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Few would deny the brutal beauty of Janis Joplin. A voice so shockingly raw and searingly honest is a rare thing, as all who have ever heard ‘Cry Baby’ would attest. But few of us know the woman behind the music, excepting her membership in the tragic, perversely romanticised ‘27 Club’. This is set to change with Pearl: The Janis Joplin Story. Writer/director Chris Keeble has assembled a team of outstanding independent talent to resurrect the circumstances of Joplin’s life, and the show has already received a rapturous reception.

“I wear many hats,” Keeble laughs as she launches into appropriately rapid conversation. “I’m constantly writing down ideas and coming up with shows, being on the phone, talking to venues, trying to put together the puzzle of the tour, working on 2016/17 now. You’re a salesperson, you’re a marketeer, you’re a publicist. You’re in conflict resolution, you’re a fixer. I’ve turned into one of those people who somehow find themselves in everything, so luckily I’ve got a good right brain for the creative, but I can also kick in the business side when it’s needed.” Keeble is indeed ideally placed to bring such a show to life. Her life is firmly centred on the development and showcase of indie talent, and with a production such as this that touches on one of the most celebrated and idiosyncratic singers of the ’60s, her talents truly get to flourish.

She has also come quite a long way since her Red Faces debut on Hey Hey It’s Saturday back in the day. “I got beaten by an eight-year-old brat who made siren noises,” she says. “Four years at uni and some eight-year-old comes and puts me in my place. The life lesson? Learn how to make siren noises.”

And while klaxons are kept to a minimum, everything else you would hope to see of Joplin’s exceptional life will be on display in Pearl, led by the incredible Liza Ohlback. “My passion is for independent Australian artists,” says Keeble. “It’s tough out there, so I try and look for commercial vehicles, like The Janis Joplin Story, that will help showcase original artists. All my artists onstage have great bodies of their own work, and I actively promote selling their own wares at the end of the show. We don’t sell Joplin stuff, because you can just walk into JB Hi-Fi and get that; I don’t need to be a warehouse for that. But I don’t mind being a warehouse for these great Australian talents. All original stuff. Liza, who stars in this show, is such an extraordinary singer. Just amazing. As does Jeremy Edwards, our musical director. But still, it’s a tough industry, and this is my way of trying to help.”

While many will be drawn to the production on the strength of Joplin’s songs, it is Keeble’s hope that audiences walk away at the end with more than a simple night’s entertainment. Instead, her intention is to educate people not only of the struggles and successes of Joplin’s personal life, but to understand the cultural and historical context from which she emerged; the small, conservative communities that Joplin put so much effort into escaping. “It’s told in third person. Our story is in chronological order, but the songs aren’t in any particular chronology. They’re dropped in because they suit that particular time of the story. We start with her as a young girl, and the suffering she went through both in her family and when she went to school. She was voted the ugliest man on campus, and unsurprisingly she had massive self-esteem issues.

I went to Port Arthur in Texas [Joplin’s hometown] at the beginning of the year to do some research on her life, and … well, you can see why she wanted to escape that place. “She’s quite an interesting girl, was very open about her sexuality. She was openly bisexual, which, in those days, not many people talked about. “She had tattoos, which not many girls had. She was part of women’s liberation, a thrift shop junkie with feathers in her hair. She was a real trailblazer. We also found a recording that she made John Lennon on his birthday, ‘Happy Trails’. She sent this and Lennon only got it in the post three or four days after she died. So we’ve added that, and it’s really something.”

Given Joplin’s contemporaries were folk like Hendrix, Dylan, Leonard Cohen and the like, it won’t take much convincing to tempt people into delving back to that era of music. But what is paramount is that Keeble is not seeking to simply replicate Joplin onstage. Having grown up with her music, she has too much respect for such mimicry. “I think the first thing is, we’re not trying to pretend to be Janis. You’re not going to see [impersonators] walk out onstage; I didn’t want it to be your typical tribute by a pub band. I wanted to elevate it to a bit more of a theatrical level, so we deliver the songs in a very cool, well-developed way.

That’s why nobody has done a Janis Joplin show. 90 minutes of Janis, lyrically and vocally, is extremely difficult. No-one does it. Janis couldn’t even do 90 minutes of Janis. I wasn’t looking for a pretender to go up there and scream away like Janis did. I wanted something quite intimate and personal that makes her seem real.”