

"One wrist in heaven, one ankle in hell": Jim Carroll to Speak in Missoula

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Nate Schweber, Eye Spy Reporter

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When I discovered Jim Carroll a week before my 20th birthday, it took me 30 seconds to adopt the last sentence of the first chapter of his book "Forced Entries" as a personal motto. After a diary entry about taking the \$20 his grandmother sent him for his 20th birthday and buying heroin with it, Carroll writes:

"If you haven't died by an age thought predetermined by your abuses and excesses, what is there left to do but start another diary?"

Is that inspiration to write or what? When I found out that this hero of mine was coming to speak at UM, I flipped.

Carroll's life is the stuff of urban legends. His hair-raising tales are autobiographically chronicled in his books, including "The Basketball Diaries," "Forced Entries: The Downtown Diaries," and "The Book of Nods." Carroll also achieved rock stardom when his song "People Who Died" was a No. 1 hit in 1980.

Born in New York City, Carroll went to Catholic school and used his graceful, 6-foot-3-inch body to become a star basketball player.

He also blossomed into a renowned poet. At age 13, he published his first book of poems. It was so well heralded that the late Jack Kerouac commented, "At age 13, Carroll writes better than 89 percent of authors out there."

Carroll's life and art turned when he began experimenting with drugs. At 15, he took his first shot of heroin (thinking it was safe and that marijuana was the addictive stuff). Soon he was a walking laboratory of every substance, chemical and idea New York had to offer in the 1960s.

Carroll hooked up with Andy Warhol's Factory, hung out in the club Max's Kansas City and was a huge Velvet Underground fan. He schmoozed with drug addicts, drag-queens and genius artists. He rubbed noses with folks like Allen Ginsburg and William Burroughs, thereby making him one of the last surviving writers with direct ties to the original Beats.

In the early '70s, Carroll moved to California to kick his drug habits. While there, his New York girlfriend Patti Smith and her band came to play in San Francisco. Smith's opening band quit right before the show, and as a replacement, Carroll went onstage with Smith's backing band and rapped his poetry over a rock beat.

Carroll was so inspired by rock 'n' roll that he returned to New York and founded The Jim Carroll Band. Their hit, "People Who Died," was the most requested song in 1980, second only to "Imagine" — because John Lennon died earlier that year. (Factoid: "People Who Died" is what's playing on the radio in the opening scene of "E.T.")

The Jim Carroll Band released three albums between 1980 and 1983 on Rolling Stones records. Just as Time Magazine dubbed Jim Carroll the Bob Dylan of the '80s, he stepped back from the public eye.

A decade later, he came back when a movie was made of his book "The Basketball Diaries," starring Leonardo Di Caprio. Then, in 1998, Carroll came out with a new music/spoken word album. Now he's doing a spoken word tour, which includes a stop in Missoula on Nov. 8.

As one of the most influential artists of the 20th century, Carroll is a man not to miss.

Jim Carroll will speak in the Urey Underground Lecture Hall on Monday, Nov. 8, at 7:30 p.m. Tickets are available from all TIC-IT-E-Z outlets and are \$10 for the public, \$8 for students.

Suffolk University

(Boston, MA) 4 April 2001

Review by Derek X Nemirov

Twice in the last 8 days I had the distinct honor of being in the audience for spoken word performances by poet/author/songwriter Jim Carroll. On both nights Mr. Carroll was in rare form and had members of the captivated audience eating out of his figurative hand. Digging into his bag of tricks, Jim recited crowd pleasers such as "Zeno's Law of High-Heeled Shoes," "Sick Bird," and his tale of success despite lack of preparedness, "Tiny Tortures." Each performance featured a chapter reading from Carroll's latest as-of-yet untitled novel for which riotous background, set-up information was provided to introduce the pieces as only a wordsmith like Jim Carroll could deliver. Also included each night was the reading of a letter supposedly written by the late Tupac Shakur to a German fan that Carroll 'found' in a recording studio that, each time read, is slightly embellished and leaves the crowd in stitches.

The only thing that truly distinguished these two already stellar performances from ones in the past was the special guest who made an appearance at the conclusion of each night's set. Terrell Winn, guitarist from the *Catholic Boy* era Jim Carroll Band, was present and he and his old band mate delighted the crowds with an unplugged but highly electrifying rendition of the Velvet Underground classic "Sweet Jane." Even more amazing was that the duo went on to perform a second song at the Suffolk U. show. Although Carroll had a head cold, which came across clearly during the readings, but didn't soften the impact of them, he honed his voice during "Sweet Jane" and was absolutely superb in his delivery of my personal favorite JCB composition, "I Want the Angel." Just when I figured that I had witnessed everything that could possibly be offered, a stagehand announced that Jim would be doing a meet and greet after the show. Despite his ill health, Carroll took the time to chat with everyone who wanted to and patiently signed keepsakes for every last person in line. Thanks Mr. Carroll. The pleasure was all mine.

Missouri Southern State College

Joplin, MO (3/17/99)

Review by Damien9693@aol.com

It was really cool. Jim is way funnier than I thought he would be. He made cracks before and after most of his poems. He didn't mention the Make a Wish kid. But he did have a cold and had to blow his nose a couple of times. Which he does quite loudly I might add. Here is his set list (not in any particular order)

A day at the races (FE)
The Two Signs (FE)
Tiny Tortures (FE)
With Van Gogh (FoD)
8 Fragments for Kurt Cobain (VoC)
From a Message on an Answering Machine (VoC)
Poem (VoC pg. 53)
Poem (VoC pg. 112)
Sick Bird (VoC)
Train Surfing (VoC)
I Want the Angel
Falling Down Laughing
Facts (VoC)
Poem (VoC pg. 49)
Jukebox (VoC)
Spy (VoC)
Poem (VoC pg. 12)
The Ocean Below (VoC)
Poem (VoC pg. 47)

He signed all four of my books for me, I was the second one up there to ask him and the line behind me was HUGE! A couple of the poems he read he said he had never read before. He started to read one from *Forced Entries* about when he was taking speed to get off heroin and he had to take heroin again to get healthy, but he decided against it for some reason. I for one would have loved to hear it.

University of Notre Dame

Notre Dame, IN (2/16/99)

The Sophomore Literary Festival

Review by J. A. Carpenter

This is a tale about how I met Jim Carroll. It was, indeed, at Notre Dame University which was the worst place in the world. My friend and I got lost, there were like no signs, we couldn't find a place to park and no one would help us. But being the type of people we are, we did find it in time to see Jim. We arrived an hour early and as I stood in the Student Services Building, I started sobbing. Why? I don't know. I guess because it was hitting me that I was about to see with my own two eyes the man who inspired me to keep living. And I couldn't stop until about 20 minutes before he was supposed to read. And then He came out. I was in the front row...just like I said I would be and he came in a side door. My body froze and I stared as if I had seen a mirage...my brain was refusing to believe this was happening. He was so tall and thin and long...he slumped down into his seat so no one could see him, so he could see no one. He was wearing a black silk shirt and vest, blue jeans and black leather boots. He was carrying a black bookbag of sorts. When this nerd gave him an awful introduction, I and two other people stood as he went for the podium (everyone clapped, though). I started to shake and I think I did have a panic attack as he nervously pulled out his books and papers to read for the night. He started out with *A DAY AT THE RACES* from *Forced Entries* which everyone laughed at and seemed to fuel Jim. He was on last night. Just like he always says in his books, When a poet is on, he is really good. Jim was just really really good. He was so witty and sarcastic. He intro-ed the second story *TINY TORTURES* which went over even better. He then read *FAT BAT* which probably went over the best. He set up an intro about the goat's leg and the fake Satanists. It was really funny. He then read from his new novel about a painter who makes it big in the New York scene which made me drool; I cannot wait to buy that book. When He read *8 FRAGMENTS FOR KURT COBAIN* I started to cry again because that poem moves me way too much to just sit there and act like it doesn't matter that my hero was reading this. He then read *FACTS, FEMALE AS THUNDER, DEADLINE POEM, TRAINSURFING* (which is an interesting poem about these poor kids from Brazil who have nothing to do so they sniff glue and surf the top of trains that are going about 90 miles per hour), *SICKBIRD, SPY, "OUR DESIRES" FROM FEAR OF DREAMING*, Sang *I WANT THE ANGEL* a capella, read "*THE CAT IN THE COUNTRY*" poem, the *Hearts in the Bathtub* poem, *1958 HURRICANE, MY RUINS*, Sang *POOLS OF MURCURY* a capella, and read *MESSAGE LEFT ON A PHONE MACHINE* which finished off his set. Everyone then gave him a standing ovation which made him embarrassed as he got off the stage. So the nerd guy said Jim would talk to people and sign stuff in another building which my friend and I didn't know where that was. We asked the nerd guy and he told us the wrong directions and we got lost. Giving up, we went to the Student Service's building for help and *RIGHT IN FRONT OF US WAS JIM SMOKING A CIGARETTE!!!!!!* I gave him this "I am a deer caught in headlights" look and almost fell down the stairs (as I was going UP the stairs, no less) and ran into the building like a coward. I told my friend, "We'll wait here for him and then see where he goes." he came in and went up the stairs and get this: I walked in his foot steps right behind him! So I was thinking A.) I am literally walking in Jim Carroll's footsteps (no pun intended) and B.) If he falls backwards, he will take me with him....So shaking up the stairs behind him like a dork, he goes inside where everyone clings to him like leeches. Finally he sat in the center. I got him to sign my *Fear of Dreaming* book. He even wrote a poem for one boy (which I thought was rude to put him on the spot like that, but what can you do?) and I asked him TWO questions! First was the purity question, because you all know how bad Julie wanted to know...and he said, "Nope. No. Nope. I don't think I can attain purity," then he paused and said, "At 16 you think anything is attainable. I heard a while back there was this Dahmer guy who cut these people up and froze them in his feezah because he said it made him feel pure. Now I know there's purity in evil and in other...things...and I don't think I can be pure. I'm more relaxed now, but I'm not pure," he replied shaking his head no. He wouldn't make eye contact with people very often (though he did look at me 6 whole times...I counted). He said he likes being a musician but it was tiring. He said he sometimes didn't want to get on stage when he was feeling vulnerable and that was part of the reason why he quit. One guy asked him what music he listened to now and he said not much...but he called Courtney Love a HAG and said "I don't even WANT to buy the Hole album!" which brought a lot of laughter. He said, "I fuckin hate Dylan." I asked him a SECOND QUESTION: Do you ever wish you would've approached Frank O'Hara?" The whole time I was thinking of me approaching him and asking him these questions. He said, "Of course. He was my hero and he meant so much to me. But I was afraid he'd try to pick me up and I wouldn't be with poets. But of course I wanted to talk to him. For so long I hung in the back of the room

at Saint Mark's Church at 15 years old and watched people. Then I got published and used that as a way to meet Ted Berrigan, my writer friend, and Anne Waldman who ran the place. If Frank had lived, I would've met him, too. I was this token child prodigy because they liked my poetry. But yeah, I wanted to meet Frank and everyone said, "He would really go for you". I heard stories about him from my poet friends. It's weird, I was just reading him the other day and thinking how great he was. How much he had an affect on me. John Ashbery I couldn't even get into even though technically he was a better poet but I always liked Frank better. John Ashbery was good before some lit. guy fucked him up. Fucking Literary Critics (laughs), They ruin shit. John Ashberry changed when he won the Pulitzer Prize and other awards in the same year. But I still love Frank." It was soooo great hearing him say these things with such passion. He talked about Lou Reed and the movie and said he wanted to try absinthe sometime (what Rimbaud was addicted to) when someone asked about him doing pernod and he said he couldn't ever handle alcohol. He talked about Patti Smith and how writing on a computer ruins the legacy of writing by hand. Colleges want the hand written stuff later.

Well, I accidentally bumped his knee when he signed my book and I was like, "I just touched Jim Carroll." And I feel like my whole life is different. This morning my mom asked about it and I started sobbing again and I am crying right now, too. and I still don't know why. I feel like I am in a dream now. But I do know for sure that I want to follow in his footsteps and be a published poet. He is such a talented and kind person. He was so nice to everyone. I will never forget last night. It was the best night of my whole life. And I took lots and lots of pictures...I think I have like 10 of him and I have his fucking AUTOGRAPH in his book, for god's sakes!!!!

It was awesome. I got to reach my one goal in life: meeting Jim Carroll and because of that I have a new one : following in his footsteps, but metaphorically this time.

Seton Hall University
South Orange, NJ, 18 March 1998

Review by Laurie Pine

Waiting for Jim Carroll, the pressed milk skin, red tresses and fair lashes are there soon enough. Heavy leather coat, scarf of soft blues and Russian black cap that the nubile students flirt over. This rainy March night can't be dampened. Still a basketball player's lanky step greets those gathered. The raspy voice transports us to the song of angels, Kurt Cobain, knowing pain, pulsing promises of racing crab love, tainted possibilities, the pawing puss. You capture the vision, emotions raw and unsentimental, yet striking reality chords to the pulsing mass. New audiences commingled with familiar friends, cheering, exhilaration. Clapping echoes the generations as you score endlessly, still in prime form.

Your stories of that performance with the cockroach in the bag. What does it mean? Same as it always does. And I feel 20 again, no 17, 16 with you easing the rediscovery, pre-Eden's fall. A poet-philosopher with the wit to bring on the laughter but make all feel connected, safe. And yet many of those who share your stage are the ones for whom you must translate their pain, no longer present. From the Brown Eyed Girl dancer at your friend's jukebox gravemarker to your vanished puss, the night warrior who worries on gravity's mortality no longer.

They all wait on line--the college professor, the angry poet, the anxious chicks, the hopeful writer, the pilgrim with the bootleg tapes from the age of radio--to be singed by your burning presence, the desire to stay awhile, the writing yet to be. Still alive, working through the pain. No drinks proffered accepted. You got to get home to be up early and in that studio. So prolific: books, poems, music. And we celebrate and think, no, not everything dies.

University of Kentucky

Lexington, KY, 29 January 1996

Review by Paul McDonald

I saw JC at UK Monday evening, January 29. The hall seats 800 and was packed to capacity, so my two friends and I sat on the floor in the front. Carroll came out wearing a sign he found laying around backstage with the name "Hermes" scribbled on it. I had seen Carroll a year and a half ago at a coffeehouse in Louisville, and much of the material for that reading I heard repeated on the CD "Praying Mantis," so I expected to hear some of the same work. Some were indeed repeated, like "A Day at the Races," "I Am Not Kurt Schwitters," and his poem for Robert Mapplethorpe, "To the National Endowment for the Arts," but there was plenty of new material, most notably "Curtis' Charm."

Maybe it was his baggy clothes, but Carroll actually seemed SKINNIER than the last time I saw him, and instead of bumming reading glasses from someone, as he did eighteen months ago in Louisville, he came prepared with a pair of glasses that complimented his bony face. Carroll had a cold and a toothache, but he apparently knew how to work with his pain. He began with "Curtis' Charm" and right away gave up trying to stand still in front of the microphone. He moved so much, in fact, all in perfect rhythm to his speech, that he finally pulled the mike off its stand, much to everyone's relief. The next piece was "Eight Fragments for Kurt Cobain." The first time I heard Carroll read this it was still handwritten on loose sheets of notebook paper. Now the poem has been published in the NY TIMES, a chapbook, poster, recited on MTV, and remains one of the most powerful pieces Carroll has written. This poem pulls the audience into Carroll's orbit; they are not of his generation. Yet the references to depression, suicide, fame, addiction and the muddled lyrics of "Teen Spirit" serve as anchors for a shared experience. The rest of the evening was orchestrated between pieces that would make you laugh so you could deal with the bare-bones imagery of a work in progress about war crimes in Bosnia.

The evening then settled into recitations of "I Want the Angel," and two outtakes of the "Basketball Diaries" soundtrack. Because these were memorized, Carroll was free to wander the stage, often crouching like he was sharing a secret. It also gave Carroll the opportunity to banter with the audience, even insisting that a heckler not be silenced because it was "...authentic Kentucky gibberish."

He provoked a definite reaction from the crowd when he said he heard that Massachusetts had a pretty good basketball team. But then he redeemed himself when he said that he convinced "my man Rick Pitino," then coach of the NY Knicks, to go south because of the blizzard coming in '96.

I showed up that evening armed to the teeth for a book signing. I had my copies of *Forced Entries*, *Basketball Diaries*, and the CD Jackets from *Praying Mantis* and *A World Without Gravity*. As Carroll was signing them I mentioned that I enjoyed his portrayal of Frankie Pinewater. He seemed genuinely pleased and mentioned that he did a lot of other good work that wound up on the cutting room floor. He was unaware that the music video of "People Who Died" was at the end of the BD Video. He told me that BD was three weeks at number one at Blockbuster and DiCaprio got the lions share of the royalties. One of my friends is in the masters program at the Naropa Institute and had an anthology of poetry edited by Anne Waldman with a picture of Carroll in his twenties. Carroll was amazed how much baby fat he had.

Paul McDonald is a local poet and library assistant for the Louisville Free Public Library. His goal in life is to live with no credentials and no apologies.

Jim Does Rutgers

By Cyndi Gentile

The Medium: The Satirical Entertainment Weekly of Rutgers University

September 27, 1995

If you didn't go see Jim Carrol last Wednesday night, you should be ashamed of yourself. Carrol gave a chilling performance, one in which the true spirit of this seasoned artist came shining through.

Todd Colby, a published poet and musician, began the evening with a few intense and feverish poems of his own. The most well received piece was entitled *Taking the Bull By the Horns* (I think). In it, Colby exploded with wit and anger, employing this trite clique as a vehicle to a "motivated" moment, as he watched the "bull" drown in the Hudson River. Later, he read a new poem called "Hippie shit", where he bashed the silly nature of the modern day hippy. (Aside: Colby may not look like your average tie-dye wearing, bead-making hippy, but he certainly rolled a mean joint and smoked up back behind the Rutgers Student Center with the ease of any decent sandal-footed hippy.)

Jim Carrol was quite a different story. Carrol is a slight man with pale red hair, cut haphazardly, but with careful regard to his small, deep-set, dark eyes. Despite his size, he is quite a commanding force. His voice is gruff but clear, and it is easy to imagine him fronting his hardcore punk band, aptly called The Jim Carrol Band. Their greatest hits album entitled *World of Gravity* was released to a surge of critical acclaim.

But Carrol is more than a rocker turned author, he has been writing all his adult life. The recent movie. *The Basketball Diaries*, starring Leonardo DiCaprio, was based on Carrol's novel bearing the same name. He began that journal around age thirteen, and it chronicled his life through his addiction to heroin and his days of junk-sickness. Carrol has also written several other books filled with short stories and poems, from which heread several pieces.

The first story he read was entitled *Curtis Charm*. In it, Carrol told the story of a fellow recovering drug addict that had taken a fall from the wagon. Curtis was a bit on the loopy side, and in this funny tale, Carrol is inclined to created a talisman for Curtis to ward off evil spirits. *Curtis Charm* was recently made into a movie by an independent Canadian film company, and won second place in the Toronto film festival just last month. To that news, Carrol seemed to be quite flattered, if not a little confused.

Carrol read several other pieces dealing with a wide range of topics - from insanity to Kurt Cobain. His most moving piece was one about at welve year old Bosnia girl who had witnessed the execution of her entire family. Though RCPC billed this as a "lecture" Carrol really did anything but. The question and answer period at the end was a big flop, but that's no surprise. Those who remained were either blown away by his hard-hitting words, or were awe-struck. Jim Carrol is an underappreciated, but talented author. His words serve to inspire and to educate, and it is worthwhile to listen.