

JANIS IAN

b. April 7, 1951

SINGER-SONGWRITER

She is a three-time Grammy Award-winning singer-songwriter and a lifelong activist.

“Truth is not the enemy, and whatever does not kill us sets us free.”

Janis Ian is a folk singer-songwriter and lifelong activist. She has won three Grammy Awards and been nominated for 10.

Born in Farmingdale, New Jersey, to a liberal Jewish family, Ian grew up on a farm. She began playing piano at age 2 and guitar at age 10.

In 1965, at age 14, Ian wrote “Society’s Child” (“Baby I’ve Been Thinking”). The song was released the following year and reached No. 14 on the Billboard 100. Even so, Ian

was harassed both on- and offstage for its lyrics, which depict an interracial relationship. In 1967 she was nominated for her first Grammy for Best Folk Performance.

In 1975 Ian performed on the premiere episode of “Saturday Night Live.” The following year she won two Grammy Awards, including Best Pop Female Vocalist, and was nominated for three more.

Ian married an abusive man in 1978 and divorced him five years later. She moved to Nashville “penniless, in debt, and hungry to write.”

In 1992 Ian came out as a lesbian and started her own label, Rude Girl Records. After a nine-year music-industry hiatus, she released the album, “Breaking Silence” (1993). It was nominated for a Grammy for Best Folk Album.

Ian became a columnist in 1994. She wrote for The Advocate until 1997 and for Performing Songwriter until 2001. In 1998 she and her future wife founded The Pearl Foundation in honor of Ian’s mother. Since its inception, the organization has donated more than \$1.2 million in college scholarships to support returning students.

Ian’s mother, Pearl, put her lifelong dream of attending college on hold when she married at age 18. When Ian was 15, Pearl was diagnosed with MS. Ian then convinced her mother to return to school and paid for her tuition. Ian insists “the proudest thing” she ever did “was sending her to college.”

In 2001 Ian began publishing her science fiction short stories online. She was one of the first recording artists with a personal website and controversially maintained that “free Internet downloads are good for the music industry and its artists.”

In 2002 Ian’s debut song, “Society’s Child,” was inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame. In 2008 her hit single “At Seventeen” was also inducted. Ian’s autobiography, “Society’s Child” (2008), earned her a 2009 Grammy (Best Spoken Word) for the audiobook. She was nominated again in 2016 for her reading of the lesbian classic, “Patience and Sarah.”

Ian has been honored by the New York State Senate and the Human Rights Campaign. She lives in Nashville with her wife.



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