

Lou's Spotlight on the Artist.

I've Been Graced By: Lou Ricco

Janice Grace's self-titled CD has 8 songs that describe this artist hands down- funky, soulful, not afraid to take a risk, trail-blazing, powerful, energetic, and, well, you get my point. She is as interesting to interview and speak with as she is on her CD. Early on in her music career, she took a complete 180 turn from classical music to more upbeat tempos, as is illustrated in her work. From her music, to her life, to even clothing believe it or not, Janice has made a name for herself. Here's what she had to say to us.

LC: You are quite a multi-talented girl. You go from classical organ and operatic arias to funky music and have the clothes to match (which are quite cute i might add). Fame in the musical world comes out of every facet of music, whether it is trendy or not. If it was fame you sought, what changed your mind as a student of classicism in college to pursue the trendy music of that time?

JG: First of all, I applaud you for being a band chorus director. If it weren't for my music teachers from 1st - 9th grade I would have never made it through school. They gave me the encouragement and opportunities for my musical growth. My favorite school teacher was Mr. Bob Filangeri. He was my band director when I was in junior high school. Instead of hanging out in the cafeteria during lunch, the musically minded students would be invited to spend their lunch hour with him in his music room. He taught me flute, oboe and drums. I received the gold medal for band from him. He was a great teacher and very special man. I hope your students will remember you as I remember Mr. Filangeri OK Back to answering your 1st question! "If it was fame you sought, what changed your mind as a student of classicism in college to pursue the trendy music of that time?" LACK OF DISCIPLINE !! When I got to college, (Westminster Choir College, Princeton NJ) I had know idea what to expect. I was really out on my own with NO IDEA what classes I should have been taking. My major was organ, my minor was voice. I couldn't get up for my 8 am classes, I never practiced for my private organ lessons, I thought the voice classes were a joke (only now do I understand what that class was about), I fell asleep in music literature class, and could not figure out for the life of me how to phonetically spell out words for some kind of diction class. I couldn't get a job to make extra money, and my boyfriend at the time lived in NYC. After spending a semester there and being put on academic probation I realized that I didn't want to be 'Church Lady'. I did get a high from playing Toccatas on church pipe organs, but I grew bored quickly. Also, unless you are the organist and choirmaster for St. John The Divine or Riverside Church, being an organist doesn't pay that well. I wanted to break out of the liturgical world and this seemed like the way to do it. At that time pop/dance rock had so much more feeling and emotion to me than playing Bach's "In Death's Strong Grasp The Saviour Lay". I wanted to be in the middle of the action: NYC. In the clubs and discos! I love being in a church because of it's architecture, and spiritual symbolic ness. But you won't find me going to a Sunday mass where some 'alleged' celibate priest is going to preach not to use birth control! Or how gays are looked down upon as sinners. The church is all about fear and control, not love. I'm very anti 'organized religion'.

LC: Share a moment in your life when the "crummy jobs" most young musicians take and the life you were living wasn't the greatest that may have caused you to go back to what you knew and give up the whole "star" thing. What made you stick it out? (Many of our readers are just like you, up and coming artists waiting for their big break...this question is important to keep them going, just as much as it is for you)

JG: After my short stint at Westminster, I came home, had a nervous breakdown and wondered what in the world was I going to do with myself. A friend of mine hooked me up with a job in Manhattan at Charles Jordan shoe boutique where I did inventory and book keeping. I LOVED that job. We had so much fun there. The staff became my brothers and sisters that I never had. I stayed there for 2 years. From there I moved into the city and I stayed in the shoe industry for another 2 years working for Kenneth Cole and Mario Valentino. At this point I hadn't gone back to my music yet. My other jobs were: Managing a restaurant (free food, working nights so I could work on my music during the day). What I didn't like was closing the restaurant and walking home at 2 am in the morning by myself. During this time I became friendly with a musician-writer-producer. One night he invited me to stop by and meet some people he was working with. Unfortunately, I was too chicken to go, and missed an opportunity of a lifetime. The person he was working with was Desmond Child !! Anyway, I did become more friendly with Alfredo, and ended up buying his Tascam 38 and mixing board.

I worked at the Hard Rock Cafe in NYC where I stayed 5 years. That was another job I loved, it was physically grueling but fun.. It was like going to the gym to work out and getting paid for it. I worked 4 days a week, made decent money and worked on my music on my days off. The "star" thing didn't hit me until Madonna came out. That's when I said "THAT'S WHAT I WANT TO DO!!!!!!" But Cher was definitely a predecessor in the inspiration department. I wanted to dress up in Bob Mackey dresses, sing torch songs and be on TV too!

LC: Your single "The Only One" is amazing. Is there a personal story behind this song and its lyrics? By the way, the music matches well with the story being told and I give you mad respect for finding just the right balance between lyrics and music.

JG: Thank you ! 'The Only One' is a hybrid of two songs. It started out as "Prove Me Wrong". I took the verses from PMW which I wrote a long time ago, and rewrote the chorus to TOO. The personal story is about a guy that I had the rah-rah's for, but he had a girlfriend. Later on in life the same scenario came up but I didn't need him to 'Prove Me Wrong'. With this new guy I wanted to be 'The Only One'.

LC: Your music video, also from your single "the only one" was produced by Adolfo Doring who has worked with several big names in the music industry. Any stories of meeting, working with, speaking with, anything with some big stars out there? Any aspirations as far as that goes, a favorite star you would like to someday work with?

JG: I worked briefly as a server-goddess (waitress) at a restaurant named Canastel's where I worked with Sandra Bullock. She had just come to NYC. She was very much like what you see on screen; very nice, real and sincere. We both got out of that place fast. It was like working in a meat market where the girls were the meat and the male customers were the flies. You had to swat them away. When I first met my husband he was building monitors for Patrick Leonard's studio Johnny Yuma. Patrick produced "Like a Prayer" & other Madonna albums, as well as Roger Water's "Amused to Death". That was like meeting God. It was also my first trip to LA so the whole experience was great. Ted (my husband) gave Patrick my demo at the time, but nothing ever came from it. I guess he didn't feel I was ready? Eddie Kramer (producer for Jimi Hendrix, Kiss, and some of Led Zep) was over the other night listening to some songs I'm working on. He gave me some pointers for one of the songs I'm going to record "Am I Getting Thru". So there's collaboration in the works with him which I'm very psyched about! The ultimate producer for me that I want to work with is Trevor Horn (of The Buggles and producer for Seal). He is just amazing in the way he puts textures together. I love his bass sounds that he comes up with. The man can do no wrong as far as I'm concerned!

Carlo Fornerino the producer that I worked with on my last album and will be working with again on my next album is very talented and great as well. So I consider myself very fortunate to be working with him. He's always pushing me to the next envelope, which I am grateful for. Yes, we fight a lot in the process, but once I give it up and let it go and give him the final control (which is VERY hard for me to do, being the control freak that I am!) his results always amaze me. Tracks 9-16 which are the remixes of tracks 1-8 on my CD are his versions of how he would have done the songs. In the end we both got our way!

LC: From the standpoint of a female in the industry, how has all of the time and blood/sweat/tears you have spend on getting where you are and where you want to go affected your personal life as far as kids, a family, etc. Do you see yourself like Madonna who is making videos 2 months after her 2nd child is born? Are you down with attending the PTA meetings every month?

JG: I've been writing and recording my own music for more than 10 years. I started building my recording studio when I was 25. I think I was one of the first girls to write, arrange, produce, engineer and mix my own music all in my studio apartment (at the time). At this point in my life I don't want children. I truly don't know how Madonna does it. But then again, she's got a nanny and that makes all the difference in the world. That woman was born with motivation. Nothing can stop her. I wish I had that amount of determination and drive. Lou, if I had the balls, guts, courage and business savvy (which is very important) that Madonna has, you would have heard about me 10 years ago! I have a pretty cushy life, so I'm not wanting for anything. Right now, my songs are my children, and that's a full time job in itself. As far as the PTA thing, I'd probably have the teachers over for a dinner party. Give them cocktails, play Frank Sinatra mixed with ambient electronica, great food, great wine and then talk!

LC: What is one thing you learned along the way (aside from the obvious things) that really stuck in your mind that you can share with some of our readers about the business, being a woman in it, and getting where you want to go.

JG: I'm still trying to figure it out myself. It's a labyrinth that doesn't seem to end. I've created my own label to give my music a home. I am working on securing distribution. The Orchard is my on-line distributor, but I'd like to get into brick and mortar stores as well. I try to play out once a month to support my CD. My band consists of studio musicians, so each gig costs me a lot. But I have the security of incredible musicians supporting me. What I learned: It takes money to make money. I'm still waiting to get the return on my investment! But I love being a singer-songwriter-engineer-producer and being able to do it all in my own studio (with the assistance of soundGod, my husband/CFO & Carlo my music producer !) Please visit my web site www.JaniceGrace.com to find out where and when you can see me perform!

This artist goes to show that when you really think you are on your way in life, something can just "click" in your mind and really throw you into a totally new ballgame. Determination got her where she is and is going. I think if we all took a look at ourselves and evaluated our lives, even a little bit and took a risk once in a while, we might find that deep down inside, we are just as funky as Janice Grace. You go, girl!

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