

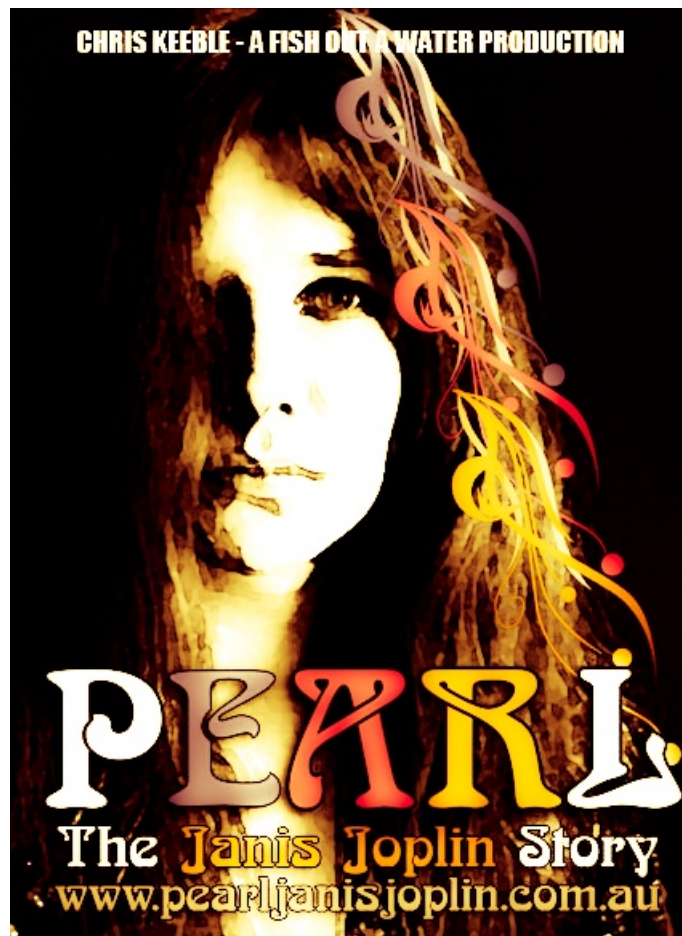


STUDY GUIDE – LINKED TO STAGE PRODUCTION

PEARL

THE JANIS JOPLIN STORY

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Study notes written by Bernie Howitt - Educator & Chris Keeble - Producer

The historical context

Janis Joplin was born in the working class eastern Texas oil town of Port Arthur on 19th January, 1943. The United States was deeply embroiled in World War II after Japan had bombed the American naval base of Pearl Harbour in Hawaii, on 7th December, 1941. That war would end with the use of atomic bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, before the world entered a Cold War as the tensions between the Communist Soviet Union and capitalist United States occasionally boiled over into conflicts such as Vietnam, Berlin and Vietnam.

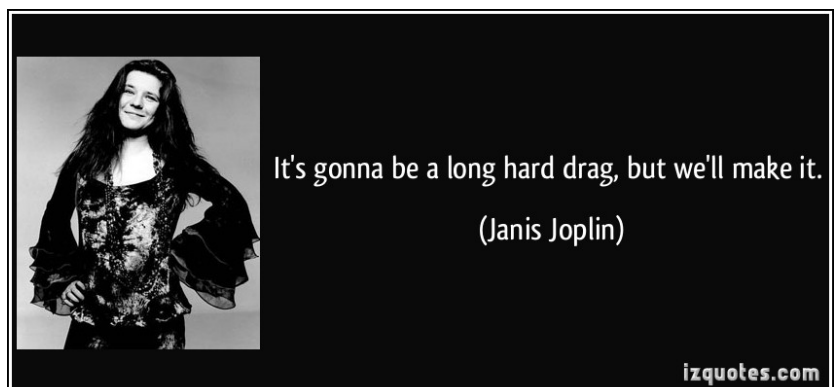
The America Janis grew up in was developing economically, and prosperity was the aim of post-World War II families. Suburbs grew rapidly, employment was high, and teenagers emerged as a distinct group. The prosperity that emerged also supported a level of social conformity. Teenagers were viewed as a threat to that conformity as they challenged the ideals of middle class wealth, safe popular culture, and different opportunities based on race and gender.

Port Arthur was a major oil refinery, and the oil industry dominated the town. Janis' parents had moved there in the mid-1930s, when oil production was helping the country emerge from the rigours of the Great Depression. In a sign of the changing nature of life in America at this time, Janis was the first child born in either of her parents' families to have been born in a city rather than on a farm. Her town would reach its population peak around 1960, the year Janis graduated from high school.

Janis was determined to exit Port Arthur as soon as possible. After time at the University of Texas at Austin, she ended up in San Francisco by 1964, at a time when rock music was emerging as the major popular culture for young people. Janis had been influenced by two recent developments in popular culture. One was the Beats movement who were closely linked to individual expression, jazz and the new style of writing championed by Jack Kerouac. The other was the folk music boom of the late 1950s and early 1960s, that encouraged a "do it yourself" approach.

Janis found herself in the perfect time and place by relocating to mid-sixties San Francisco. Much of the colour, sound, ideals, and language that is described today under the umbrella of "the Sixties," had its origins in mid-Sixties San Francisco.

The Beats had given way to hippies, America was becoming heavily involved in the Vietnam War, young people were experimenting with alternative lifestyles, and Janis Joplin found herself at the epicentre of this "youth quake."



Becoming Pearl

According to her sister Laura, “Janis was a bright, precocious child with a winning smile and a manner about her that charmed people.” At fourteen she moved from Junior High to High School, and suffered the pain of being a late developer. Her face was marked with a severe



case of acne, and she became incredibly insecure about her appearance. Her high school career was perhaps best described in the report comment by a 10th grade teacher, “I enjoyed having her in class. Janis is an excellent student and thinker...however Ns (needs improvement) will become Xs (unsatisfactory) unless talking is stopped.”

All the insecurities associated with adolescence were compounded when Janis developed acne, and her willingness to wear pants and short dresses, as well as a refusal to speak out against African-Americans marked her as different to most of her peers. Her final year of high school was miserable. She endured comments about her morals, spitting and rock throwing. In an interview Janis reflected on those times, “they put me down, man, those square people in Port Arthur.”

In 1962, sick of working as a waitress in Port Arthur she enrolled in an Art course at the University of Texas in Austin. She lasted two semesters, long enough to be featured in the University’s newspaper under the headline, “She Dares to be Different.” Indeed the earliest recording of Janis’ singing dates from this period, a song she’d written called “What Good Can Drinking Do,” that reveals an original voice that was already drawing on folk and blues influences.

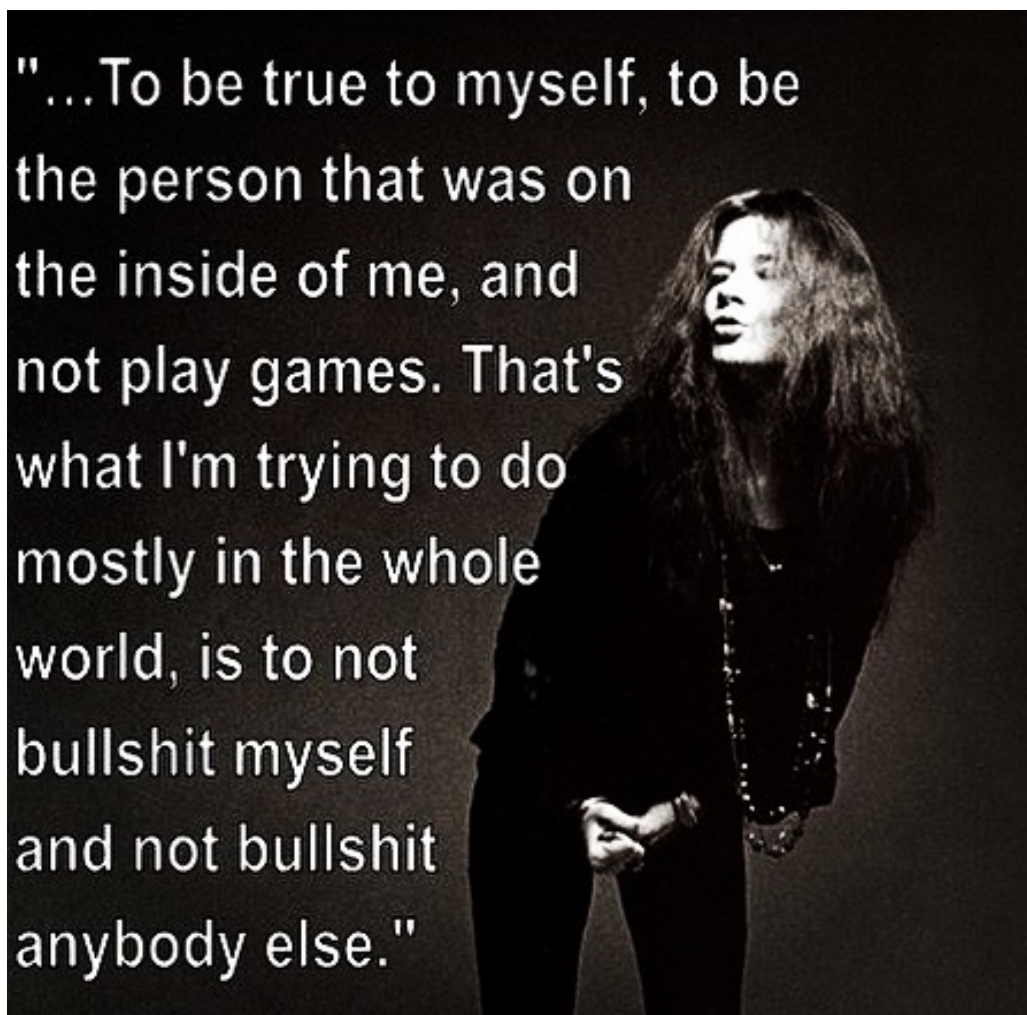
Between 1962 and 1966 Janis travelled between Texas, California and New York, before finally settling in San Francisco. It was after being taken on as lead singer of Big Brother and the Holding Company in 1966, that Janis Joplin really emerged into the limelight. The band quickly won a reputation for searing live shows, and in June 1967, Janis’ performance at the Monterey Pop Festival launched her towards legendary status.

By the time she performed with her new band at the Woodstock Festival in August 1969, she was a seasoned performer who had toured Europe, and was a must for promoters putting together rock festivals across the United States. Her recorded output had never been as strong as her live performances, with various producers struggling to capture the “lightning in a bottle” electricity she generated in concert.

By the summer of 1970 she was planning work on what would be the album that secured her position as a truly great singer, “Pearl.” On the Dick Cavett TV Show in June 1970 she announced that she would attend her ten year reunion at Thomas Jefferson High School. Her comment that her classmates had “laughed her out of school, out of town, out of state” revealed the deep personal insecurities that still haunted her. She returned from that reunion frustrated after the evening, instead of being an emotional triumph, ended in a punch up with rock’n’roller Jerry Lee Lewis backstage at his show.

That was the emotional backdrop to her final days. The “Pearl” sessions captured some of her greatest vocal performances, with her recording of Kris Kristofferson’s “Me and Bobby McGee,” a song that drew on the music of her Texas roots, would go on and become her biggest hit. It was during the recording of “Pearl” that Janis Joplin died. She had returned to the Landmark Hotel in Hollywood with a couple of band members after recording a birthday message for John Lennon that ended up as an impromptu version of the Roy Rogers cowboy tune, Happy Trails.”

On October 4, 1970, after returning to her room after buying a packet of cigarettes, she collapsed, and died alone from a heroin overdose. At the age of 27, Janis Joplin, the insecure, acne faced high school student who felt she never belonged to her home town, died as Pearl, her latest and greatest album released with her vocal track still to be recorded for a song that could well have been her epitaph, “Buried Alive in the Blues.”



Discussion questions:

1. When Janis stated on national television that she had been “laughed out of school, out of town, out of state,” what was she saying about her adolescence? How did she react to this type of bullying? Can you identify any impacts of bullying in her music?

2. Janis struggled with self-esteem issues in high school, particularly when dealing with issues of her physical appearance. How common is her experience? To what extent can you compare your life with Janis’ from Texas in the 1950s?

3. The differences between Janis’ life in 1950s Texas and 1960s San Francisco reflects the dramatic changes that western society was undergoing at that time. Discuss what you think those changes were, and how Janis’ life story helps you understand those changes.

4. Janis Joplin was inducted into the Rock’n’Roll Hall of Fame in 1995, and many of her belongings have been on display there. Does this type of official recognition show that she was ultimately able to rise above the traumas of her adolescence?

5. As you listen to the music of Janis Joplin, what influences can you hear? What styles of music would you say influenced her sound?

6. Discuss the ways in which Janis could be seen as both a positive and negative role model for teenagers today.

7. Is there any evidence of Janis Joplin’s influence in modern Australia? What does that tell you about the power of rock’n’roll music and popular culture?



Research questions:



1. What was Port Arthur in Texas like in the 1940s and 1950s? Could that environment help explain later development in Janis' career?
2. Who were "The Beats?" What was the folk boom of the late 1950s and early 1960s? How does their influence on Janis Joplin help you understand the power of popular culture to influence and change society?
3. What was San Francisco like in the late 1960s? Compare Janis' life there with her life in Port Arthur.
4. What was Janis Joplin's high school life really like? Identify experiences that you think had an impact on her social and psychological development. How did they affect her later life?
5. Why was the Monterey Pop Festival in 1967 so important for Janis' career?
6. Analyse Janis' return to Port Arthur for her 10 year school reunion in August, 1970. What effect do you think it had on her?
7. Why would Janis Joplin have been inducted into the Rock'n'Roll Hall of Fame?
8. Investigate the circumstances of Janis Joplin's death. What lessons are there to be learned from her life and death?
9. How would you describe Janis Joplin's impact on popular culture?
10. Select one of Janis' songs to analyse. You could comment on things such as:
 - When it was recorded and who it was recorded with
 - Whether it was her song or an interpretation of someone else's
 - Whether it reveals anything about her influences
 - Whether it helps you understand her

To Find Out More: There are many sites available on Janis Joplin. Some that might be a useful starting point for research include:

- <https://rockhall.com/inductees/janis-joplin/bio/>
- <https://rockhall.com/inductees/janis-joplin/>
- <http://www.biography.com/people/janis-joplin-9357941>
- <http://www.officialjanis.com/>
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Janis_Joplin
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Port_Arthur,_Texas
- <http://www.pearljanisjoplin.com.au/#!/media/ct74>
- <https://www.facebook.com/janisjoplin>
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bld_-7gzJ-o (Ball and Chain at Monterey)

10 things about Janis Joplin

[Janis Joplin](#), often referred to as the “Queen of Rock and Roll,” is best remembered for her rebellious lifestyle, her psychedelic Porsche, her free flowing fashion sense and above all, her distinctive voice. Here are 10 things we bet you didn't know about her:

1. She Made Certain Her Biggest Influence Got a Proper Tribute



One of Joplin's biggest influences was blues singer Bessie Smith, who's been hailed as 'The Empress of the Blues.' In 1937 Smith died from severe injuries due to a car accident and sadly was buried in an unmarked grave, where she remained until August 1970. Joplin and Juanita Green (who as a child had done housework for Smith) paid for a proper tombstone to be erected on Smith's gravesite.

2. Her Last Recording Was a Birthday Greeting for John Lennon



John Lennon, New York City, 1970

The last recordings Joplin completed were 'Mercedes-Benz' and a birthday greeting for [John Lennon](#). On Oct. 1, 1970, Joplin recorded the old Dale Evans cowboy tune 'Happy Trails' for the former [Beatle](#), which is sort of spooky given the lyrics are "*Happy trails to you, 'till we meet again.*" The tune was titled 'Happy Birthday, John (Happy Trails)' and released on the Janis box set in 1993. Lennon told talk show host Dick Cavett that her taped greeting arrived at his home after her passing.

3. Her Ashes Were Scattered in the Deep Blue Sea



Joplin was cremated in the Pierce Brothers Westwood Village Mortuary in Los Angeles, Calif. Her ashes were scattered from a plane into the Pacific Ocean and along Stinson Beach. There was a private funeral service, but it was only attended by Joplin's parents and her aunt. She died 16 days after [Jimi Hendrix](#) on a similar \$200 a day heroin habit

4. She Was Rewarded for Repeatedly Passing Out



Joplin was a heavy drinker, and Southern Comfort was her drink of choice. The whiskey became so synonymous with the singer, and she therefore boosted the company's sales to such an extent, that she managed to get them to give her a lynx coat as a thank-you. (This is pre-PETA, we're guessing!)

5. She Was Getting Tattooed Long Before it was Trendy



In April of 1970, Joplin was tattooed by legendary artist Lyle Tuttle. He inked a famous design on Janis' outer wrist in his shop on Seventh Street in San Francisco. The symbol stands for the liberation of women. She also had a small heart tattooed over her left breast. "I wanted some decoration. See, the one on my wrist is for everybody; the one on my tit is for me and my friends." She paused and chuckled, "Just a little treat for the boys, like icing on the cake."

6. 'All Is Loneliness' Comes Straight from Her Heart



Janis was overall a very lonely young woman in spite of all the people surrounding her. She loved men (to put it nicely) and had several lovers but in many ways was very much a loner. "Onstage,

I make love to 25,000 people – then I go home alone."

7. You Could've Seen Her Perform at Woodstock for \$8.00



A Variety Magazine image pictured on JanisJoplin.net reveals that Joplin was to be paid \$7500 for performing at Woodstock, although it's been said that many of the performers were never paid. Do you know what it would've cost you to attend Woodstock? A mere \$8.00 would've bought you admission for one day, or you could've been the big spender and paid \$18.00 for a three day ticket.

8. Treated Billie Holiday's Biography "Like a Bible."



Two other people that heavily influenced Joplin were Billie Holiday and Leadbelly. Joplin has claimed that the first album she ever bought was a Leadbelly record. In regards to Holiday, one of the two books that Joplin took to San Francisco with her was Holiday's autobiography 'Lady Sings The Blues.' Joplin's friend Richard Hundgen believes it was like a Bible to her, and said that she kept it all her life.

9. 'Cheap Thrills' Was Originally Titled Something Else

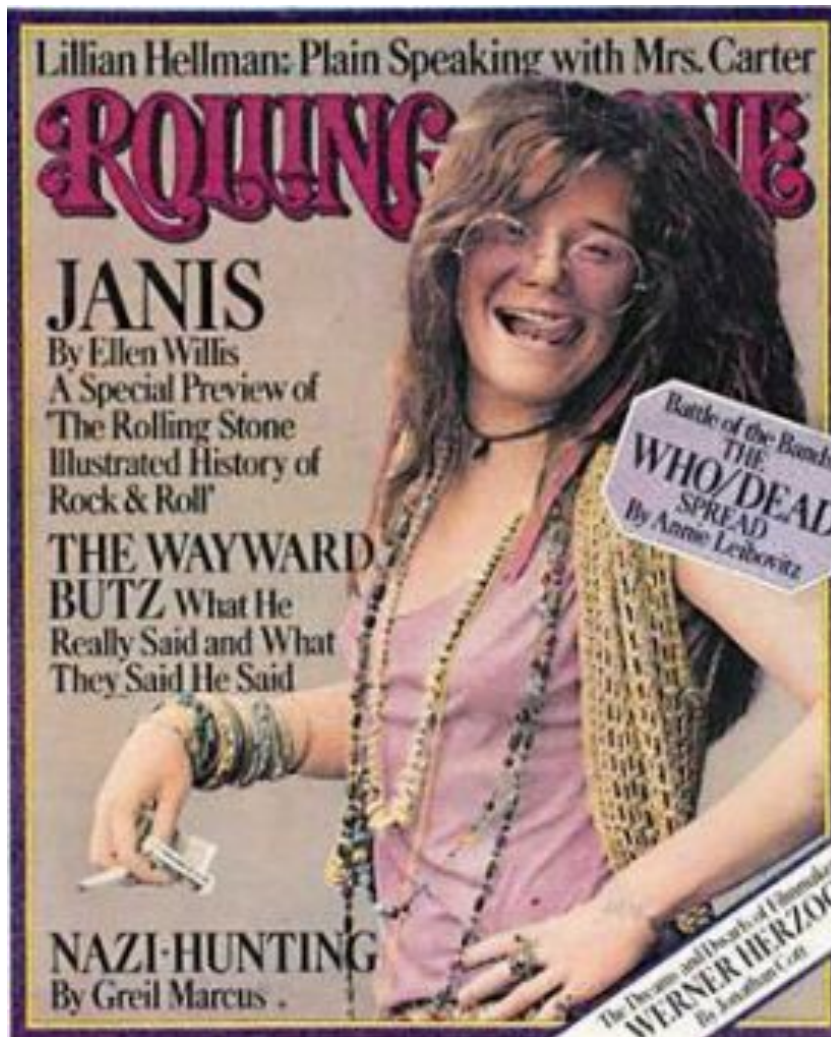


The album 'Cheap Thrills' was originally supposed to be titled 'Sex, Dope And Cheap Thrills' but Columbia Records didn't go for two-thirds of that. Since advocating cheap thrills didn't threaten them as much as the other two, that became the LP's title instead.

10. She knocked back Jim Morrison – Twice!



[The Doors](#) frontman [Jim Morrison](#) was physically turned on to Joplin after she busted a bottle of Southern Comfort over his head, knocking him out cold. Morrison, loving the physical confrontation and her violent attitude, seemed to be in love. The day after this strange encounter during rehearsals, he asked producer Paul Rothchild for her phone number. Joplin had no intent on getting together with Morrison again and as it turns out, they never did. Morrison was reportedly heartbroken.



Media Release

The vintage funk tour

The music, obsessions and passions of Janis Joplin.

For the first time in Australia, a production about a rock immortal whose individuality became a hallmark that both shocked and inspired a generation and to this day touches all ages.

On 4th October 1970, Janis Joplin was found dead from a heroin overdose. Lonely, sad and on the inevitable self destructive path of a junkie, Janis was ironically also headed for far greater personal and musical success with her critically acclaimed album 'Pearl'. Released after her death and embraced by the world then and today as a triumphant album that fuses, rock, jazz and blues with a gritty flavour that marked an era of change.

Pearl – The Janis Joplin Story is an interpretational musical presentation, celebrating a woman who exploded onto the music scene and quickly became the queen of rock 'n' roll and mother of thrift shop vintage funk.

Best remembered for her rebellious lifestyle and her distinctive voice, she joins the infamous 27 Club.

Joplin continually left audiences speechless with unforgettable hits like "Cry Baby" and "Me and Bobby McGee.", "Move Over", Piece of my Heart and many more.

Paying homage to the legacy of a captivating woman who stunned fans with her extraordinary performances and simultaneously shattered stereotypes, leaving a life-long impression in the rock 'n' roll world.

To her intimate friends she was known as 'Pearl'. To her enthralled public she was Janis Joplin, the greatest female singer in the history of rock and roll.

Pearl - The Janis Joplin Story, delivers in words and music her tumultuous outlook on life, love and being the first lady of rock who got a little dirty!

An extraordinary story interwoven amongst 19 hit songs that shaped an era where love was fearless and rules were broken.

Including hits such as 'Cry Baby', 'Move Over', 'Piece of My Heart', 'Bobby McGee' and more. Also featuring songs from Janis's greatest influences such as **Bessie Smith, Bob Dylan & Leonard Cohen.**

Transporting the audience into a smoky, jazz, blues club feel... mixed with a good dose of pure acid bohemian vintage rock!

"Her voice was dirtier than any other white chick singer and her story is no different."
Pearl is a musical interpretation of Janis's story and music and is in no way an impersonation

Fast facts:

- 1) Janis Joplin belongs to the infamous 27 CLUB (those artists who died at 27, she joins Jimmy Hendrix, James Morrison, Amy Winehouse, Kurt Cobain)
- 2) She suffered terrible self-esteem issues. She was voted the ugliest guy in college.
- 3) Weight problems, acne and never being good enough in the eyes of her mother only added to her instability and need to find acceptance.
- 4) Her album "Pearl" hit the top selling charts after her death.
- 5) Her last recording was a birthday greeting for John Lennon who received it in the post after she died.
- 6) Janis was a trailblazer, with her passions, lovers' and outlook. She pushed the boundaries, broke the rules and did it her way in an era where good white girls just didn't do things like that!
- 7) Inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1995
- 8) Ranked #3 on VH1's 100 Greatest Women of Rock N Roll
- 9) She was voted the 47th Greatest Artist in Rock 'n' Roll by Rolling Stone

CHRIS KEEBLE - A FISH OUT A WATER PRODUCTION

PEARL

The Janis Joplin Story

www.pearljanisjoplin.com.au

"Her voice was dirtier than any other white chick singer and her story is no different!"

Featuring

**Cry Baby, Move Over,
Piece of My Heart,
Me and Bobby McGee
& many more hits.**

Plus the influences of greats such
as Bessie Smith, Leonard Cohen
& Bob Dylan.

Written and Directed by Chris Keeble
Fish out a Water Productions.
Musical Direction by Jeremy Edwards.

**Blues,
jazz & a good
dose of pure acid
bohemian vintage rock!**

