

RECORDS

SUBTERRANEAN URBANESQUE BLUES



THE JIM CARROLL BAND
Catholic Boy
(Atco)

by Richard Riegel

Jim Carroll's the latest word pusher (as in prose, poetry, you know, the pen-meets-paper thing) to cross the art-will-be-convulsive-or-not-at-all line, into the authentically electric seizures of rock music. And if you appreciated the many jagged gems of word'n'roll hidden among the furious chaos of Patti Smith's attempts to make that same leap of faith, then get set for major acupuncture on your jugular, as you listen to Carroll's debut recording.

I'd never heard of Jim Carroll myself until last winter, when Atlantic sent me his book *The Basketball Diaries* as advance promotion of this record. Nonetheless, I quickly learned that Carroll had made his mark as a published writer so many years before as to have earned praise from beatnik godhead Jack Kerouac himself, who, as you must know, died in 1969. Since Carroll's only 29 or so now, you can see what a prodigy he was when St. Jack smiled down on the earliest *Basketball Diaries*.

Kerouac was right about Carroll, too; *The Basketball Diaries* is nothing less than the manifestation of many anyway 60's-kid's dream of converting the consciousness-expanding riches of a full life into the creative expression that would open yet more doors to the rich life. *The Basketball Diaries* is a disturbingly seamless mixture of fact and fiction, written by Jim Carroll about a "Jim Carroll" character who reflects/cheats his true autobiography in probably equal measure as the tall-tale writhings of Henry Miller's favorite protagonist, "Henry Miller."

And I'm emerald with literary envy that Jim Carroll not only



"This ain't Mick and I need a bloodchange!" thinks not-all-there Keith!

really might've been the simultaneous Manhattan child/jock hero/white spade/stud/prehippie drug-fiend/aware hustler/street aesthete he claims in his book, but also that he had the consummate imagination to fuse these elements into a wholly convincing narrative, either way.

So how come Jim Carroll didn't get around to the modality of rock 'n' roll until now, if he already saw and knew it all back in '65? Oh, literary stuff he had to get out of his system first. Getting his poetry published in the littlest of the little magazines. Kicking his heroin habit. You know, all that groves of academe.business.

The punch line is that Carroll didn't miss a thing by absenting himself from the rock of the 70's, even as the rest of us were denying the Eagles and celebrating the Sex Pistols. *Catholic Boy* confidently takes up that uniquely Eightyish urbanscape right where *The Basketball Diaries* left it off in the summer of 1966. The Jim Carroll Band (Jim on vocals, two guys on guitars, two more on bass & drums, just the basics as the Stones or somebody once conceived em)

play dynamic, fluid, straightahead rock 'n' roll that owes next to nothing to punk and its discontents. Rock music crafted (hell no, felt) as a direct challenge to Bruce Springsteen's night after-night urbancrest melodramas, yet sharing nothing of Springsteen's flair for the eternal homilies.

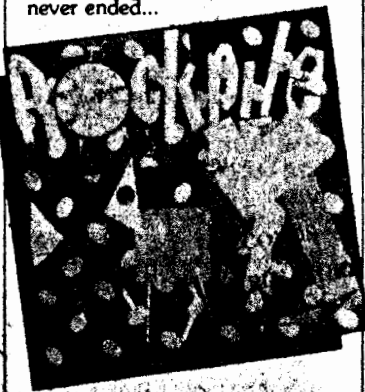
The influences on *Catholic Boy* (if you insist) are more like Lou Reed (but the campus poet Lou Reed who idolized Delmore Schwartz, Reed before he thought of forming the relatively disingenuous Velvet Underground), or maybe even Iggy when he was still an Iguana, prior to making *The Stooges* because he couldn't do otherwise. Jim Carroll phrases with the prophetic bemusement, with the dry and prurient wonder of a true believer Lou Reed. Dry and prurient, as the Jim Carroll Band forever pulse along on the liquid crystals they swiped from John Cale's titanium pacemaker, as the Band urban-renew the sonic metropolis for us at New York on a \$200-a-day habit.

One song off *Catholic Boy's* plenty for weeks of psychotextual analysis, as I have it tonight, and I've

got to go with "City Drops Into The Night," a stern Gotham moonscape beyond the glare of Bobby Keys' sax, but somewhere this side of those horribly-flaming oil tanks I can make out on the apocalyptic Jersey shore. Jim Carroll sees it all, even as the sproinging guitars (credit Brian Linsley and/or Terrell Winn) and the cocksucking sax keep smashing into his vocals to underline/contradict his lyrics: "Before the darkness/There's one moment of light/When everything seems clear/The other side/It seems so nearrrr!"

If not the equally insistent claims of "People Who Died," that stunningly exuberant yelp of awe from Jim Carroll, for all of his 60's pals who paid for their own peculiar moments of light with some non-negotiable currency: "Bobby O.D.'d on Drano/The night that he was wed...Kathy was 11 when she pulled the plug/On 26 reds and a bottle of wine," et.seq. A communal legend as ancient as Allen Ginsberg's *Howl*, of course, but even Neil Young's never matched Jim Carroll's wide-eyed scream of incredulity: "They were all my friends/And they DIED!"

Pardon my critic's disbelief that rock 'n' roll this intense and true has come from what I've always smugly called "a real writer," but Jim Carroll's done it, over and over, for sure. And I haven't half-unravell'd the intricacies of *Catholic Boy's* intimate Patti Smith tribute, "Crow," or of its title cut, a bittersweet storehouse of emotion that Ti Jean Kerouac would be sure to love, if only he and the 60's had never ended...



ROCKPILE
Seconds Of Pleasure
(Columbia)

On paper *Rockpile* is as good a band as there is. On *Seconds Of Pleasure*, Dave Edmunds, Nick