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Remembering Jim Carroll

September 21st, 2009 Comments

From guardian.co.uk | ben myers:

With the death of Jim Carroll last week, America has lost one of its singular and most under-rated poetic voices. As depicted in his most popular work The Basketball Diaries, Carroll grew up on New York’s Lower East Side, the son of three generations of Irish-American bartenders, with the fair Irish looks to match. He
was also an unlikely poetry prodigy and a man of contrasts: at the age of 12 he started keeping a diary that documented his dual teenage existence as an-all star basketball player at an elite private school, and his emerging heroin addiction and the street life that surrounded the junkie scene.

Inspired by the likes of Rimbaud and Frank O’Hara, in 1965 he began attending workshops at St Mark’s Place and published his debut Organic Trains a year later at the age of 16. Extracts from The Basketball Diaries appeared in the Paris Review – a huge achievement for a 16-year-old, especially one who was also occasionally working as a Times Square rent boy and mugger to finance his heroin addiction.

It was poet Ted Berrigan who took Carroll under his wing, introducing him to the likes of Burroughs and Kerouac, who remarked that “at 13 years of age, Jim Carroll writes better prose than 89% of the novelists working today.” Carroll’s ascension coincided with a cultural explosion centred on downtown Manhattan in the late 60s/early 70s, an era that spawned Andy Warhol, Velvet Underground, Robert Mapplethorpe and Patti Smith.

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