

val Express trek across Canada. This footage brought on rushes of recognition in those of us fortunate enough to have experienced at least one of those hard-driving shows.

Co-directed by Howard Alk and Seaton Findlay, and completely edited by the gifted Alk, *Janis* is a credit to Crawley Films of Ottawa, both on a financial and (ahem) the ol' artistic level. (That's the one that those who look for stiffs never care about.) The film does not attempt to eulogize, it merely relies on the singer herself to unfold her own story through performance and some interviews. The nostalgia trap of endless associates telling of knowing her when, is blessedly absent.

Concert footage for the most part is skillfully blended with Joplin interviews in various parts of the world, which work on both the superficial level ("You came from Port Arthur, Texas, didn't you?") as well as allowing us intimate glimpses of what stardom was doing to this free spirit and how she was riding the wave to the very end. We see her audiences briefly, but meaningfully, as in the very powerful closing sequence, filmed in Germany, where short haired GI's with peace medallions around their necks get on stage to form a grotesque yet thoroughly American tableau of dancing figures around her, completely fitting to a small town Texas girl turned superstar.

Sprinkled with humourous and insightful anecdotes from Janis' own lips ("If you wanna get a piece of . . . talent, you gotta start hustling your ass early in the morning. . ."), enough free language to earn a restricted rating in the States (seven "fucks" by Budge Crawley's count) and catching her off-guard many times during the long hours of rehearsing, recording, performing, the film *Janis* is itself a hard driving show, its pace being set from the outset by the rollicking Joplin beat. The three supporting bands she had at various times during her skyrocketing career (Big Brother, Snooky Flowers, and the Cozmic Bluez Band) were all composed of very high if not superb musicians, and some of the guitar solos are remarkable, as is Janis' soulful duet with Snooky at Woodstock.

Being a compilation documentary, *Janis* does have its shortcomings. That happens whenever footage from various media are mixed to produce a final film. Heads get chopped due to the different ratio between 16mm and 35mm theatrical image and the unity of the experience is jeopardized. Yet



2-inch colour videotape from an old Dick Cavett show is blown up to 35mm with excellent results. The sound on any rock film tends to cause problems with theatre management reluctant to install a good sound system, but Budge is following the movie around making sure that enough decibels reach enough perceptive ears through professional quality speakers. (How long have we to wait for quadraphonic sound on all rock films?)

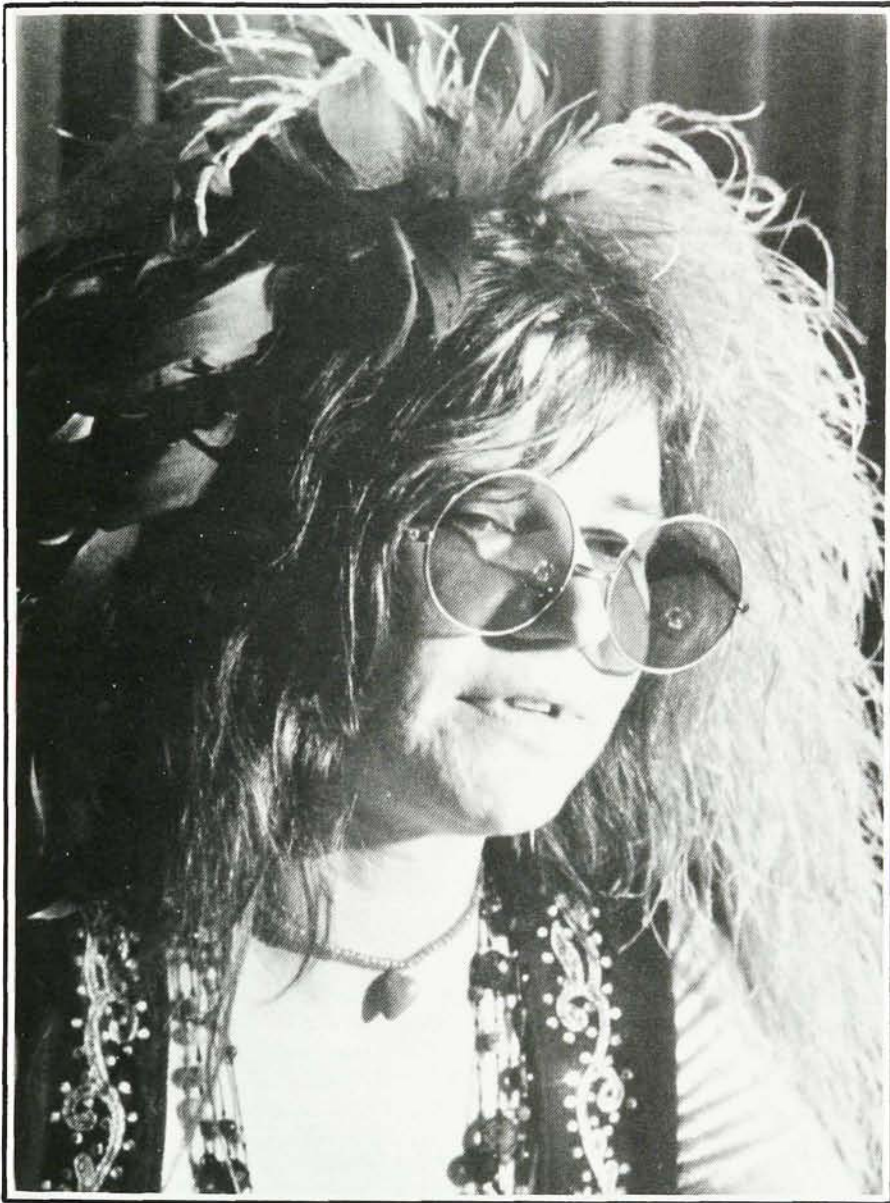
Janis' own philosophy of a life without bullshit permeates this capturing of her heart and soul on celluloid, most memorably in the sequence showing her triumphant return to Port Arthur to attend the tenth reunion of her high school graduating class. Once a reclusive student with hardly a friend, she makes the most of rubbing in her success and chuckling at the storm created by her contagiously explosive presence. "What do you like about Port Arthur?" she is asked by the local TV reporter. "Er . . . no comment," replies the living legend with glee, adding later: "I'm glad to see that Port Arthur has loosened up a bit. There are even signs of . . . drug use. But I prefer to live in San Francisco, because what place could be looser?"

She even has a funny story about a member of her band being busted in "Vancouver, England. Oh, no! Canada, but it's part of England, right?" and laments the "assholes" who would hassle a human being for such a minor triviality as dope in a hotel room. These linear interviews are kept short in the film, and Janis the woman grinding her liberated pelvis with the maniacal striving of an amphetamine freak for satisfaction, her hip clothes and feathers, her outrageously colourful frills and jewellery, are allowed to dominate the film, and the viewer has Crawley, Alk and Findlay to thank for it. We just boogie along with "Try," "Cry, Cry, Baby," "Cozmic Blues," "Summertime," "Ball and Chain," "Oh Lord, won't you buy me a Mercedes Benz," and "Me and Bobby McGee," without a single morbid reminder of her death, as if she had never died and we were all back in San Francisco slugging Southern Comfort with a truly remarkable lady.

—George Csaba Koller

Janis

With the current fascination of pop stars, (last year's film of Jimi Hendrix and this year Dustin Hoffman's interpretation of Lenny Bruce) Crawley



Films has released a documentary on one of the greatest blues singers, Janis Joplin.

Janis had its Canadian premiere on December 1 at the National Library auditorium in Ottawa. The premiere was organized by the National Film Theatre of Canada (a division of the Canadian Film Institute) and Crawley Films. That evening, the 400-seat auditorium was packed and the audience loved the film.

Janis opens with a shot of Joplin's psychedelically painted Porsche, as the soundtrack plays "Mercedes Benz". Most of the film is Janis and her music, there are a total of 15 songs including some not previously released. The film follows Janis from Calgary to Toronto in 1970 on the Festival Express tour and includes her



performances at Woodstock, the Monterey Pop Festival and a concert in Frankfurt, Germany.

Brief interviews with Janis are interspersed throughout the film. At one point she is asked if she enjoys performing and responds, "It's real, not a performance, but it only lasts for a moment".

The film exposes Janis at her best. Onstage she was an uninhibited raspy singer torturing herself with song lyrics that erupted from her heart. She was a wild child floating in the frantic pace of her career.

She had soul but wouldn't admit it. She referred to Billie Holiday and Aretha Franklin, "they're subtle, so subtle, all I've got now is strength".

The film has an hilarious exchange between Janis and America's own intellectual charm boy, Dick Cavett. After finishing a raucous song on his television show, she saunters back for the standard trivial interview. Cavett, trying desperately to be hip, says, "I guess your engines are all revved up after that number". Janis later catches Cavett off-guard snapping, "with shoes like that (suede boots) you must be a real swinger".

Janis is a crisply edited and loving portrait of Janis Joplin the singer. But little of Janis Joplin the person is adequately revealed in the film. Glimpses of Janis' remembrances of her youth are briefly seen in a sequence where Janis returns to her home town of Port Arthur, Texas for a class reunion. She sadly reflects that "they laughed me out of school, out of town and out of the state". When asked whether she attended the senior prom she simply replies, "no, nobody ever asked me".

Howard Alk, a co-director along with Seaton Findlay, has assembled a vast amount of material into a compact running time of 96 minutes. Alk is primarily known for his documentary, *The Murder of Fred Hampton*.

Janis is a rousing documentary made with true dedication and sincerity, full of good music and humour. The film never bogs down in overlong interviews, they are all kept short. The film is total Janis, upfront, and at her best.

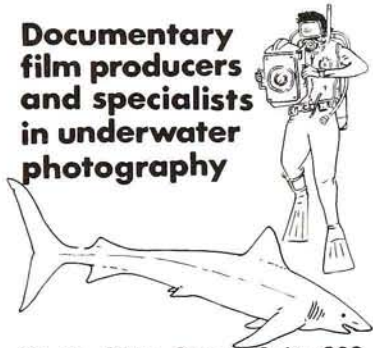
At the end of the film as the numerous credits appear, Janis begins to sing "Me and Bobby McGee". Then, still photos of Janis as a little girl are flashed on the screen. As the photos fade away, we sensed that we never did get to know or understand the real Janis Joplin.

- Tony Lofaro

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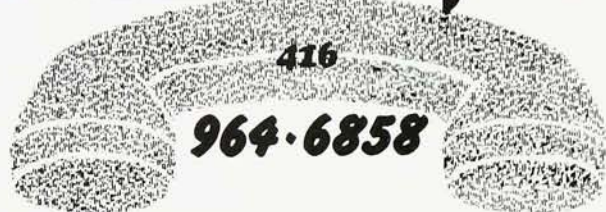


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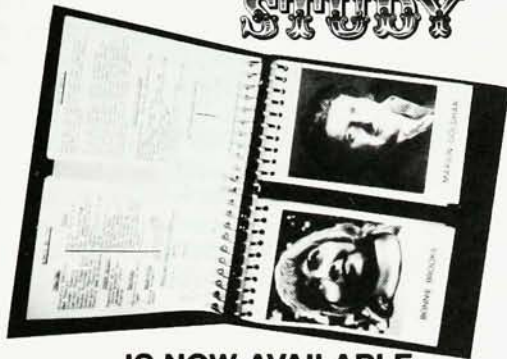
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