

# The Arc of Joan

**JOAN OSBORNE** on her new online zine, life after "God" and a fond wish for more male groupies.

It has taken Joan Osborne some time to recover from the celebrity that slammed into her life in 1995, when she made it big with "One of Us," transforming her from an unknown blues singer into a cult-followed *Spin* cover girl. But this September, Joan reemerges with her five-years-later follow-up album, *Righteous Love*, and also goes multimedia, booting up a new webzine for women called *Heroine*. Osborne, a thirty-eight-year-old belter from Kentucky, takes refuge in a boudoir typical of a touring rock star—a mostly empty one. A generous mattress with a nappy plum blanket sits on the floor; the room's only other significant pieces are a door-sized mahogany mirror and a cocoa-colored hand-loomed rug from Tibet. Joan's personal style is just as straightforward, equally easy to be around. Even in publicity shots, she doesn't look like the kind of person who'd ever have a personal trainer or particularly worry about controlling her frizz—in other words, she's a lot like one of us. —JENNIFER BAUMGARDNER

**JB:** *Your bedroom strikes me as very Om.*

**JO:** I think the colors are very soothing. And because the room is so simple, it's also calming. My life is so hectic, I like having someplace with very little visual stimulation. I also like my ovarian clock and phallic lamp.

**JB:** *I know you're in a serious relationship with a non-musician—whose bedroom do you prefer, yours or his?*

**JO:** His—my apartment is big and airy, and his is like a little nest, like a hidden, secret space. That's very sexy to me. I feel safe there so I can let it all hang out.

**JB:** *I noticed that you are listed on a celebrity website about bisexuality. It says "God may not be one of us, but Joan Osborne is."*

**JO:** Really? I am not a card-carrying bisexual. I have had a couple of limited experiences with women, but I usually go for guys. I often get asked if I'm gay, which I think has something to do with the fact that I opened for Melissa Etheridge on an early tour.

**JB:** *And sometimes you do backup for the Indigo Girls—*



PHOTOGRAPH BY GEORGE PITTS

*the only thing missing from your gay resume is a guest spot on Ellen. I also think women feel somehow included in your sexiness, like it's meant for them as well—as opposed to being competitive with them.*

**JO:** Or maybe it's because I'm a woman who has a strong presence, who calls the shots and seems masculine, and ergo, I must sleep with women. But I don't feel insulted or afraid when people ask me that. I have definitely met



women whom I find totally erotic. I probably would have had more experiences with women if the opportunities had presented themselves. But that's just not how my life has turned out.

**JB:** *It's more the boys who have come your way?*

**JO:** Yes—but if you're at all famous, the guys who might be attracted to you won't necessarily act on it because they're intimidated. You think you're going to have this rock star

life with male groupies—where you can pick one, rock their world and move on to the next town—but it doesn't really work that way.

**JB:** *I noticed a lot of the women on Lilith Fair were sleeping with their drummers.*

**JO:** I swore off having relationships with people in my bands years before my record deal. I did it a couple of times and it was disastrous on both occasions. Now I think if there's sexual tension there, let it inform the music, but don't let it go any further than that.

**JB:** *Why start a women's magazine? Aren't there enough?*

**JO:** I was so tired of seeing women's magazines that were primarily concerned with fashion and beauty—I wanted to make something interesting for women without relying on that. I've got a conversation between Susan Sarandon and the Indigo Girls on mixing art and activism; a beautiful comic from the artist Fiona Smyth; and a piece about Mary J. Blige, which will either have clips or a video that hasn't been seen before.

**JB:** *It must be nice to actually be the media, having been the focus of so much media attention yourself.*

**JO:** I went through a brief period after my celebrity moment when I would not turn around if somebody called my name. People would follow me down the street chanting the lyrics to "One of Us" at me, and I made a decision one day that I was not going to be available to every person who wanted to meet someone famous. It's not that I'm proud of that stance, but I realized you have to defend yourself. It was all very depersonalizing.

**JB:** *And yet, anyone who's seen you perform knows you love being onstage.*

**JO:** It feels very sexual to me to be onstage, to be in that power position as the performer. And I enjoy sharing that sexual feeling with the audience.

**JB:** *You never feel like you have to, you know, fake it?*

**JO:** I don't choreograph steps. Sometimes I go to a concert and I'll be whooping and hollering and shaking my ass all over the place and people give me this "What are you doing?" look. I would hate to feel like I was too cool to dance. Music is supposed to free you from your dailiness—it's a shame when people don't go with it.

**JB:** *Now you're ready for album number two. Is there a particularly steamy song on there?*

**JO:** There's a song called "Baby Love," inspired by Mary Kay Letourneau, that teacher in Seattle who fell in love with her sixth-grade student and had his baby. She's in prison again. I wrote a song kind of about that, conflated with my own experience with a much younger man.

**JB:** *Another sixth-grader?*

**JO:** No, no. He was a grown adult. I swear. ●