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Late 'punk poet' / artist Jim Carroll had strong Seattle music ties (part 2 of 2)

September 20, 4:07 PM Seattle Local Music Examiner Greg Roth

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Part 2 of a 2 part series, Part 1 ran on Wednesday, September 16th...

With the death of Patrick Swayze and Kanye West's interruption of Taylor Swift's acceptance speech at the MTV VMA's last week. What may have been lost in the mix was the news of the untimely death of poet and music artist, Jim Carroll, via heart attack, a week ago.

Late 'punk poet' Jim Carroll had strong Seattle music ties (part 1 of 2)

In last week's article (link above), we mentioned close musical ties to city of Seattle, in particular we mentioned the collaborative partnership between he and singer/songwriter and multi instrumentalist, Robert Roth from 'Truly'...

Carroll, who's 'no holds barred' style of prose, married with punk, power pop and hard edged rock music, garnered a fiercely loyal following and influenced many or the newer generation of artists today.

In Part 2 of the article, we delve a little deeper into the creative process between Robert Robert and Jim Carroll. In addition, we provide links at the bottom of the page so you can actually hear some of the magic that these two, artists, friends and kindred spirits created together.

The beginning of the collaborative journey...

From the beginning of their friendship and collaborative journey, it is very apparent that Carroll and Roth had a very functional creative process. When Roth and Carroll collaborated on the two songs ('Falling Down Laughing' and 'Hairshirt Fracture') for the film, 'The Basketball Diaries'...



photo by Lance Hammond Local Seattle musician, Robert Roth ('Truly') pictured performing live with the late Jim Carroll at the legendary Crocodile Cafe in Seattle in 1998,

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times that the music would come first before the lyrical content.

"Falling down Laughing" was literally written over the phone during a two hour conversation between the two artists. Roth explains... *"I would hum the melody and he would then hum some lyrics and a melody."* Roth continued, *"The cool thing is a lot of people don't know is that one of the few songs that he Jim wrote specifically for the film "The Basketball Diaries" was written about the "young Jim" from that period of his life". There were not a lot of songs written by Jim, about Jim, from that period. So, to me that is a really important song because of that fact, which is another reason that it is a shame it was not used in the movie."* Roth stated, with a tinge of sadness and regret in his voice tailed off during the interview.

The creative process...

Roth spoke in more detail about the he and Carroll's creative process. *"I wrote the music and hummed a particular melody and suggested phrasing but Jim is a master at phrasing, very much in the spirit of a Dylan, Lou Reed or even Mick Jagger. When I would suggest a particular phrasing, he would take it up a few notches in the way that only he could do. That was his musical gift."* Interestingly enough, Roth shared that Carroll wrote differently when he wrote poetry as opposed to writing the lyrics for a song. *"He understood the song form very well."* Roth stated. The two split their publishing straight down the middle, 50/50.

Their first face to face encounter...

Roth talked about the first time he met Jim Carroll in person. *"When I went to New York, I was there for 5 weeks doing working on our first record, "Fast Stories From Kid Coma". We were in Soho. The day after the record was done; I met Jim at the "Cafe Orlin" in the East Village. We took a cab out to Brooklyn and spent a day in some small studio working on "Hairshirt fracture". (one of the two songs they wrote for "The Basketball Diaries") Truly" had already recorded the music. We spent most of the day working on Jim's vocal tracks. Half of the lyrics were already written by Jim. (He had books of stuff that he had written down). In addition, he wrote some of the lyrics on the spot. We finished up the vocal tacks and then Jim went home and I stuck around and finished the mix. It was a good but long day in the Studio".*

Special delivery...

Roth fondly recalled the day he received a special delivery package at the recording studio. *"When I was in Soho and "Truly" was finishing up some final mixing on the record, a courier brought over a package. In the package was a cassette tape. Jim and his friend Lenny Kaye (Patty Smith Band) had mixed a version of the song with Jim Carroll singing over music to a song that I wrote and then sent it over to me. It was surreal hearing Jim Carroll's vocals on a song that I wrote."* Roth proudly stated. Carroll was one of Roth's lyrical and musical heroes. One can only imagine the satisfaction and joy Roth felt upon hearing a musical track that he produced, with one of his biggest influences, Jim Carroll singing on it.

Legendary live performances in the "Emerald City"...

The following year, Roth and Carroll would have the opportunity to play the material that they wrote together in front of live audiences in Seattle. They played sold out shows two years in a row at legendary ["The Crocodile Cafe"](#) in Seattle (98' & 99'). The performances were in support of Carroll's new album ["Pools of Mercury"](#), which included the two songs that Roth and Carroll wrote for "The Basketball Diaries" soundtrack but were never used, as well as his new book of poems that were released at the time. The first show in 1998, featured the locally renowned, **Kurt Block** from ["The Fastbacks"](#).

In Sept. 2000, Carroll and Roth performed at the *Seattle Opera House*. Carroll read his spoken word poetry and then he and Roth played to sold out crowd of 1500 people. Roth said, *"I've never heard that many people laughing at one time ever and it was so impressive to see that many people hanging on to every word, they we're completely with him."*

One of the highlights for Roth that night, was Carroll's performance of his beautiful ballad *"Dance the Night Away"* a song which Carroll had not played since the 80's. Roth recalls... *"As a singer/guitarist, this was my first time playing piano on stage and I managed to get through the*



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whole song without a single flub (whew!!) and according to Jim I even got a standing ovation for my guitar solo on "Wicked Gravity". (What a night, I'm telling you!)"

The remaking of a classic rock standard...

In 2000, Roth and Carroll collaborated on a cover tune. The song was the late [Del Shannon's](#) classic and iconic hit, "[Run Away](#)"

The unexpected collaboration of this song came together during a live performance two years prior to the actual recording sessions, at the the one of the "Crocodile Cafe" shows in 1998. Roth says, *"When Jim and were doing the show, we were in between songs. I was tuning my guitar for "Falling Down Laughing" (I make up my own tunings for my songs). When I struck the first chord for "Falling Down Laughing", Jim started humming the melody of "Run Away" The band and the audience started joining in and we did an impromptu verse and chorus of the song, right on the spot live. It was very spontaneous and unplanned."*

In 2000, Carroll flew out to Seattle again to do a reading and to do another performance with Roth. During that trip, Roth and Carroll booked a day in the studio in Tacoma. Together the two artists created a sonic masterpiece with their own version of the *Del Shannon*, American rock standard. The song was then released on the "[Kill Rock Stars](#)" label. *(To hear Roth and Carroll's version, click on link provided below).*

Roth and Carroll meet the late Ronnie Spector...

Through the creative process and performing several shows together, Roth and Carroll became good friends and hung out on several occasions when the two were not working together. Roth shared a fun and humorous story about the night he and Carroll met the late [Ronnie Spector](#) ("[The Ronnettes](#)" and former wife of famous producer/convicted murderer *Phil Spector*"), after Carroll and he had finished performing one of their Seattle shows a few years back.

"After the gig we went to see Ronnie Spector with the "Kill Rock Stars" crew (the label that released 'the Runaway E.P.'). Jim was in great mood and we had a fantastic time hanging out. Ronnie Spector blew us all away with her huge voice and terrific ten piece band, put together by Ramones longtime producer, Daniel Rey. While we were hanging out backstage, we did a bunch of group photos with Jim. He was signing autographs etc... But then I noticed, Jim looked slightly perturbed at one point, so I whisper, "What's wrong man?" Jim whispers back, "When Ronnie Spector just came over and hugged me she thought I was (expletive) Bowie man!" I reminded Jim that Phil Spector had her locked up in their mansion for 28 years and that she didn't get out much." Roth told Carroll in a humorous and sarcastic tone. Roth's funny observation was not lost on Carroll."He laughed and of course was over it like that." Roth concluded.

Not a prima donna...

Roth also offered a little insight into the type of person Carroll was. *"Although he was very much down to earth and most definitely wasn't a prima donna, he was conscious of who he was and wasn't afraid to let people know and rightly so! I was always impressed to see so many fans, from young students to "graying hipsters", line up after the shows and readings to say hello and get stuff signed, but also there was always a clutch of hot women who would throw themselves at Jim... rock-n-roll poet indeed!"*

Closing thoughts...

Jim Carroll was a singer,"punk poet", spoken word artist, writer, story teller and perhaps, even somewhat of a prophet and sage. Whatever one wants to call him, doesn't really matter, for this artist defied and probably deplored any type of labeling or classification. He knew who he was and who he was not.

The fact is, Carroll spoke about what he knew and he wrote about what he spoke, nothing more and nothing less. Carroll was the genuine article, an authentic American character and treasure, that provided anyone with the eyes to see, the ears to hear and the willingness to stop and think, a looking glass into an alternate universe that exists within the past and present human condition.

As a person and as a friend, it is safe to assume that he will be missed by the millions of lives that he touched. With this said, friends and fans of his work can take comfort in knowing that through his art and through the lives he touched, his spirit lives on and his legacy is secure, to be shared by many souls for years to come.

As mentioned previously, you can visit [Robert Roth's My Space Page](#) , to hear the live version of 'People Who Died' from the first Crocodile Cafe show in 1998. In addition, you can listen to Roth and Carroll's arrangement of Del Shannon's "Runaway" that starts off with a little spontaneous and hilarious story from Jim that Roth snipped from the 98' show and added to the intro.

Additional Jim Carrol Links...

[Remembering Jim Carroll... LA Times](#)

[Jim Carroll's death leaves a void in poetry](#)

[Death of a Poet...Saying goodbye to Jim Carroll.](#)

[CNN: 'Basketball Diaries' author Jim Carroll dies at 60](#)

[Rolling Stone: "Basketball Diaries" Author, Punk Icon Jim Carroll Dead at 60](#)

[LA Times: Jim Carroll dies at 60: poet and punk rocker wrote about travails in 'The Basketball Diaries'](#)

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