

NOW WE'RE TALKIN'

By Helen Marketti

A conversation with Brother Michael about Janis Joplin's personality, his memories, and the upcoming show - A Night with Janis Joplin

On March 2, A Night with Janis Joplin will be taking place at The Connor Palace at Playhouse Square. Cleveland's own Mary Bridget Davies will be playing the role of Janis. A rock icon of the late 60s and early 70s, Janis Joplin's name is synonymous with a counter culture generation seeking change and establishing one's own identity. Her heart pounding lyrics to *Piece of My Heart*, *Me and Bobby McGee*, *Mercedes Benz*, *Ball and Chain*, *Cry Baby* and many more still hold the attention of music fans who remember her and new ones who are discovering the blues and rock singer. Janis Joplin's brother, Michael took a few moments recently to talk about the show, his famous sister and her musical influence.



Michael gives us a glimpse into his life while growing up. "My father was classical music oriented. My mom was too but she liked Broadway musicals such as *Threepenny Opera* and *West Side Story*," he remembers. "My mom was a flapper. She tried singing as a career but had surgery on her throat, which ended that opportunity. All of us had musical training and played instruments."

"Janis always loved art. She was a painter and would do drawings. She was very talented and was interested in art as a career. We have some of her paintings that she did when she was 18 years old," said Michael. "She was smart, sharp, intelligent, driven and focused as to how she was going to approach her career."

There has been much written about Janis Joplin over the past 45 years. There have been stories shared about her life describing her as being unhappy. "The perception can only be as accurate as to what was written about her," said Michael. "If you talk to anyone who really knew her they never saw that side. She loved to have a good time. She partied hard, which could be a problem, but she loved to talk and loved to laugh. She had a beautiful cackle. Some people didn't notice the great things about her. She was extremely well read and sharp as a tack. I guess it sells more newspapers when someone is focusing on the dark side."

"Janis was one of the first rockers to hire an attorney. She said many things to get into print. She wanted people to write about her. She was playing the press before people even knew what that meant. She knew what was happening," explains Michael. "Janis had a vision with how she wanted to present her music. People responded to what she said, what she wore and what she sang. She represented the real package. She created her own style. It was as if she was the mother of boho chic and it never has gone out of style. She stood for what she believed in and let it out on stage. She commanded the stage and people got it. She sang with her soul."

"My parents, my sister Laura and I visited Janis in San Francisco in the early days. We happened to be walking in front of a music store and one of her songs was playing on the outside speaker. She started dancing. It was cool that our parents were there and we were

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all witnessing that moment together. Everyone was proud," recalls Michael. "I first saw her in concert at the Avalon Ballroom in San Francisco with Big Brother and The Holding Company. Chet Helms was there who was the manager of Big Brother. The band, Moby Grape was there, too."

Having Janis Joplin for an older

sister was still a normal routine for Michael. "As an older sister, she punked me a few times and treated me like a little kid. She was also loving, caring and concerned. She always wanted to know how I was doing. By the time I was in high school is when she became famous. I had a lot of dates back then so that was pretty cool!" (laughs).

Michael was 17 and his sister Laura was 21 when Janis passed away. They have kept her memory and legacy alive. "It's an interesting position to be in and it has been a learning experience," said Michael. "We try to maintain her legacy with integrity and never sell out. We try to put out there what we feel Janis would be proud of to maintain her memory. Laura and I do not know everything there is to know about the music industry so we have had some assistance. It is still amazing to do interviews about my sister who has been gone for 45 years! It's fascinating to watch Janis move people of all ages to this day. I am still proud of her."

There are other projects in the works for Janis Joplin's memory and influence. "There is a film documentary called "Janis, Little Girl Blue" that is doing very well and receiving great reviews," said Michael. Malyn Joplin who is Janis's niece is starting a clothing line to honor the fashion style of her late aunt. (www.madeforpearl.com)

A Night with Janis Joplin is now on tour and will be in Cleveland in early March. "Laura and I were talking with our management. We wanted to have something new that was fun. The previous show, "Love Janis" was heart touching and this time we wanted people to dance and dance with Janis. We have worked with great people for this show," said Michael.

Cleveland's own, Mary Bridget Davies will be playing the role of Janis Joplin. "It's amazing to watch her channel Janis. We have never told her to mimic or copy her. We wanted her to let out her own inner Janis. Mary got that from day one and it has been fun to watch her grow into the role. She kicks ass!"

Learn more about Mary Bridget Davies and a listing of tour dates throughout the country at anightwithjanisjoplin.com/tour

Ticket prices are \$10 - \$59 and are available through www.playhousesquare.org or by calling 216-241-6000.