

Songs Worth Keeping

JoAnna Janét

JoAnna Janét only recently completed her first album, but she learned a long time ago to trust her instincts when it came to writing and choosing material.

"WHEN I WRITE A SONG, IT'S VERY PERSONAL," SAYS Janét (pronounced juh-Nay). "I always write about something that's going on in my life. So when I hear a song by another writer that strikes that sort of chord for me, I know I have to have it. If I feel a song, if it really does something to me, then I fall in love with it forever."

Example: *All That I Remember*, a song from JoAnna's as-yet-untitled debut disc. The writer was Terry Wade Haynes, Janét's next-door-neighbor when she attended Nashville's Belmont University. "I've loved that song for a long time," says JoAnna. "Wade wrote it in fragments of two or three lines over the course of a semester. By the time he finished it, I'd told him I had to have it. So when he eventually signed his publishing deal, he put it into his contract that I would get it. This was long before I had a record deal."

Such long-range planning seems characteristic for Janét, who claims she knew she'd be a singer even as a child growing up in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. "This has been a dream of mine forever," she says, "and I definitely have long-range plans."

After graduating from Belmont U., Janét began performing on song demos. One such recording caught the attention of Dreamworks Records, who signed the young singer and paired her with Dixie Chicks and Martina McBride producer Paul Worley. But when Worley left the label for Warner Brothers, JoAnna and her almost-finished record went with him. "I was very lucky," she says. "Dreamworks is a great label, but Paul just understands my style and direction a little bit better."

Worley ensured that Janét's songwriting voice came through loud and clear on the album, even when she was collaborating with experienced Nashville song wizards. "Sometimes that process was difficult for me," she confides. "When you write with someone, you're very vulnerable. It takes time to build up enough trust to open up and write together. Sometimes the Nashville way of doing things — co-writing, scheduling writing times, trying to complete a song in three hours — seems very foreign to me. And being faced with writers who've written a lot of hits can be a very intimidating thing. But you



have to trudge through the uncomfortable, awkward moments because that's the only way you get to know people well enough to become comfortable in collaborative situations. But I have to confess that I'm still most comfortable writing on my own or with friends."

It's probably no accident, then, that Janét's favorite song from her album-to-be is *If I Could Have My Way*, which she wrote with two songwriter friends, Steven Jones and Ashley Gorley. "It's definitely the most personal song on the record," she says. "It describes all the things I wish I could change in my life; but they're impossible things to change, so it talks about being thankful for the things I do have."

JoAnna plays mandolin, guitar, and piano but writes chiefly on the latter two instruments. "For me," she says, "piano songs tend to be sweet and sad. But on guitar, there are no limits to my mood. Guitar songs can be anything from sad ballads to sassy, crazy fun. And right now I'm learning to play electric, which is a completely different instrument from acoustic. It's easier on my fingers, but the amplification makes it so that every little finger move makes a difference. But I know the electric guitar will open new writing doors for me. Maybe more aggressiveness, maybe production ideas I haven't considered before."

JoAnna has a number of Yamaha guitars, including APX10A, AEX500, and CPX15N acoustic-electrics and a CJ32 acoustic. Her chief stage guitar is an LA58.

"It's a gorgeous, hand-made guitar. It's small, because I am — I'm five feet tall, so it's hard to find a guitar that fits me. Yet it has a huge sound, big, deep, and rich. It sounds great in the studio, too. It's easy to play. I love it. I love it. I love it."

Yeah, but what do you really think, JoAnna?

"Well," she laughs, "there's something about guitars. When you find one that works for you, you stick with it. Some people say that guitars hold songs in them, and I'm starting to believe it might be true. A guitar's sound can just inspire you in a certain way. I know I've definitely written some songs I love on this guitar. That definitely builds a bond between you and the instrument."

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