

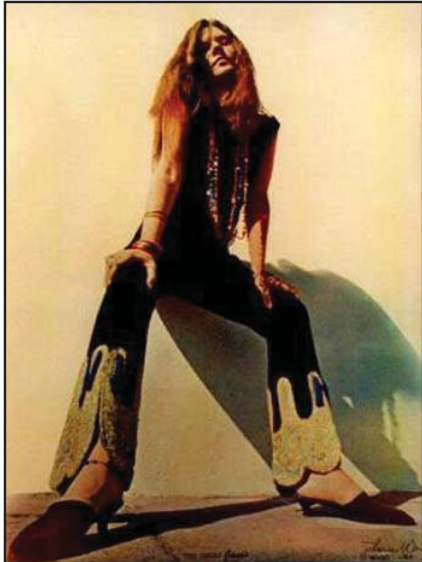


JANIS JOPLIN 1943 - 1970

by Paul Brett



On October 4th 1970, one of the greatest female rock singers ever, died from an 'accidental' overdose of heroin in a Motel in Los Angeles at the ripe old age of 27. Such is often with way with many of rock's greatest icons. Born on January 19th 1943, Janis Lyn Joplin was destined to be a rebel of rock music. Born and raised in Port Arthur, Texas, she grew up and was encouraged by her parents to pursue artistic avenues.



In the bad old days of racial segregation in the States, Janis bucked the trend and stood up for the rights of African Americans to have equal status with the white population. Her musical influences were firmly Blues based. Bessie Smith, Leadbelly, Odetta were all major players in her formative years and she sung around the Coffee Houses and Folk Clubs that existed throughout her home State of Texas. Lone Star State for a Lone Star Lady. She attended the University of Texas in Austin where she soon succumbed to tasting the thrill of alcohol and drugs. This was indeed the norm of the day as it is today among Students worldwide. Many pass through this phase, others never do.

In 1966, in the Hippy era of Flower Power and Free Love, she auditioned for a group in San

Francisco called " Big Brother and the Holding Company ". They weren't that well know and played clubs around the Bay area and at gigs up and down the California Coastline. In 1967, known as "The Summer of Love " year, the band landed a spot on the Monterey Pop Festival. Janis excelled at this concert with a great version of Big Momma Thornton's " Ball and Chain ". She never looked back after that. Because of the Hippie audiences the band attracted, they also attracted hostility from the establishment. None more so than when they played a show in The Curtis Nixon Hall in Tampa, Florida. To be fair, the Police were already edgy about a previous show involving The Doors in Miami, which ended in a near riot and didn't want the same happening in Tampa. It all kicked off believe it or not with George Gershwin's "Summertime " . As the guitar played the opening riff, the crowd left their seats to worship near the feet of Janis, filling the aisles as they did so. Suddenly, over the top of the notes boomed a bullhorn. It was the voice of Detective L.F Napoli, telling the crowd to go back to their seats. Janis stopped the song and said over her microphone " I'm trying to build a sensuous mood ", shooting a glance over to Det.Napoli. The audience cheered wildly. In the next song the same thing happened again, this time more Police shouting through more Bullhorns. Janis had had enough by now and she addressed the Police directly by saying " Don't f**k with these people ! ". The hall's management then turned off the lights and the power to the band's equipment and Janis lost her control completely. After some exchanges between band and management, the show was allowed to continue and finished without further incident. Afterwards, as Janis entered the back-stage area, she spotted Det.Napoli and issued a string of expletives at him as she walked passed him to her dressing room. At midnight, Janis was served with an arrest warrant by the Police and was taken to the City Hall Jail and charged with two counts of vulgar and indecent language. (This was the 60's !).

Fig. 1 The mug shot picture, taken at the time of her arrest. She was later released having paid a bail bond of \$504. Her arrest was in fact an excuse for City Officials to berate the youth movement. The Mayor of Tampa Dick Greco stated he would not tolerate Miss Joplin's type



Fig. 1

of performance in his city. Usual stuff, old farts decrying young heads, nothing's changed ! The case fizzled out and Janis was fined \$200 in absentia.

Big Brother and the Holding Company had signed with one of the most influential managers of the day, Albert Grossman, who got them a three album deal with Columbia Records. The "Cheap Thrills" LP was released in 1968 and went Gold in a short space of time. Hits from the LP were "Piece of My heart" and "Summertime".. Big Venues, Big audiences, Big Successes were the order of the day, all accompanied by lots of drugs and booze. This was what ended the bands relationship with each other and they played their last gig in December 1968. Janis formed her own group and sang more Blues based material which wasn't that appreciated in the States and got mixed reviews, but was greeted with much acclaim in Europe. Unfortunately, Janis was still heavily into using drugs and booze to cope with her hectic lifestyle and the pressures associated with it. She finally gave up the drugs before the formation of her third band. At the time of recording her great 'Pearl' LP, she started using heroin again. It was during this session that she took a more pure form of heroin with fatal consequences. "Pearl" was released posthumously and featured the classic track "Mercedes Benz". *Oh Lord, won't you buy me a Mercedes Benz ? My friends all drive Porsches, I must make amends. Worked hard all my lifetime, no help from my friends, So Lord, won't you buy me a Mercedes Benz ?* Anyone who has heard this track, never forgets it or the memory of Janis Joplin, there has never been another.

The deadly duo of Drugs and Alcohol have combined to end prematurely, the lives of so many talented artists. Is this life ending experience pre-ordained for those who choose to walk it's lethal path ? or is it a human frailty that attaches itself to those whose resistance is weak to the short term benefits it can supply ? or is it simply, Rock and Roll !

