company (san Janis); has had her songs performed by Roberta Flack (her cover of "Jesse" was a top ten hit) and Nina Simone; she was on the Smothers Brothers show (at age 16); mentored by Leonard Bernstein. "Society's Child" became a national hit on its third release after Bernstein featured it in a TV special: Inside Pop: The Rock Revolution.

She was the first artist on "Saturday Night Live" when the show started in 1975; she plays guitar and piano; earned a Grammy nomination for Best Jazz Duet with Mel Torme. She sang her songs "Silly Habits" and "Fly Too High" on the soundtrack of the Jodie Foster movie "Foxes" (Janis did a lot of music scoring for films).

Her songs have been covered by Kathy Mattea, Bette Midler, Amy Grant, Nanci Griffith, and a host of others; in 1990 she co-chaired the first Nashville AIDS-walk, with Minnie Pearl (not a typo); formed her own record company, Rude Girls. In 1993, she had a column in *The Advocate*; she loves and writes science fiction, and wrote a children's book.

Her Pearl Foundation (named for her mother) raised one million dollars in scholarship funds donated for returning students. She's studied acting. Her parents (and the family) were under government surveillance (her parents, Victor (a music teacher) and Pearl, ran a summer camp in upstate New York, and, in that Cold War era, were frequently under "suspicion").

In 1975 she released the album, "Between the Lines" which surpassed all her previous records to emerge as the most successful album of her career gaining a platinum status. It reached number one status on Billboard's Album chart. She's collaborated with various other artists like Kye Fleming, Amy Grant, Bette Midler and Marti Jones. She even pursued a career in acting and took acting classes from Stella Adler.

On the Adult Contemporary chart, "At Seventeen" peaked at number one. The song won Janis her first Grammy Award. The same year, she performed the song on the debut of Saturday Night Live as a musical guest.

Adjectives from various media outlets: precocious, diminutive and the female Bob Dylan. She's dabbled in science-fiction writing (George R.R. Martin, the "Game of Thrones" mastermind, is in photos from her 2003 wedding and is a friend).

How about an autobiography? "I already wrote one," she explains. But certainly a life like hers where she has had a long view of such rich, turbulent and changing times warrants a second book? She loves to write, adding, "I'm a writer first."

Janis moved to Florida three years ago in part due to Covid, her house is on the water and was, and is, a sanctuary while the pandemic raged and now, we hope has abated.

Assuming she has heard every question in an interview before, I asked was there a moment when you said to yourself...this is it: I'm done touring: done recording. Actually, "I've been thinking about it for 10 years," but she adds, wistfully, "Artists don't stop being artists."

From the Janis Ian website: "The Light at the End of the Line" is her latest and last solo studio album to bookend a catalog that began with her 1967 self-titled debut. It's her first album of new material in 15 years. The songs reflect on getting older but wiser ("I'm Still Standing"), of knowing when to stand up and not take any more shit ("Resist"), of celebrating life's fleeting beauty ("Swannanoa"), of exalting in your true identity ("Perfect Little Girl"), of paying homage to a lifelong hero and her demons ("Nina," as in Simone).

Here are some lyrics from "I'm Still Standing": See these lines on my face? They're a map of where I've been And the deeper they are traced, the deeper life has settled in How do we survive living out our lives? 🍷

STORY: Louise Bruderle  
IMAGES: courtesy of the artist

► *The Light At The End Of The Line* is available at the [official Janis Ian Store](http://officialjanisianstore.com).