

## STUDY GUIDE

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### THE PLAY

The band, the lights, the crowd: the stage is set for a full-blown rock concert.

Enter: **Janis Joplin**. She is a music legend. Her energy is like a tidal wave. Her voice is like no other. When Janis performs her music, she shares every part of herself—her life story and little bits of her soul.

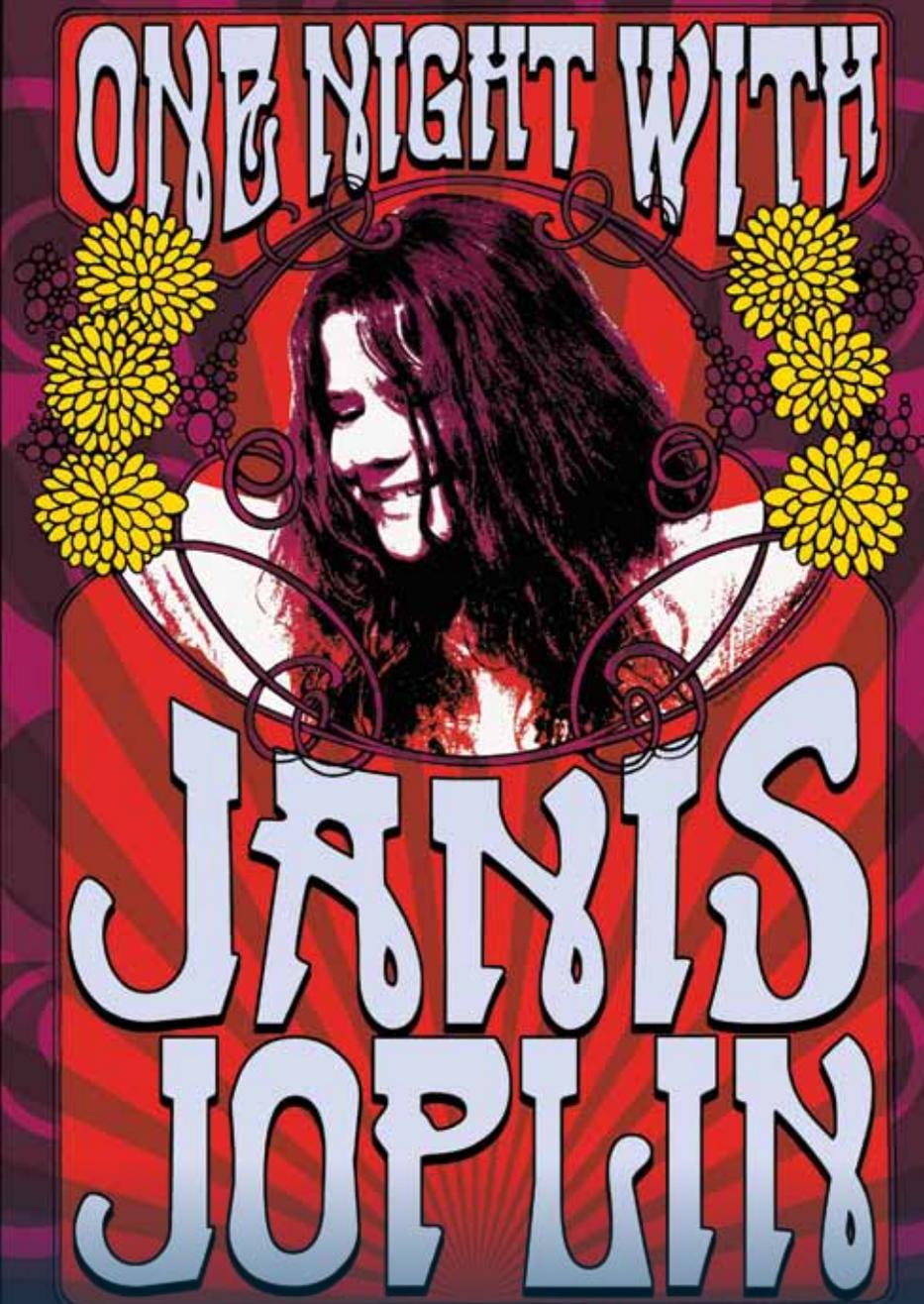
On stage we meet not only Janis, but the blues singers that influenced and inspired her. Janis describes herself as a “white chick who sings the blues,” and she never forgets Bessie Smith, Etta James, Nina Simone and the other women who taught her how to belt out her pain.

You have a seat at an impossible concert. You see, Janis Joplin died of a drug overdose in 1970 at the age of 27. Yet, here she is, suspended in time—somewhere in her mid-20s in the 1960s. She is going to give you a show!

How did she grow up to be the artist she's remembered as? What art grabbed her and wouldn't let go? It's clear she's got a case of the blues, but did she really ever want a cure?

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*All of a sudden someone threw me in this rock 'n' roll band. They threw these musicians at me, man, and the sound was coming from behind. The bass was charging me. And I decided then and there that that was it. I never wanted to do anything else.” –Janis, *One Night with Janis Joplin**

## ONE NIGHT WITH JANIS JOPLIN

Now playing in the Kreeger

September 28 – November 4, 2012

created, written, and directed by Randy Johnson

## MEET THE CREATOR:



**Randy Johnson**

“One of my favorite expressions of entertainment is the Artist in Concert. There is nothing more exciting than the sound of the audience when the lights go down just before the start of the show.”  
—Randy Johnson

Randy Johnson's career is in creating, directing, producing and staging theater, music and entertainment events, often on a large scale.

He has produced, directed, and/or written work that looks at the lives of celebrities, like boxer Mike Tyson and singer Patsy Cline. He co-conceived and directed *Elvis the Concert*, which reunited Elvis' original band, singers and musical director—all playing live in conjunction with real footage of Elvis singing years ago. The show is in the Guinness Book of World Records as “the most successful rock tour performed by an artist deceased”.

He staged and directed Pope Benedict's most recent appearance in New York, which included 4-hour concert featuring musicians like Kelly Clarkson.

His has directed and produced PBS specials, the grand opening of Universal Studios Islands of Adventure, President Ronald Reagan's 80th birthday, Disney on Ice, cruise ship performances, concerts, charity events, and nightclub acts.

His other theater credits include producing the West Coast premiere of the Tony Award winning drama *The Normal Heart*. His autobiography, *Adventures in the Hotel Crazy*, will be published in 2013.



## MEET JANIS JOPLIN

(1943-1970)

Janis Joplin was born on January 19, 1943 in Port Arthur, Texas, an oil town. Her parents, Dorothy (a sales clerk) and Seth Joplin (a gas station attendant) encouraged her love of music. She had two younger siblings and loved singing in the church choir and reading.

Early on it was clear that Joplin was an extrovert (someone who gets their energy from being with other people). Her mother said, “Without extra attention, Janis was unhappy and unsatisfied. The normal rapport wasn't enough for her.”

In high school Joplin gained weight and had a bad case of acne that scarred her face. She started dressing differently, cursing, drinking and developing an outrageous persona. Although she felt comfortable with a few friends (who introduced her to the early blues records that shaped her career) Joplin was fairly miserable during high school. She was never asked to or attended prom.



In college, she joined the folk band Waller Creek Boys. She dropped out of college and tried to start her singing career in San Francisco. There, she became addicted to drugs and returned home to enter rehab. In 1966 she returned to California and joined Big Brother and the Holding



Big Brother and the Holding Company

Company. Her real career began. Later, she left the band for a solo career, first backed by the Kozmic Blues Band and then the Full Tilt Boogie Band.



Joplin was often quoted as preferring Southern Comfort to all liquor.

## JANIS AND DRUGS

In high school, Joplin began drinking heavily. After dropping out of college she became addicted to methadine, a type of methamphetamine. At 21 she went home to kick the habit, but soon returned to San Francisco. Joplin then discovered heroin, sometimes costing her \$200 a day. By the end of the 1960s, she was in and out of rehab. In October 1970 she died of a heroin overdose. Her last album, *Pearl*, was released after her death.

## THREE BIG QUESTIONS

What makes an artist's work timeless?

What is the relationship between a musician's music and their lifestyle?

What has been the role of women in the development of music in the 20th and 21st centuries?



**ACTIVITY:** What makes a musician a legend or icon? Draw a picture/diagram of a music legend, labeling the things that make them a legend (ex. a signature instrument, fashion, screaming fans, etc.).

# FEMINISM AND ROCK 'N' ROLL

## FEMINIST FASHION:



**IN THE 1960S**, many things were changing. Although rock 'n' roll was a revolutionary medium, its gender roles could be traditional. Shattering stereotypes, Joplin helped show rock wasn't just a man's world. Not a sugary sweet voice, Joplin made her audience *work* to accept her. She growled her songs, wasn't afraid of her own power, and didn't care about being cute. Joplin is known for her powerful renditions of "Piece of My Heart" and "Me and Bobby McGee."

Joplin's look—long hair without product, no makeup and either loose-fitting clothes or outrageous fashion pieces—was a rejection of pin-up beauty. Rock writer Lillian Roxon called Joplin "homely."

## JANIS THE PERFORMER

"Janis Joplin claimed the blues, soul, gospel, country and rock with unquestionable authority and verve, fearlessly inhabiting psychedelic guitar jams, back-porch roots and everything in between. Her volcanic performances left audiences stunned and speechless, while her sexual magnetism, world-wise demeanor and flamboyant style shattered every stereotype about female artists - and essentially invented the "rock mama" paradigm." – JanisJoplin.com

## JANIS THE PERFORMANCE

Mary Bridget Davies portrays Janis Joplin in the show. She also played Joplin in the Off-Broadway show *Love, Janis*. She has also toured internationally with Big Brother and the Holding Company, Joplin's original band. Davies said, "When I sing those songs, it's like the first time I'm singin' 'em. Because that's how she would've done it."



**ACTIVITY:** If you could bring any artist back to life for one last concert, who would it be? Why? Describe what point in their career you'd showcase and what songs they'd sing. Where would the concert take place?



*I think I sound like a white chick singing the “blues.” ...There was just something about that ache I heard that got me bad. After all, the blues is just a bad woman feeling good.”*

# INFLUENTIAL BLUES SINGERS

**JANIS JOPLIN** shares the stage with a blues singer, who represents the blues singers that influenced her. The blues evolved out of African-American work songs and is the basis of jazz, rock, R&B, and hip-hop.



**Bessie Smith (1894-1937) “Empress of the Blues”:** A big woman with an even bigger voice, Bessie Smith was known for her vocal power, phrasing, tone and range. She also led a wild life: painful relationships with men, alcoholism, and scandalous relationships with women. One of Joplin’s lovers, Jae Whitaker, said Joplin felt like Bessie Smith reincarnated. In 1970, Joplin paid half of the money needed to erect a proper tombstone for Smith.



**Etta James (1938-2012) “Miss Peaches” and sometimes “The Matriarch of R&B”:** Born Jamesetta Hawkins, Etta James made her first record at 15. Like other blues singers, she knew her classics—but she was also ready to rock with the sensual beat of a new, proud generation. With her earthy voice and sass, she mastered the blues, jazz, soul and R&B. James also struggled with heroin and cocaine addiction. Her signature song was “At Last.”



**Nina Simone (1933-2003) “High Priestess of Soul”:** Nina Simone (born Eunice Kathleen Waymon) started playing piano by ear at age 3. Her parents enrolled her in classical music lessons. When she applied to study at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, the school did not accept her because she was black. She made her own way playing gigs in Philadelphia, mixing jazz and blues with classics. She became well-known for her vocal interpretation and as a musical storyteller. Simone was a passionate force in the Civil Rights Movement during the mid-1960s.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### BOOKS & ARTICLES

*Blues Music in the Sixties: A Story in Black and White* by Dr. Ulrich Adelt  
*A Bad Woman Feeling Good: Blues and the Women Who Sing Them* by Buzzy Jackson  
 “Janis Joplin: The Hippies Blues Singer as Feminist Heroine” by Jerry Rodnitzsky, *Journal of Texas Music History*, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 7-15

### ON THE WEB

The Blues: [www.pbs.org/theblues/](http://www.pbs.org/theblues/)  
 Janis Joplin: The Official Site: [www.janisjoplin.com](http://www.janisjoplin.com)

### MUSEUMS

National Museum of Women in the Arts  
 Exhibit—Women Who Rock: Vision, Passion, Power.

### Helpful Hints for Theater Audiences

As an audience member at the theater, YOU are part of the show! Just as you see and hear the actors onstage, they can see and hear you in the audience. To help the performers do their best, please remember the following:

- Arrive at least 30 minutes early.
  - Visit the restroom before the show starts.
  - Before the show begins, turn off your cell phone, watch alarms, pagers and other electronic devices. If anything rings by accident, shut it off immediately.
  - Save food and drinks for the lobby. There is no eating or drinking inside the theater.
  - Walk to and from your seat - no running in the theater!
  - Do not talk, whisper, sing or hum.
  - Do not use cell phones for calls, text messages, pictures or games.
  - Keep your feet on the floor, not on the seat in front of you.
  - Avoid getting up during a show because it distracts your neighbors and the performers. If you must leave, wait for a scene change, then exit quietly and quickly.
  - Performers appreciate enthusiastic applause rather than whistling or shouting.
  - Cameras and videotape are prohibited because they are distracting to the performers.
- Enjoy the show!**



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