

# EVO

WEEKLY

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EVERY THURSDAY

**Ancient and justified: The state of Toronto broadcasting debate with David Pritchard and Reiner Schwarz**  
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**Lush's oceanic rock gets spooked by the influence**



of the  
Cocteau  
Twins'  
Robin  
Guthrie  
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Jack Smith's  
1962 opus  
Flaming  
Creatures  
is raucous,  
totally  
over-the-  
top – and  
definitely  
not to every-  
one's taste  
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## LISTINGS

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# Julie Carroll

Heaven in a  
wild flower

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► BY CHRIS O'CONNOR

"I say one must be a seer, make oneself a seer. The poet makes himself a seer by an immense, long, deliberate derangement of all the senses."

— Arthur Rimbaud, 1871

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And so it was that in his seventeenth year, Rimbaud vowed to tear away the blinders of Higher Education, Church and Family that other adolescents wore like trendy fashion items, and to peer into the darker pits of the human soul unaided by anything save his own intellect and poetic vision.

Those, and massive quantities of opium and absinthe.

Those were the agents that sharpened his eyes to telescopes that saw "sunsets stained with mystic horrors" and glimpsed the terrors of "A Season in Hell," later to become one of French literature's classics.

Rimbaud was 19 then.

Almost a century later, his vision quest would be taken up in 1963 by a bratty New Yorker named Jim Carroll, probably unaware of the legacy as he sat down to write his own declaration: "Fuck it anyway. I just couldn't think of anything else to write about. No dope, no nooky, no queers following me today, I guess you start writing lame diaries like this."

Alright, hardly "Nuit de l'Enfer," but then Carroll was just 13 and already leading the kind of adolescence that'd put the *ABC Afterschool*

*Special* off the air in short order.

When not shooting hoops on the basketball court, he was shooting his tender veins full of smack and still managing the kind of prose writers twice his age could only nod about.

Carroll's songs of innocence and experience were serialized in *media res* by the *Paris Review*. Later, the writings coalesced into *The Basketball Diaries*, a book that became his most famous work, a kind of *Catcher in the Rye* to mortician-like nihilism kids when it came out in book form in 1980.

Carroll somehow survived to write another set of diaries,

another artist's album (like on Lou Reed's *Mistrial*) to mash down rumors he'd disappeared into the dropper, but never really breaking silence.

Until now, with a new spoken-word album, *Praying Mantis*, and an uncharacteristic talkativeness, Carroll, see, dwells in a reality beyond the ken of ordinary folk. He "hardly ever goes out" of his New York City home, "doesn't listen to the radio" and actually likes the Traveling Wilburys. He speaks with the fragile, wiry voice of a junk-startled moth, fluttering from topic to topic free of anything resembling conventional logic. He rambles, and in the marathon three-hour phone interview we conducted I asked him a mere four questions: the rest was mental follow-the-leader.

Carroll is pretty just-the-facts when discussing *Praying Mantis*. It came about after A&R reps saw him do a reading at the Bottom Line with Marianne Faithfull. They eventually twigged on the idea of a spoken-word album after realizing they weren't going to get another rock disc. Carroll agreed to record most of it live at a single reading at St. Mark's Place.

But things get weird when he's asked about selecting tracks for the album.

"I thought maybe we should sock on some entries from *The Basketball Diaries*," he draws, "and I thought of ones that were short and that I hadn't done in a long time. But when I tried reading them dry in the studio, I felt I couldn't summon up the voice of that character. I mean, I played pinball in the studio to get back into his voice but I just couldn't do it."

*Character?* This is your life we're discussing.

"But whenever I speak about the diaries I always refer to the guy in third person. If I were talking to an analyst I could talk about the things in that book as episodes of my life and be completely into it as myself. But as they are in the book they had such a long myth about them, just over time as they were published in mags, the pieces adopted this mythical facade. They've got certain confines that make them a different person.

"*Forced Entries* is the much more literary book. The humor and poignancy and drama of *BD* comes from the events themselves. Intellectuals thought they were very camp when they first came out

in *Paris Review*. I don't even think of the *Diaries* as literature, 'cause it's kind of beneath and above that at the same time. It's storytelling in a very pure form, and that's what touches people, that's what's poignant about it."

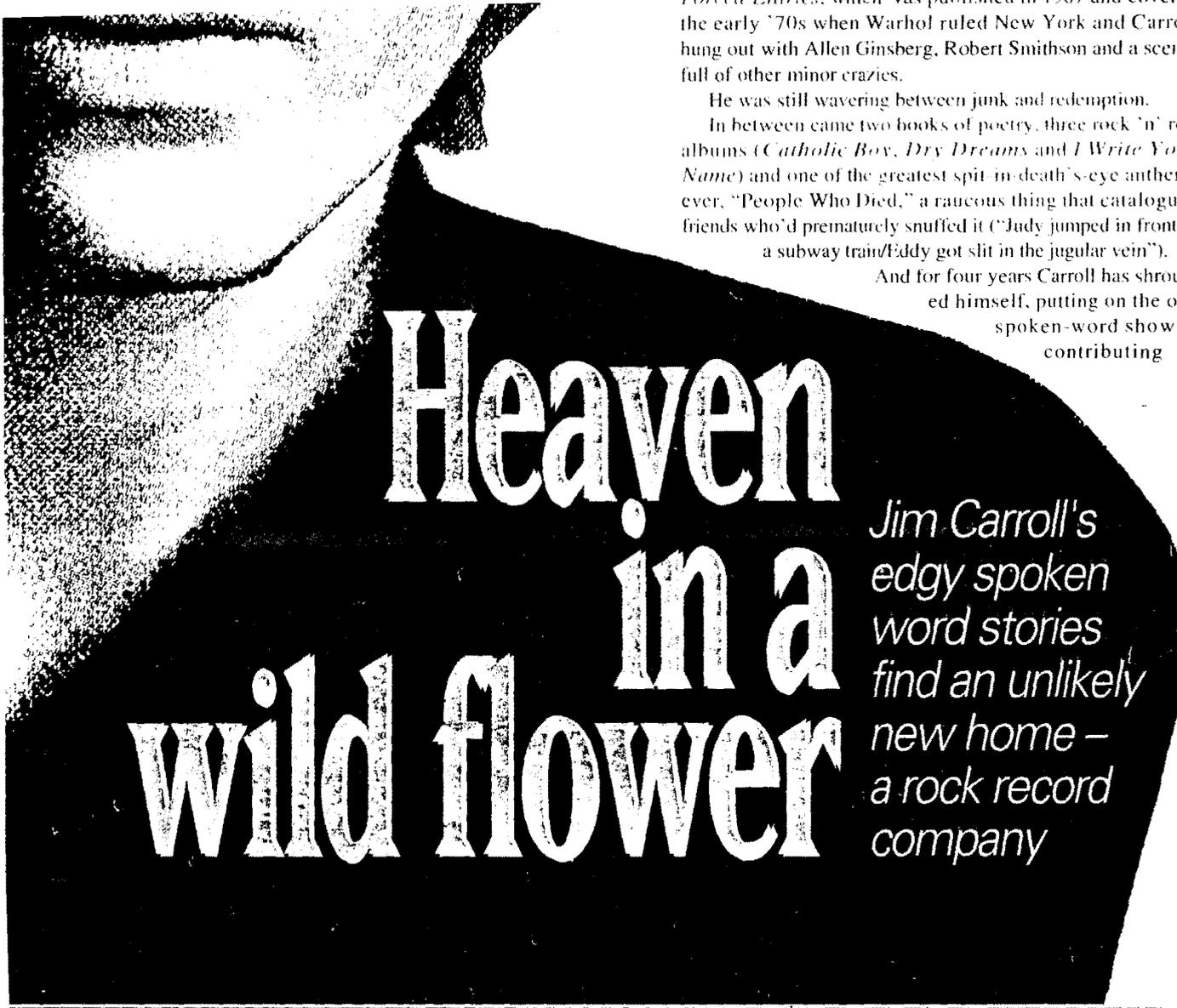
So it was that two *Forced Entries*, an improv, and a clutch of poems got the final nod for *Praying Mantis*. Still, the diaries manage to hit some sensitive veins. There's this story he has of a teacher who forced her charges to read his entries — to pretty grim effect.

## PREVIEW

JIM CARROLL

Saturday, March 21

El Mocambo, 464 Spadina Ave., 922-1570



*LOUCA ETHICS*, which was published in 1987 and covered the early '70s when Warhol ruled New York and Carroll hung out with Allen Ginsberg, Robert Smithson and a scene-full of other minor crazies.

He was still wavering between junk and redemption.

In between came two books of poetry, three rock 'n' roll albums (*Catholic Boy*, *Dry Dreams* and *I Write Your Name*) and one of the greatest spit-in-death's-eye anthems ever, "People Who Died," a raucous thing that catalogued friends who'd prematurely snuffed it ("Judy jumped in front of a subway train/Eddy got slit in the jugular vein").

And for four years Carroll has shrouded himself, putting on the odd spoken-word show or contributing to

# Heaven in a wild flower

*Jim Carroll's  
edgy spoken  
word stories  
find an unlikely  
new home —  
a rock record  
company*

"She sent me a bunch of papers her class had written, and it pretty well defined the problems of American education to me. I mean, some of these kids, man! This was San Diego State and all I can think of is these tanned blond kids who'd rather be out surfing than reading this book, or on the beach drinking brewskis. So it was just these paragraphs from guys saying, 'My main question is is this guy a faggot or what?' All these comments were completely depressing, but then I realized that's what happens if you've been made obligatory reading.

"I went to Chicago and everybody was coming up with these new copies of the diaries to get 'em signed, so I knew right away there was a class on it. And there was, actually. I met the guy who taught it. He told me down in Texas, in the real fundamentalist area where he'd taught this book, he got run out of town. Not just the university, but the entire fucking town! I know from reports it gets taken off high school library shelves and it's part of book burnings just like my records, but it's all so innocuous to me."

"People Who Died" and its two-fingered salute to death also spooked people, especially DJs, who handled the record like an unexploded bomb.

"Usually they'd slap this disclaimer near the beginning, this description of the subject matter like it was some kind of movie on TV, even though it didn't have any of those George Carlin seven deadly words. It's a eulogy in a really joyful way, celebrating friends who died before their lives were fully lived, and I think it's obvious from the way it's sung: 'I salute you brother/I miss you more than all the others.' I mean, there's nothing macabre about it, but these DJs' responses were so clichéd, thinking it was some kind of demonic song. Even my girlfriend's guitarist, who was about 16 when it came out, told me he thought it was a scary song, some horrific thing he shouldn't listen to, as though it were like looking at a dirty picture.

"If I wanted it to be that, I could've picked people who died in much more grotesque ways — falling on spikes and stuff. When I was seven years old we set up a high-jumping thing, and we put two sticks down to hold up this other stick.



# Excerpts...

Didn't you ever want to starve all the flesh from your body, down to the pure bone? Don't you want to take a sledgehammer and pulverize those bones to a sheer, white powder, and throw it into the air ... just to see which way the wind is blowing?

— excerpt from *Forced Entries*

I've spent the day in bed, humping the knots of hatred we wove into the sheets ...

I know I have only referred to Deborah in the context of anecdotes, but I've only avoided writing about her in depth because I was blinded to a point of incapacity by that radiance. I watched a lot of great women, whom I knew even then had more to give me, coming and going, walk out of my reach as I was pinned down, arms, eyes, and groin, by the pressure of Deborah's light, her perverse, orphaned light.

This is one of those times when being addicted to a drug seems like a blessing ... I suppose all there is left to do is get on with the job. You draw up your ego not from stains on a black satin sheet, but from the precision of the poem within ... the torturous, elegant process of each clean, white page fulfilled.

— excerpt from *Forced Entries*

(On finally draining an abscess in his arm)

This was the toxic residue of all my past sins (there, I've said it!). I didn't see pus; I saw petty demons marching out. I saw purification, with *new fresh air* being sucked into that cavity. The idol was in ruins. Do you understand what I'm telling you? I know you think it's sick, some fucked up fetish. No doubt. But

I understand the nature of it, and now that sickness is healing.

So am I. I might very well blow it again. I don't really know where I go from here, but at least I've raised my quality of living above cockroach level. New York is not the same, that's for certain. I feel, as I said, closer to my heart ...

But I'm not worrying about that now. I want to penetrate only this moment. I've pierced a veil. I've beaten an old enemy and I'm tired and my mind is clear, my senses full. I can hear that bakery truck just pulling

I don't believe in sin  
But maybe I'll begin  
A vagrant evil's climbing up my skin

The shadows from last week  
Are dancing in the street  
In homage to the darkness closing in  
— excerpt from "Still Life," from the album *Dry Dreams*

To sleep without dreams  
So distant from the mirror  
Imitating clarity, disguising  
All the terror ... I heard a thousand bells  
From a thousand old cathedrals  
They rang ... I haven't heard them since  
A decade past my decadence  
The beast hears the bell

I'm cursed to be a singer  
A singer of the flames  
A thinker of a fire  
And a son without a name  
— "Work, Not Play," excerpt from the album *Dry Dreams*



...ut one of them  
...as a slat from a  
bench, and when  
we broke it, it  
had a point on  
it. And this  
kid just dis-

emboweled himself on it. like in one end and out the other. That wouldn't have worked too well in the song, y'know. (He sings) 'Christy got impaled on the high-jump field/And he sure looked fucked up' "

A dry chuckle, like moth-wings in a killing jar. Pause.

"I cried about it for three weeks afterwards."

And there it is: the shred of redemption shining at the centre of Carroll's darkness, the humanity that saves even his most harrowing images from nihilism. For if you survive *The Basketball Diaries*' intravenous terror, you'll find it fades out with Carroll rasping. "I just want to be pure ..."

It's here for a sentence, then he's off topic-hopping in that startled-insect voice, mulling over his spiritual progeny like Henry Rollins ("Well, let's just say we've got different attitudes. I've got a piece I'm doing at the reading that'll better explain where I stand on him and Jello Biafra and the rest") and whether he'll encore singing with Groovy Religion ("Probably, unless tremors of angst or some recalcitrant terror comes over me").

Then he rings off, three hours later, only fractionally less an enigma.

Still, some talents burn so bright you can only blink as you behold them directly. You've got to glimpse it through the lens of their work, and I can't find any clearer statement of intent than this:

I am trying to abide by the clues  
in the dreams left half-fulfilled  
on the deathbed of each brother,  
where the tears of a sister stained the milk-white sheets.  
And I look to my generation  
and dream in blasts of hydrogen,  
where the residue of all my nights  
is changed to stars.

The process is a circle, is brilliant and works,  
as the final collapse of dying suns cradles new ones to life.

— *The Book of Nods*

away down Broadway, leaving behind only the stunned silence of New York City at 5:15 A.M. It's so quiet I can hear the clicking of traffic lights changing ... red to green ... stop to go. Walk. Wait.

— final paragraph, *Forced Entries*

In that Limbo the children move  
in some strange gravity within and  
outside grace. Their Lord is angry.  
They have died with their innocence untested

None knows what they have been,  
or will be. Each day changes  
without changing. Do you understand  
what I am saying? It is the life you choose  
on this earth. The life of junkies and lies.

But that wasn't you. I knew you.  
You had perfect lips, eyes like  
a true child. Your breasts unformed.

This place where I have put you now,  
It is a cursed season, an awkward  
line, a flawed circle. A snake on fire  
devouring what, tomorrow, it will itself become.

— excerpt from *To Elizabeth*

I never learned to trust it. I wore dark  
glasses, disguised my skin in hats with wide brims.  
It knew too much, its vantage points always  
too well chosen. Where did it go at night?  
thought the child, and who did it meet and what, exactly  
did it have to report? So they grew, these suspicions,  
as one. And I chose, instead, the dark dance of the moon.  
In the face of the two, I have always sought the lesser majesty.

— excerpt from *A Child Growing Up with the Sun*

