

## *Love, Janis Loses Another Star: Branigan Out*

Eighties pop artist Laura Branigan has left the company of off-Broadway's *Love, Janis*, becoming the third star to drop out of the show in recent months. „She's out of the show for personal reasons,“ a production spokesperson told Broadway.com, who added that she may return to the musical at a future date.

Not likely, according to sources who witnessed Branigan's two performances in the role, in which she reportedly struggled with her vocals despite an altered version of the *Love, Janis* script that reduced the amount of singing required of her. Ironically, an actress' second performance in the show has become a benchmark--both Felicity star Amy Jo Johnson and Kristen Lee Kelly of *Rent* and *The Rocky Horror Show* fame also left the production after their second performance.

„It's a freak job,“ says *Love, Janis* director Randal Myler. „Once in a while I can find a really good rock and roller who can do it, but it's hard. It's all about rock and roll. That's where *Janis* is from. That's the world of the show. They have to have a pedigree in that.“

*Love, Janis* opened in April 2001 at the Village Theater. Since that time, eight different actresses have played the role of singing Janis. The regular playing schedule shows that two actresses alternate the role, playing four performances each per week (although in recent weeks three actresses have been in the weekly line-up). Despite the problems of the aforementioned performers, there have been several actresses who stuck with the show through their contracts--original stars Andra Mitrovich and Cathy Richardson as well as replacements Beth Hart, Orfeh and Katrina Chester. In recent months, the *Love, Janis* advertising campaign was altered to showcase marquee-value new cast members Johnson and Branigan, a decision which looks foolhardy in light of the four combined performances they turned in for their fans.

Although recent events would make one think that the role was virtually impossible to perform, Richardson, who returned to the production in recent months, disagrees. „I think you just have to really want to do it,“ she says. „The singing is so hard and gut-wrenching that vocals chord problems will come with the territory. But it happens with all kinds of singing. I mean, how often does Pavarotti show up for his gigs?“

Still, Richardson points out that there are tricks to help singers get through the demanding show. „I learned over the years from singing rock and roll and blues that you have to know your limits and move things into keys that stay within your range. [When I'm singing Janis], it sounds like I'm straining harder than I am.“ Orfeh (*Saturday Night Fever*, *Fascinating Rhythm*, *Footloose*), who appeared in the show for 10 weeks earlier this year, agrees. „The best thing you can do for your voice is to sing in the proper key,“ she says. „They go through the show and tailor the keys to your voice. The vocal screams and tricks were for effect. They were something that I could do because it was within my range.“

Orfeh believes that a singer should be able to see their own limitations early on when tackling a role like Janis Joplin. „I'm sure many of these women were having problems in rehearsals. If you can't do it in rehearsal, you can't do it in real life. I had six days of rehearsals and by the second day, I knew I could do it. It's not an easy show, but it's your job as a vocalist to say, ‚It's not my fit.‘ For me, it was a perfect fit.“

Myler agrees that there are warning signs early on, but that the short rehearsal periods don't help the demanding situation. „You can see it in rehearsals, but by the time you're there, you only have two weeks to get the performer ready to go on. It's also hard to tell whether or not [someone] can survive singing 19 songs each night. They can sing hard for you at first, but then blow their voice.“

So what is to come of *Love, Janis*? For the time being, Richardson and Chester are alternating the singing roles in the show and Myler continues his hunt for young leading ladies with the power and stamina of the rock and roll legend. „You have to keep in mind,“ Myler says. „Even Janis herself never did four shows a week!“ (from: <http://www.broadway.com>)