

Booklist

Advanced Review – Uncorrected Proof

Issue: June 1, 2008

★ **Society's Child: My Autobiography.**

Ian, Janis (Author)

Jun 2008. 384 p. Tarcher, hardcover, \$26.95. (9781585426751). 782.42164092.

Casual music-scene observers may see Ian and her remarkable music surfacing every decade or so, usually winning a handful of Grammy nominations. There's a life between recording sessions, of course, that Ian describes with brutal honesty. An unusually intelligent child, she began writing songs very early, adored folk and protest singers Odetta and Joan Baez, but knew she didn't look like or sound like them. Her idol, Baez, was tall and svelte; she was short and stocky, with stubborn, curly hair. Yet her 1966 hit "Society's Child," about interracial romance, brought her role-models' kind of fame at 15, including hate mail and death threats. Less than a decade later, "At Seventeen," an homage to outsiders and misfits, brought further fame while, offstage, she endured an abusive marriage, came out as lesbian, had IRS trouble, and battled chronic fatigue syndrome and other debilitating illnesses. Songwriting has been her way to express inner turmoil. She writes casually and conversationally about her ups and downs and the life lessons she learned. Even recounting decisions that were stupid (quite often) and bad things that happened to her (many), she keeps us on her side, hoping things eventually turn out well. Fans will love the book, of course, but many nonfans, too, should find this painfully candid memoir hard to put down.

— *June Sawyers*