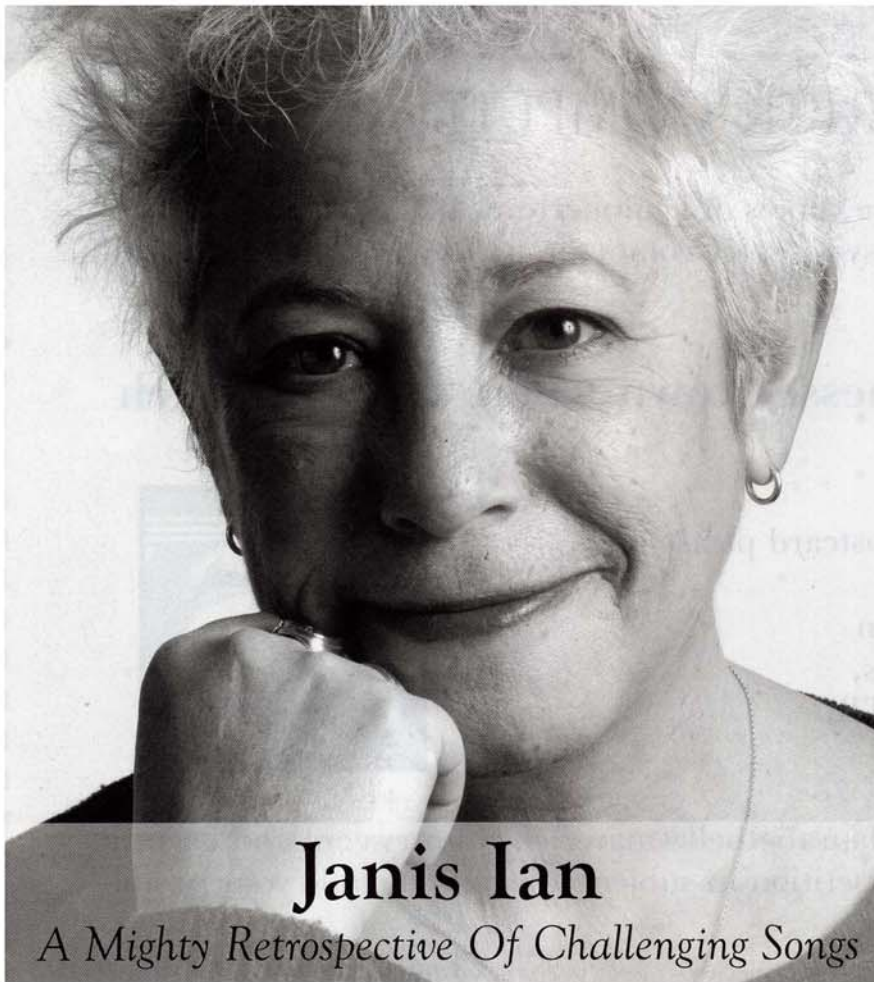


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Janis Ian

A Mighty Retrospective Of Challenging Songs

Aged two, and for the ensuing eight years, Janis Eddy Fink took classical piano lessons. Swapping the keyboard for the more portable guitar, aged twelve she began writing songs, *Hair Of Spun Gold* being her first. The Fink family relocated from New Jersey to Manhattan the following year, and the influential New York City folk magazine *Broadside* published her song. Enrolling at New York's High School of Music and Art, Janis dropped out six months later. By 1964 folk music was pouring out the doorways of a legion of Greenwich Village listening rooms. Aged thirteen, Janis adopted her brother's middle name, Ian, as her (performing) surname. It was time to take her music to the world.

Although Elektra Records initially indicated interest, Janis inked a recording contract with the Verve/Forecast label. George 'Shadow' Morton produced her self-titled debut, garnering Janis her first Grammy nomination. Verve/Forecast eventually issued four Janis Ian albums. *Society's Child*, her August 1966 debut single, featured a controversial lyric that focused on interracial love. It was roundly ignored by the record buying public, but following its performance on the late April 1967 television special, *Inside Pop: The Rock Revolution* hosted by Leonard Bernstein, the reactivated single reached

number 14 on the US pop charts.

When her Verve/Forecast contract ended in 1969, Janis spent time at Bell Sound in Philadelphia learning studio engineering, then moved to California to study composition and orchestration. In 1971 Capitol Records released *PRESENT COMPANY* but it failed to make a commercial breakthrough and Janis retired from touring/recording. While she continued writing songs that might have been that ...

From early February though April, Edsel Records have issued a substantial portion of Ian's back catalogue beginning with her CBS studio recordings. The first tranche of 2-CD sets paired *STARS* (1974) with *AFTERTONES* (1976), while *BETWEEN THE LINES* (1975) is accompanied by a DVD that principally focuses on her October 1976 *Old Grey Whistle Test* concert. There's a three-fold bonus aspect of this series. Janis has penned a recollection specific to each studio album, there's a bonus track—mainly a live performance of a song from the album—and, finally, the liner booklets feature rarely seen concert posters and photographs of Janis.

'*STARS* is, to my mind, my first grownup record' is her opening observation. The album was bankrolled by Australia's Festival Records, with CBS coming onboard once the recording was complete and after Charles Koppelman was appointed interim head of the

label following Clive Davies' departure. Janis had auditioned for CBS on three occasions, Davies passed each time. During the 1950s Brooks Arthur (birth name Arnold Brodsky) worked in New York's Brill Building as songwriter/demo singer. By the ensuing decade he had become a talented recording engineer, and in 1966 he engineered *Society's Child*. By the 1970s Brooks owned 914 Sound Studio in Blauvelt, New York and it was there, between sessions for Bruce Springsteen and Melanie albums, that Janis created *STARS*. It proved a fruitful partnership.

BETWEEN THE LINES topped the US album chart, the single *At Seventeen* reached number 3 on *Billboard's* Hot 100, and Janis picked up the 1975 Grammy for Best Pop Vocal Performance—Female, while Brooks lifted the Best Engineered Recording—Non Classical award. Janis describes *AFTERTONES* as: '...an interim album, seriously flawed in places, very exciting in others.' Recorded while Janis was touring for four days each week, writing new material on the fifth, and recording on the sixth and seventh, compromise was inevitable. The consensus from her peers was: 'the songs are fine,' although the comment was commercially motivated. *AFTERTONES* proved to be her final collaboration with Brooks. As for album highlights, her song arrangements became more adventurous, Phoebe Snow and Odetta accompanied her on *Hymn*, and supported by salsa players *I Would Like To Dance* broadened further her musical spectrum. Having set out as an acoustic guitar playing folkie in time her songs embraced traces of blues and jazz.

Accompanied by her band, *LIVE ON THE TEST* (1995) a CD issued by BBC Records, presented an edited version of the 1976 OGWT concert. Edsel's DVD not only includes Ian's ten-song performance, the BBC archives have been well and truly trawled for bonus material. Janis performed *Dance With Me* and *Stars* during her October 1974 OGWT debut, there's another rendition of *At Seventeen* from a November 1976 Shirley Bassey Show and, finally, a May 1980 performance of *The Other Side Of The Sun* from Lena Zavaroni And Music. Five 1976 OGWT songs hail from *BETWEEN THE LINES*, and excluding one song *STARS* and *AFTERTONES* supply the remainder. The diamond in the rough is the sole public domain recording of Ian's lyrically risqué *Got To Get Up*. In Val Jennings' OGWT liner note Janis recalls her emotions prior to filming: 'I was really nervous—everyone had built the show up tremendously.' Sans her band Ian encores with a stunning rendition of *Tea And Sympathy*. Her lyric encapsulates

later life with a maturity way beyond her, then, twenty-five years. There might have been an element of relief that it was the final song, but her introduction finds Janis musing: 'Boy this isn't so hard. I'll start getting cocky about it now.'

March's releases paired MIRACLE ROW (1977) with JANIS IAN (1978) while NIGHT RAINS (1979) is accompanied by her final CBS release RESTLESS EYES (1981) and also UNCLE WONDERFUL (1983). During her sojourn at CBS Ian enjoyed massive popularity in Japan and Australia—*Love Is Blind* from AFTERTONES spent six months at number one on the Japanese singles chart, and MIRACLE ROW's *Will You Dance* also peaked number one. UNCLE WONDERFUL was initially released down under by Festival Records. The first European pressing didn't surface till 1995, on the now defunct Grapevine imprint.

A musical experiment, Janis cut MIRACLE ROW with her road band instead of session players. Having offered: 'In retrospect, it may have been a mistake to use my touring band,' her liner note moves on to explain the inspiration behind a handful of her still potent songs. Recorded at the Hit Factory in New York production is credited to Ron Frangipane and Janis. Frangipane had previously worked as her arranger, and MIRACLE ROW went on to attain platinum sales in Japan alone. Produced by Joe Wissert, JANIS IAN was also recorded at The Hit Factory. Having expressed a fondness for BETWEEN THE LINES, Janis adds: 'Of the seven albums I did for CBS, NIGHT RAINS is my favourite.' Another Frangipane/Ian production, the album marked a major new departure—co-writing. Co-written with Albert Hammond the Latin rhythms of *The Other Side Of The Sun* saw her break into the lucrative South American market, while *Fly Too High*—co-written with Giorgio Moroder—topped charts literally everywhere except the States, while worldwide the album sold twelve times platinum. Veering from the 'live bonus track' norm, an extended 12" version of *Fly Too High* appears on this reissue. Ian's seventh and final CBS album RESTLESS EYES has long been a personal favourite. I've always looked upon it as Janis' most musically diverse effort. She comments: 'I loved the songs, because of the range they represented.' The CBS deal called for twelve albums, but six months after RESTLESS EYES was issued Janis requested a release from her contract. The label agreed.

Following the Australia-only release of UNCLE WONDERFUL, Janis retired again, on this occasion for a decade. Broadening her skills, in retirement



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Janis studied arts such as acting with Stella Adler and other teachers. To fulfil her songwriting contract, in 1986 Janis began commuting to Nashville. Two years later she moved there. Preceded by the production company, Spasm Inc., in 1992 Janis conceived her own record label, Rude Girl Records—back in 1966 a journalist had so described fifteen year old Janis.

Janis Ian, recording artist, resurfaced in 1993 with the appropriately titled (and Grammy nominated) BREAKING SILENCE—not part of this reissue series—and Edsel's third and final tranche picks up her career with the pairing of REVENGE (1995) and HUNGER (1997) and from the new millennium BILLIE'S BONES (2004) and FOLK IS THE NEW BLACK (2006). Proof that we live in—slightly—more enlightened times, 2001 saw *Society's Child* inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame.

Co-produced with Mary Chapin Carpenter's long time associate John Jennings, REVENGE was released by Beacon Records, while Windham Hill issued HUNGER. BILLIE'S BONES was leased to John Prine's imprint Oh Boy Records in the States, and in the UK to Cooking Vinyl Records. Prior to performing *Stars* on the 1974 OGWT, Janis commented: 'I grew up listening to recordings by Edith Piaf and Billie Holiday.' Three decades later, faithful to Ian's (own) musical

vision Holiday was memorialised in song. The double disc live set WORKING WITHOUT A NET was originally released in 2003, and features material old and new recorded between 1991 through late 2002 in the States, UK, Europe and Japan, including Janis' 'tongue in cheek' take on Lee Hazelwood's classic *These Boots Were Made For Walking*. Ian's most recent album FOLK IS THE NEW BLACK was released by Cooking Vinyl on both sides of the Atlantic. Four decades on from *Society's Child*, harnessing music's power to change, via songs like *Danger, Danger* and *The Great Divide* Janis continued to air perceived wrongs. On a lighter note, My Autobiography deliberately presaged the very readable SOCIETY'S CHILD: MY AUTOBIOGRAPHY [ISBN: 978-1-58542-675-1] published by Penguin/Tarcher in late July 2008.

For close on two decades via Rude Girl Records, Ian has vigilantly overseen the recording of her new material—self-released or leased—while also maintaining in print her extensive back catalogue. The liner booklets in this Edsel reissue series are comprehensive and beautifully conceived—did I mention they also include the song lyrics—while the music contained on the albums is never less than thought provoking. Now that's what I call a buy, buy, win, win scenario. **Arthur Wood**