

JANIS JOPLIN

b. January 19, 1943

d. October 4, 1970

ROCK STAR

A trailblazing icon of the 1960s counterculture, she became known as “the first queen of rock and roll.”

“Don’t compromise yourself. It’s all you’ve got.”

Janis Joplin was a trailblazing 1960s blues-rock singer and songwriter. Celebrated for her raw, powerful vocals and electric stage presence, she became known as “the first queen of rock and roll.”

Janis Lyn Joplin was born in Port Arthur, Texas, to conservative, college-educated parents. She gained weight and developed acne as an adolescent, and in high school, boys bullied her mercilessly. Rebellious, and convinced she would never be one of the “pretty girls,” she rejected mainstream fashion in favor of men’s shirts and tight skirts.

She befriended a group of male outcasts who shared her interest in music and the Beat movement. By her senior year, she had earned a reputation for tough-talking and hard-partying.

After graduating from high school in 1960, Joplin studied art at the University of Texas at Austin. She began performing there and joined a folk band. When a fraternity voted her the “ugliest man on campus,” she was devastated.

Joplin dropped out of college in 1963 and hitchhiked to San Francisco. She developed a following for her music, and she and a boyfriend started shooting methedrine. Troubled by her addiction, a group of friends sent her back to Texas to clean up. Though still a heavy drinker, she largely succeeded and returned to San Francisco’s music scene.

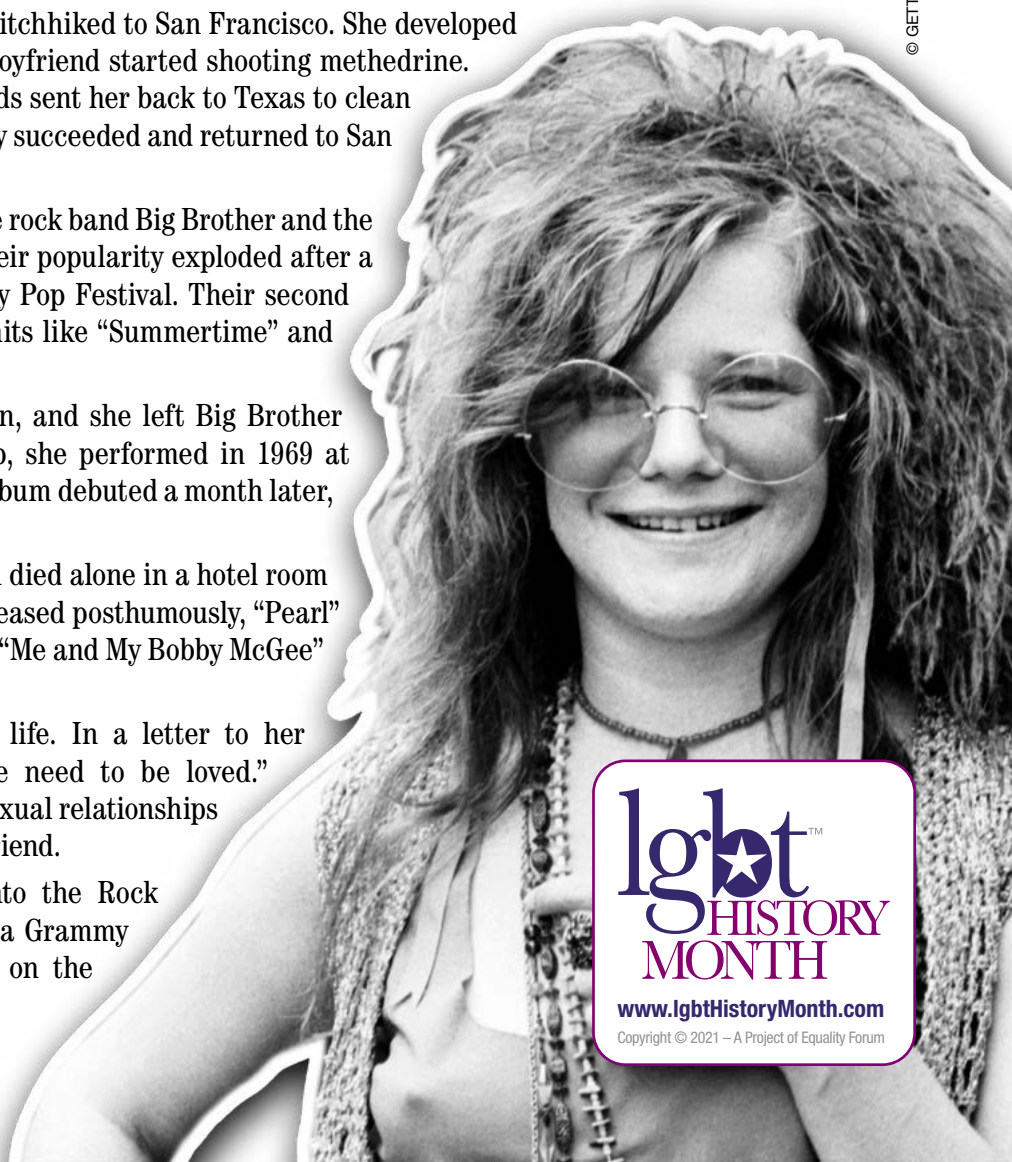
Joplin’s big break came when she joined the rock band Big Brother and the Holding Company. With Joplin fronting, their popularity exploded after a historic performance at the 1967 Monterey Pop Festival. Their second album, “Cheap Thrills” (1968), featuring hits like “Summertime” and “Piece of My Heart,” reached No. 1.

Joplin’s preeminence soon created friction, and she left Big Brother for a solo career. Backed by a new group, she performed in 1969 at Woodstock, high on heroin. Her first solo album debuted a month later, peaking at No. 5.

In 1970, after forming another band, Joplin died alone in a hotel room of an accidental overdose. She was 27. Released posthumously, “Pearl” (1971) became her best-selling album, and “Me and My Bobby McGee” became her only No. 1 single.

Drive and insecurity dominated Joplin’s life. In a letter to her parents, she described ambition as “the need to be loved.” Absent any labels, she freely maintained sexual relationships with men and women, including her best friend.

After her death, Joplin was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. She also received a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award and a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.



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