

## **Janis Joplin, 1943-1970 : One of the Most Famous Voices in Rock Music**

Joplin's hits during the 1960s included "Ball and Chain," "Piece of My Heart" and "Me and Bobby McGee." *Transcript of radio broadcast:*

12 July 2008

VOICE ONE:

I'm Pat Bodnar.

VOICE TWO:

And I'm Bob Doughty with People in America in VOA Special English. Today, we tell about Janis Joplin. She was one of the greatest white blues-influenced rock singers of her time. Her intense and emotional voice has become one of the most famous in American popular music.

(MUSIC: "Ball and Chain")



**Janis Joplin**

VOICE ONE:

That song is called "Ball and Chain." It was performed by Janis Joplin and her first band, Big Brother and the Holding Company. Some experts say that this performance is among the greatest in rock history. It was recorded live on June eighteenth nineteen sixty-seven at the Monterey International Pop Festival. This was an important event in San Francisco, California. Many famous rock musicians of the nineteen sixties gathered there for three days of performances. Before this concert, Janis Joplin and her band were only known on the West Coast of the United States. Once she performed at this festival, however, Janis Joplin became a star.

(MUSIC)

VOICE TWO:

Janis Joplin did not start out in the world of rock music. She was born in Port Arthur, Texas, in nineteen forty-three. Even as a child, Janis showed an interest in music and the arts. She sang in the local church music group and soon became very interested in blues music. For example, she was influenced by the blues music of Bessie Smith and the soul sound of Otis Redding.



officialjanis.com

When she was seventeen years old, Janis started performing in small towns around Texas. She would copy the blues sounds of the musicians she liked best. After some time singing in New York City and San Francisco, Janis returned to Texas to attend university. She also needed to recover from her use of illegal drugs and dependence on alcohol. This struggle with drugs and alcohol would continue throughout Joplin's life.

VOICE ONE:

In nineteen sixty-six, Joplin learned that a group of rock musicians she knew in San Francisco was looking for a female singer. This band was called Big Brother and the Holding Company. Joplin once said: "All of a sudden, someone threw me in front of this rock and roll band. And I decided then and there that this was it. I never wanted to do anything else".

Janis Joplin recorded two albums with Big Brother. Here is a famous song she made with the band during their two years together. It is called "Piece of My Heart". This song is an excellent example of Joplin's explosive and emotional voice.

(MUSIC)

Janis Joplin did not stay with this band for long. In nineteen sixty-eight, she and the band's guitarist, Sam Andrew, formed a new group. Joplin wanted to play music that had more of a rhythm and blues sound.

VOICE TWO:

The late nineteen sixties were a complex period in America. Many political and cultural movements were going on at the same time. These included the fight for equal treatment for black people, the women's rights movement and the movement protesting America's involvement in the war in Vietnam. In some ways, the rock bands of this period expressed the conflicts many young people were feeling.

Janis Joplin represented the culture of some young people during this period. She dressed in very unusual clothing. She let her long wavy hair fly about as she sang. She drank alcohol and used illegal drugs. Once she became famous, she even drove around San Francisco in a special sports car. This was not your average car. It was painted many colors with images of Joplin and her band. To many people, Janis Joplin's voice and actions represented freedom and social rebellion.

(MUSIC)

VOICE ONE:

Janis Joplin and her new band performed around the United States. They received both good and bad comments from critics in America. However, when they performed in Europe, they were a big success. In nineteen sixty-nine, they released an album called "I Got Dem Ol' Kozmic Blues Again, Mama!" Here is a song from that album. It is called "Kozmic Blues," a title that became the name of the band.

(MUSIC)

VOICE TWO:

Janis Joplin soon formed yet another band called Full Tilt Boogie. Many people say this was the best band she ever played with. The Full Tilt Boogie Band first played together in May of nineteen seventy. A few months later, they started to record the album "Pearl." It would become Janis Joplin's most successful album.

One song on that album is called "Mercedes Benz". Here, Janis Joplin sings a cappella, without any musical instruments. The words of the song are funny. But they also comment about the desire for costly things.

(MUSIC)

VOICE ONE:

Janis Joplin did not live to see this album completed and released. In October, nineteen seventy, Joplin died of an accidental heroin drug overdose in Los Angeles, California. She was twenty-seven years old.

Janis Joplin once said this about her singing: "When I am there, I am not here. I can't talk about my singing. I'm inside it. How can you describe something you are inside of?"

This statement expresses how serious Janis Joplin was about her music. She was an intense singer who lived during an intense time in American history. While she did not have a long career, Joplin became one of the most important voices of her time.

We close with Janis Joplin's most popular song. It was written for her by a friend, the famous singer and songwriter Kris Kristofferson. Here is "Me and Bobby McGee".

(MUSIC)

VOICE TWO:

This program was written and produced by Dana Demange. I'm Bob Doughty.

VOICE ONE:

And I'm Pat Bodnar. Join us again next week for PEOPLE IN AMERICA in VOA Special English.