

First night

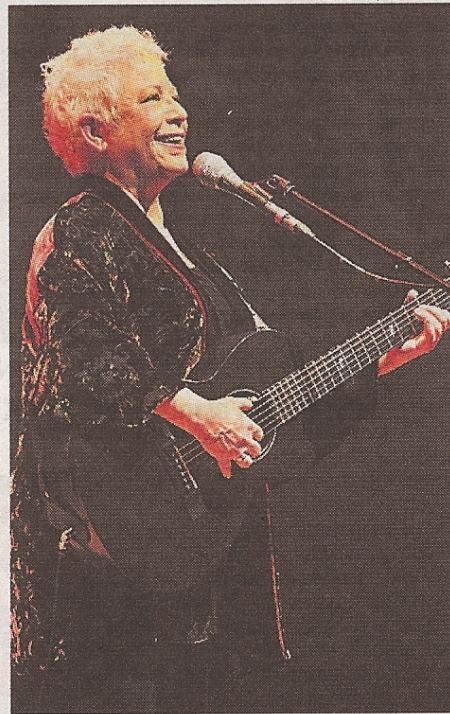
Spellbinding storyteller of a remarkable life

Pop David Sinclair

Janis Ian
Cadogan Hall, SW1
★★★★☆

Janis Ian swore just once during this long and entertaining show. The carefully chosen obscenity came at the end of *Married in London*, a knockabout song about the legal anomalies of being married to another woman: "We're married in London but not in New York/ Spain says we're kosher, the States say we're pork". Her conclusion — "Love where you can and f*** all the rest" — prompted an amazing outburst of whooping, cheering solidarity from an audience sizzling with emotion.

As with all of the stories that Ian told before, during and after her songs, it was based on the experiences of her colourful and often difficult life. A teenage prodigy who enjoyed her first hit record when she was 15 and was a "has-been by the age of 16", Ian has since survived a succession of emotional trials and upheavals to become the 60-year-old grande



ROBIN LITTLE / GETTY IMAGES

Janis Ian had her audience in thrall all night performing with just her voice and guitar

dame of the singer-songwriter tendency that she is today.

She sang *I Hear You Sing Again*, a number she co-wrote with Woody Guthrie, and talked with an exquisite sense of longing about her mother, who was often chided for being clumsy and eventually died of multiple sclerosis. Ian recalled, as if it were yesterday, the threats and physical intimidation she was subjected to after the success of her first single, *Society's Child (Baby I've Been Thinking)*, a song about an inter-racial romance released in 1967 at the height of the civil rights

disturbances in America. And she still performed her biggest hit, *At Seventeen*, a poignant evocation of teenage angst, with a searing sense of immediacy that stirred painful memories even after all these years.

A short, silver-haired, Jewish woman from New York City, Ian stood alone on the stage — no sitting around for her. The show was all about the songs, the lyrics, the person; but posterity also demands a quick mention of her acoustic guitar. She played it so beautifully, with an attention to touch and tone far exceeding that of the great majority

of singers accompanying themselves in this way. And towards the end of *Bright Lights and Promises* she set off on her only solo of the night, a set-piece, slow blues sequence that was utterly spellbinding.

"I've been scared all day," she admitted at the start of the show. In truth it was hard to see why, given the length of time she has been perfecting this material and the fiercely partisan make-up of her audience. As she sang encores of *Jesse* and *Stars*, fear had surely given way to catharsis and a joy among the audience that was palpable. Nov 8, *St George's Hall, Bristol*; Nov 9, *Huntingdon Hall, Worcester*; Nov 10, *The Stables, Milton Keynes*; Nov 12, *St George's Church, Brighton*; Nov 13, *Town Hall, Birmingham*; Nov 14, *City Varieties, Leeds*

STAPLES®

that was easy.

STAPLES®
Incredible savings