the Catholic Boy confesses

JIM CARROLL

by Clarice Rivers

JIM CARROLL has been causing a stir on the literary scene ever since the publication of his BASKETBALL DIARIES — when he was sixteen. He is also the author of numerous books including THE BOOK OF NODS (a collaboration of prose poems with PATTI SMITH) and LIVING AT THE MOVIES, for which he was nominated for a PULITZER PRIZE.

CARROLL has now opened a new chapter in a career filled with coincidences and deserved good breaks. CLARICE RIVERS spoke with the street wise, super-sharp poet about his latest endeavor, the release of his fabulous first album, CATHOLIC BOY, available on ATCO Records and Tapes.

CLARICE RIVERS: Describe a line from a poem in your book Living at the Movies, “gliding towards some future,” it could suggest that when you left New York seven years ago to live in Bolinas, California, that you were gliding towards some future in rock and roll. Or did your leap forward, the release of Catholic Boy, just published by Bantam?

JIM: The diaries took place from the start of your thing too. It's an incredible percentage. Also, a lot of my friends from when I was young died, how they died, how old they were when they died, how they died, how old they were and that's all.

CLARICE: You don't feel like crying when you hear it?

JIM: No. It's really up.

CLARICE: Do you need emotional stability to really work well or do you thrive on turmoil at home?

JIM: Well, I think you need both. When I left New York I was cut off from all the turmoil, excitement and adventures of the City. It was at the right time because I was just burned out. I enjoy having a nice place and just having things quiet and peaceful. It's still that way even now in New York. I don't like to go out to clubs at all. I've been kind of making the scene in that sense for the first time since I've gotten back. I can't really sus-
I didn't think too seriously about it until I there. I didn't start listening to rock and roll! than people. I didn't start listening to rock and roll... of my day was going down to the post office to get my mail.

CLARICE: Those four years were you working on poetry?

JIM: I wrote two books and another book of poems. Towards the end I worked pretty much on writing rock lyrics. I wrote a book of prose poems and a book of short stories which is the one I'm interested in now and which is all finished. The book of poems has also been completed. I think I might take this book of poems which has about 60 pages and the best of some of my old poems and make that a book.

CLARICE: What else?

JIM: I had three dogs because when I was growing up in New York my parents would never let me have a dog. I was always bringing home stray dogs and they'd make them kick them out. So I had these terrific dogs and we'd go for these long walks along the coast every day.

Then I'd come home and work a lot and it was actually one of the happiest times of my life.

CLARICE: What happened then?

JIM: I started to write songs for other groups. I wrote some songs with Patti Smith in mind. Of course, Patti writes most of her own songs. I wrote some lyrics together with Allan Lener from the Blue Oyster Cult, who wrote the music. At first I was just sort of writing for other people. I didn't start listening to rock and roll anymore than I had before, which was practically nothing. I liked rock and roll and I liked the idea of poets working with rock and roll, so I decided that I was going to maybe give it a shot, but I really didn't think too seriously about it until I saw Patti when she came out on a tour there.

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CLARICE: Do you have any ideas that you'd call this one?

JIM: No. I've had a few different ideas. I like to work in three-year sections of diaries. The next one would be from the time I was nineteen to twenty-three. And maybe from there the first six months of being in California, because one of the big parts in this basketball diary is the change from just being a street kid, and going to Catholic and public schools, and all of a sudden getting a scholarship to this very posh private school with wealthy kids, for the first time, and meeting all these wealthy girls and going out with them. I needed a switch like that. The switch from leaving New York and going to California and dealing with that whole kind of California mellow-hot-tub-bullshit which I never could stand. But I stayed out there anyway, because I was always by myself. I just kind of used the landscape.

CLARICE: You call your album Catholic Boy.

JIM: I wanted to call it Dry Dream because I really don't like the kind of attitude of rock and roll that is so dominated by the sexual image—it's a kind of cock rock. I really wrote songs with that in mind, to try and do just the opposite. So rather than a wet dream these songs are dry dreams.

CLARICE: The trend of the moment?

JIM: The subjects are limited—you know about love. Boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy loses girl, girl loses boy, boy can't get into a girl's pants. I don't like songs like that. They're boring. There's nothing spiritual about them.

CLARICE: Do you have a favorite song on Catholic Boy?

JIM: They vary. I have different favorite songs for different reasons. I like People Who Die because it's one of our

so I just like to stay home and read and work. That state is okay to write in, but then you want a period of turmoil and excitement, intensity and variation to draw on.

CLARICE: I wasn't thinking so much about the turmoil of going out to clubs, I was thinking about your personal life now. You're married now.

JIM: One is much more inspired when things are tense with one's wife—when there's turmoil and friction going on. There's much more to draw on for lyrics, poems or anything. You're more inspired to do it out of rage and anger and things like that that are going on. But then when you're actually writing the work and polishing it and dealing with style you want quiet and peace. You need both.

CLARICE: Do you miss that sort of New York school of poetry that you were with? Like having friends that you can just drop in on?

JIM: They're still my friends and I always think of them as my friends. I don't miss that scene at all. I think poetry readings are pretty boring. Some of my old poet friends are a bit suspicious of what I do. I was always thought of as this pure poet who didn't publish that much who was kind of a recluse and very much into hard drugs. I had the image of not being in poetry for what one could get out of it.

CLARICE: That's why it's such a total switch for you to be doing rock and roll and heavy publicity?

JIM: Yes. All of a sudden I got the money from the paperback book sale of the diaries and a record contract. They thought I was selling-out.

CLARICE: Do you think there's a certain amount of jealousy in remarks like that?

JIM: Absolutely. And also I'm sick of poets who just write for other poets. They just deal with the intellect rather than the heart.