

AMERICAN MASTERS



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***American Masters* Honors Grammy-Winning Music Legend Janis Ian with Feature Documentary Premiering on PBS June 20**

*In celebration of Pride Month, **Janis Ian: Breaking Silence** takes a candid look into the "At Seventeen" singer-songwriter's decades-long journey as a musician staying true to her voice and artistry.*

Ever since she was a teenager, Janis Ian has used her musical talents to express herself and write songs about the world around her. In 1966, she released "Society's Child," a song she wrote at just 14 years old about the travails of interracial love during a time when the topic was taboo. Although the song skyrocketed her to fame, she was also subjected to intense pressure and hostility from racist critics. Despite the isolation and scrutiny she experienced, Ian continued to explore her love of music and her talent for songwriting, which ultimately led to a career full of award-winning works that chronicled her journey of self-exploration and evolving reflections of society. Dive into the story behind Ian's musical artistry, starting as a precocious teenager who transforms into a groundbreaking voice in folk music and beyond, in ***American Masters – Janis Ian: Breaking Silence***, premiering nationwide Friday, June 20 at 9 p.m. ET on PBS (check local listings), pbs.org/americanmasters and the [PBS App](#).

Janis Ian: Breaking Silence made its world premiere at the DOC NYC Festival in November 2024 and has a star-studded lineup of interviews including **Lily Tomlin, Joan Baez, Arlo Guthrie, Jean Smart, Laurie Metcalf** and more.

Featuring archival footage and stills, animations, mood shots and new interviews with Ian, ***Janis Ian: Breaking Silence*** follows the artist's life, showing how her politically active parents influenced her songwriting, particularly with the song "Society's Child." Following the song's release, she began performing at renowned music venues in New York City's West Village alongside folk music's most notable artists, cementing her place as a stalwart in the folk genre.

Her growing fame, however, came at a price – the media scrutiny and antagonism, especially at such a young age, took an emotional toll on Ian. In the face of these hardships and the pressure to conform to the music industry's expectations of young female artists, Ian continued to hone her craft and stay true to her evolving artistic voice. Her Grammy Award-winning record "At Seventeen" catapulted her to even greater fame and solidified her as one of the most celebrated female songwriters of the 20th century. The poignant song delved into the pain of isolation and struggles with self-worth, and also tapped into the angst of a generation.

Along with her musical accomplishments spanning several decades, the film gives an intimate look into Ian's relationships, the challenges she faced within the music industry and her struggles to hide her sexual identity before coming out as a lesbian during the release of her 1993 album "Breaking Silence." Her fearless songwriting and musical brilliance continue to influence artists today.

Janis Ian: Breaking Silence is directed and produced by award-winning filmmaker Varda Bar-Kar, who previously directed and wrote the documentary feature *Fandango on the Wall* for HBO MAX. Additional documentary credits include *The Cheech*, spotlighting television and film star Cheech Marin, and *Big Voice*, which premiered on Netflix and earned a Bronze Telly Award.

Now in its 39th season on PBS, ***American Masters*** illuminates the lives and creative journeys of our nation's most enduring artistic giants — those who have left an indelible impression on our cultural landscape — through compelling, unvarnished stories. Setting the standard for documentary film profiles, the series has earned widespread critical acclaim: 28 Emmy Awards — including 10 for Outstanding Nonfiction Series and five for Outstanding Nonfiction Special— two News & Documentary Emmys, 14 Peabodys, three Grammys, two Producers Guild Awards, an Oscar, and many other honors. To further explore the lives and works of more than 290 masters past and present, the [American Masters website](#) offers full episodes, film outtakes, filmmaker interviews, the podcast "American Masters: Creative Spark," educational resources, digital original series and more. The series is a production of The WNET Group.

Janis Ian: Breaking Silence is a production of Wild Rose Pictures in association with GroundStorm Media and American Masters Pictures. Pierre Hauser, Gloria Ann Evans and Michael Kantor are executive producers. Varda Bar-Kar, Alessandra Pasquino and Brooke

Wentz are producers. Bill Prady is co-executive producer. The film is written by Varda Bar-Kar and Pierre Hauser, and directed by Varda Bar-Kar. For **American Masters**, Michael Kantor is executive producer, Julie Sacks is series producer and Joe Skinner is digital lead.

American Masters will be available for streaming concurrent with broadcast on all station-branded PBS platforms, including [PBS.org](https://www.pbs.org) and the [PBS app](#), available on iOS, Android, Roku streaming devices, Apple TV, Android TV, Amazon Fire TV, Samsung Smart TV, Chromecast and VIZIO. PBS station members can view many series, documentaries and specials via [PBS Passport](#). For more information about PBS Passport, visit the [PBS Passport FAQ](#) website.

American Masters' commitment to accessible programming is a continuation of PBS's mission to provide more resources and availability of audio-described content streaming on PBS.org. In addition to audio description (AD), **American Masters** programming with extended audio descriptions (EAD), large open captions, on-screen ASL interpretation (ASL), combined descriptive transcription and more can be found [here](#).

Original production support for **Janis Ian: Breaking Silence** is provided by Jewish Story Partners, the Kenneth Rainin Foundation, Susan Lowenberg and Joyce Newstat, Cathy Sullivan, the Leslie and Roslyn Goldstein Foundation, Anne Germanacos, Christina Harcar and Lynne Therriault.

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About The WNET Group

[The WNET Group](#) creates inspiring media content and meaningful experiences for diverse audiences nationwide. It is the community-supported home of New York's [THIRTEEN](#) – America's flagship PBS station – [WLIW](#), THIRTEEN PBS KIDS, WLIW World and Create; [NJ PBS](#), New Jersey's statewide public television network; Long Island's only NPR station WLIW-FM; [ALL ARTS](#), the arts and culture media provider; newsroom [NJ Spotlight News](#); and FAST channel PBS Nature. Through these channels and streaming platforms, The WNET Group brings arts, culture, education, news, documentary, entertainment, and DIY programming to more than five million viewers each month. The WNET Group's award-winning productions include signature PBS series ***Nature***, ***Great Performances***, ***American Masters***, and ***Amanpour and Company*** and trusted local news programs like ***NJ Spotlight News with Briana Vannozzi***. Inspiring curiosity and nurturing dreams, The WNET Group's award-winning Kids' Media and Education team produces the PBS KIDS series ***Cyberchase***, interactive ***Mission US*** history games, and resources for families, teachers and caregivers. A leading nonprofit public media producer for more than 60 years, The WNET Group presents and distributes content that fosters lifelong learning, including initiatives addressing poverty, jobs, economic opportunity, social justice, understanding, and the environment. Through Passport, station members can stream new and archival programming anytime, anywhere. The WNET Group represents the best in public media. Join us.

About Janis Ian

Janis Ian is a 10-time GRAMMY nominee (two-time winner) whose songs and performances have resonated with a diverse group of fans for more than five decades. She is one of just a handful of artists who have received nominations in eight completely different categories. Raised by activist Jewish parents on a New Jersey farm, she currently lives in Florida with her partner and wife of 34 years.

Ian received her first GRAMMY nomination in 1967 for "Best Folk Album" with *Janis Ian*, featuring "Society's Child." She took home her first GRAMMY in 1975 for "Best Pop Vocal Performance, Female – At Seventeen," and her second for "Best Spoken Word Album – Society's Child: My Autobiography" in 2013. Her 2023 GRAMMY nomination for "Best Folk Album," *The Light at the End of the Line*, brought her full circle.

Two of her most powerful songs, "Society's Child" and "At Seventeen," were inducted into the GRAMMY Hall of Fame in 2002 and 2008, respectively. She received the International Folk Music Awards Lifetime Achievement Award in 2023 and was honored by Ireland's Tradfest and Ireland's Minister of Culture in 2024 for Outstanding Achievements In the Arts.

Ian has been mining her treasure trove of music and memorabilia for a massive archival project, the Janis Ian Archives, that opened in October of 2024 at Berea College in Berea, Kentucky. She has also been preparing collections of rare and previously unreleased recordings. The first two releases, *Live at the Calderone Theater 1975* and *Worktapes & Demos Vol. 1*, dropped last fall with more to come. She is also making appearances to support the theatrical release of a documentary about her life and work. *Janis Ian: Breaking Silence* is helmed by award-winning director/producer Varda Bar-Kar, best known for *Big Voice* (Netflix, PBS) and *Fandango at the Wall* (Max). Along with Ian, the film, which will have a June 2025 broadcast premiere on PBS' famed *American Masters*, features interviews with friends including Joan Baez, Arlo Guthrie, Lily Tomlin, Jean Smart, Laurie Metcalf, and others.