

Jim Carroll

All Music Guide (2000)

By Jason Ankeny

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| Born | 1950 in New York, NY |
| Genres/Styles | Rock/ Proto-Punk, New Wave, Punk |
| Instruments | Vocals, Songwriter |
| Labels | Kill Rock Stars, Mercury, Atlantic, Giant (<i>more</i>) |

To rock audiences, Jim Carroll's crowning achievement was the hit "**People Who Died**," a brutally emotional punk record saluting the victims of the New York drug culture. In truth, however, Carroll's artistic legacy is considerably more complex and far ranging. An acclaimed diarist, poet, actor and spoken-word performer, Carroll's work has appeared in *Paris Review*, *Poetry*, the *Yale Literary Review*, the *New York Times Magazine*, and *Rolling Stone*, and his books have been translated into a dozen languages. His formative years even served as the subject of the film **The Basketball Diaries**, starring Leonardo DiCaprio.

The product of a working-class background, Carroll was born and raised in New York City. At the age of 12, the highly-touted basketball prospect to begin keeping a journal; later published in 1978 as **The Basketball Diaries**, his early writings vividly chronicled his teenage addiction to heroin, which led him into a life of crime and hustling. By the time he was 16, Carroll was a published poet. Gaining recognition as a prodigy, he worked at **Andy Warhol's** Factory, collaborating on the play *Pork*. 1973's **Living at the Movies** further established his reputation and funded a move to Northern California, where he was finally able to shed his drug habit.

Inspired by the success of his friend **Patti Smith**, who also married a background in poetry with a career in rock music, Carroll began writing songs. In 1978, backed by his San Francisco-based band, he cut a handful of demos and was signed to Rolling Stones Records by **Keith Richards** himself. Produced by Bob Clearmountain and label head Earl McGrath, the Jim Carroll Band's debut album **Catholic Boy**, featuring the group's definitive song, "People Who Died," appeared in 1980, achieving significant critical acclaim.

After a move back to New York, the Jim Carroll Band returned in 1982 with **Dry Dreams**, followed by 1984's **I Write Your Name**, which received lackluster reviews. With his three record contract fulfilled, Carroll dismissed the group members and resumed his prose and poetry work. After an appearance in the 1985 film **Tuff Turf**, he published **The Book of Nods** in 1986 and **Forced Entries: The Downtown Diaries 1971-1973** a year later.

During the remainder of the eighties, Carroll balanced his poetry and prose material while writing tracks for other artists such as **Blue Oyster Cult's** *Club Ninja* and **Boz Scaggs' Other Roads**. He also made appearances on **John Giorno's** Dial-A-Poem spoken word albums.

As the 1990s dawned, Carroll was frequently approached to return to music, but he was firmly dedicated to his spoken-word work. His first solo album was **Praying Mantis** (1991), a collection of spoken-word performances, not new songs. While he occasionally performed as a musician, his primary focus remained his literary pursuits. Notably, Carroll was one of the first poet-rockers to break down the barriers between poetry and spoken-word and mainstream rock music. He's participated in various readings since the mid-eighties but his 1994 performance on **MTV's Unplugged** was most moving: his now-legendary poem "**8 Fragments for Kurt Cobain**" was a mesmerizing tribute.

In 1993 he published **Fear of Dreaming: The Selected Poems of Jim Carroll**. In 1995, both *The Basketball Diaries* and the short story **Curtis' Charm** were adapted into films; he also contributed lyrics and vocals to **Rancid's** multi-platinum release *...And Out Come the Wolves* (1995). A year later Carroll also appeared on the benefit release **Home Alive: The Art of Self-Defense** and in 1997, Carroll was one of a number of high-profile writers, musicians and actors who contributed to the Kerouac tribute album

kicksjoydarkness, where, backed by **Sonic Youth's Lee Renaldo**, Patti Smith guitarist **Lenny Kaye** and **Anton Sanko**, he read "Woman." 1998 was a monumental year for Carroll. He released a brand new collection of poetry in his new book **Void of Course** as well as returning to rock in his own cathartic way with the release of his first album in nearly 15 years, **Pools of Mercury**, which combined his classic wounded poetry with song. In 1999, a comprehensive tribute release entitled **Put Your Tongue to the Rail: The Philly Compilation for Catholic Children** showcased 25 local artists from Philadelphia empowered by the work of Carroll. Two years later, Carroll issued the **Runaway EP**, which featured live cuts of material from *Pools of Mercury* and an eclectic cover of **Del Shannon's** pop hit of the EP's namesake. There was also talk of collaborating with **The Doors' Ray Manzarek** for a possible record.