



14<sup>th</sup> May, 2015

Re: Liz Thomson's "Bringing It All Back Home" festival in Greenwich Village

To whom it may concern:

I've known Liz Thomson, as a journalist and friend, for over three decades. During that time, she's often spoken of her life's dream – to create an ongoing event in Greenwich Village that will pay homage to the spirit, and the music, of the 60's. Her perseverance, tenacity, and continued enthusiasm are remarkable.

I am a multiple Grammy Award winner with nine nominations. My own *curriculum vitae* can be seen here: <http://www.janisian.com/presskit.php>. My parents were New Yorkers, and I am currently affiliated with the Stella Adler School as a visiting professor, which includes working with NYU students in the Village. I stay at the Washington Square Hotel when I visit, and am constantly looking for excuses to spend time there.

I first began singing in Washington Square Park when I was ten years old, as part of my summer camp's weekly gatherings "around the fountain". Growing up on a farm in New Jersey, the Village was my first experience of mixed-race couples, gay couples, *avant garde* music, independent bookstores... the list goes on and on.

My first show, when I was thirteen, was at the Village Gate, alongside such luminaries as Tom Paxton, Judy Collins, and Louis Gossett, Jr. My first "real" gig was opening for Reverend Gary Davis at the historic Gaslight Café. It was there that Robert Shelton, then music critic for the *New York Times*, first heard me, and brought David Oppenheim to see my own show. It was there that David introduced Leonard Bernstein to my song "Society's Child," which in turn became the first hit record to openly deal with miscegenation, cutting a deep path through the music of that turbulent era.

I cannot begin to tell you what it was like, to go from club to club – in one night, I watched as the Rolling Stones wandered the streets with Jimi Hendrix, saw B B King at one club, hopped to another to see the Lovin' Spoonful, stopped in at a Mothers of Invention/Frank Zappa rehearsal, heard the SNCC Freedom Singers and Odetta, then ended the evening watching Phil Ochs and Bob Dylan argue at a local restaurant.

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As you can see, my roots with Greenwich Village go deep. Thanks in large part to the vibrant community that surrounded and influenced me there, I have had a successful career as a singer/songwriter these past 50+ years.

The community I grew up in is rapidly diminishing. In just the past few years, friends like Dave Van Ronk, Pete and Toshi Seeger, and Richie Havens have passed on, and those with vivid memories of those times, who gathered around the fountain to share songs and discontent, will not be available much longer. But the spirit of those times lives on, politically and socially, in song and in deed.

The importance of remembering, and paying homage to those times, cannot be over-estimated. Yet from my point of view, as an artist and former New Yorker, the city has done little to preserve seminal musical landmarks like the Gaslight Café, or to honor the artists in all fields who participated and formed that public consciousness. There have been minor, usually abortive, attempts to capitalize on it, but none resembling what Ms. Thomson is trying to create.

I believe a folk festival of this nature could come to rival festivals like Bonnaroo, which I've watched since its inception from my current home in Nashville, or the New Orleans Jazz Festival. Perhaps not in size, but certainly in scope. This is a win win, so far as I can see, for the city and the state of New York. The potential for archival material is astounding. The possibilities – a DVD series, a CD series, working in conjunction with institutions that could range from the NY Public Library system to the Smithsonian Folkways series – are unending. And the commercial potential is tremendous.

Outside of any financial consideration, the musicians and artists who gravitated toward Greenwich Village throughout the 60's and even into the 70's formed a group as diverse, eclectic, and talented as the artists who gravitated to Paris in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Their influence on our culture, and that of the world, cannot be overestimated. For New York to support such of them as remain, and honor the memory of those who are gone, is not only a good thing for the city – it is a right, and proper, thing for the city's history and conscience.

I gladly lend my name in support of Liz's efforts, and sincerely hope they come to fruition.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Janis Ian". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Janis Ian