

JANIS IAN

Now in her fifth decade of writing songs and performing, Janis received her most recent Grammy nomination in 2016 for the self-produced “Patience & Sarah”, an audio book she produced and co-narrated with the actress Jean Smart (“Designing Women”). This makes a total of 10 nominations in 8 different categories, a record for a solo artist whose first nomination came at the age of 16 for her debut album, “Janis Ian”.

She lost this last Grammy to President Jimmy Carter, but two years earlier she’d received a Grammy for “Society’s Child: My Autobiography”, winning Best Spoken Word over stiff competition (President Bill Clinton, First Lady Michelle Obama, Rachel Maddow, and Ellen DeGeneres.) Accepting the award to a tumultuous standing ovation, Ian quipped “Well, this is a stunning upset... and I have to admit that when I saw the list of nominees, my first thought was ‘There’s got to be a joke in here somewhere. An ex-president, a First Lady, and three lesbians walk into a bar...’”

On a more serious note, Ian said “We artists are the last alchemists, pulling your dreams, your hopes, your deepest desires out of thin air. We turn them into something you can hear, and play, and sing. So let us never forget this – we don’t sell music. We sell dreams.”

Ian has been in the forefront of too many controversial subjects to list here. Among others, her song “Society’s Child”, written at the age of fourteen, went on to ignite a storm among radio broadcasters and listeners for its unflinching look at the relationship between a black boy and a white girl. “At Seventeen” has been featured in everything from anti-bullying commercials to television shows like *The Blacklist*. At Montreux, Nina Simone said the song “Stars” was the only way she could express what she was feeling at that moment. Tennessee Williams wore out three copies of *Between the Lines*, Johnny Cash kept a copy of Janis’ poetry book in his personal library, and her article *The Internet Debacle* was the first major piece to come out in favor of downloading and Internet usage in the music industry. (Incidentally, at last count it had been re-printed on more than 5,000 sites in nine different languages, and provided testimony in the Napster and Grokster cases.) The prescient article correctly foretold the formation and rise of iTunes and Youtube, among others.

Janis also holds the distinction of hosting the first international Internet auction, in 1998, long before eBay or other auction sites came on the scene. The auction raised money for what became *The Pearl Foundation*, an IRS-approved charitable organization providing scholarships to “returning students”. It honors Janis’ mother, Pearl, who returned to college in her forties, hindered by Multiple Sclerosis, and went on to get her bachelor’s and master’s degrees. The Foundation has no employees; everything but tax preparation is contributed or done by Janis and her wife, Pat (who likewise went back to school in *her* forties!) To date, it has given away more than 1 million dollars in scholarship funding, and seen more than 60 students graduate.

Internationally, she’s also quite a force. Her song “Tattoo” was chosen to represent The Netherlands in Europe-wide celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the end of W. W. II, leading Ian to perform for and meet with the royal family. In Japan, her “Love Is Blind” was #1 for more than a year, and the album *Aftertones* #1 for six months, records no solo female has broken since. (She is known there as “the godmother of singer/songwriters”.)

Her tours have sold out in every country she’s visited (we’ve lost count), and her songs have been recorded by artists as diverse as John Mellencamp, Amy Grant, Diane Schuur, and Joan Baez. Janis has dueted with Willie Nelson, Dolly Parton, Mel Torme and, most recently, Trevor Sewell; their single, released only in the UK, jumped up the jazz charts, again reminding us of the diversity in a career that saw Ian on the cover of *Downbeat* at 16, featured in *Melody Maker* at 26, honored by the Grammy Hall of Fame twice, co-starring with Laurie Metcalf, Rita Moreno, and Alex Borstein in the final episode of *Getting On*, receiving *Publisher’s Weekly* and *Kirkus Reviews* picks for her children’s book *The Tiny Mouse*, and continuing to expand and move forward with plans for several more books and a new album in the works.

Or, as Ian herself puts it, “I’m just curious... I’ve never courted controversy, never set out to do so many different things – but I get curious, I think ‘What if...’, and things just... happen!”