

LPs

Catholic Boy The Jim Carroll Band ATCO SD 38-132

The Rock-as-Poetry movement, a product of the Bob Dylan-pervaded Sixties, is mostly made up of rock stars whose lyrics possess certain poetic qualities.

Generally, they've been musicians first and poets second. Dylan, John Lennon/Paul McCartney, and Bruce Springsteen are names which come to mind.

There's an interesting subculture associated with the genre — the poet who decides to become a rock star. The most prominent example in recent years has been Patti Smith, who has incorporated her lyrics into song structures as well as simply reciting them.

There's a new kid on the poet/rock block by the name of

Jim Carroll. As a poet, his credentials are pretty impressive. He wrote his first book, *The Basketball Diaries* at the age of thirteen. His second volume of poetry, *Living at the Movies*, was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize.

As a rocker... well, the jury's still out. A new album and a recent concert tour have produced mixed results.

The Jim Carroll Band, made up of guitarists Brian Linsley and Terrell Winn, bassist Steve Linsley, and drummer Wayne Woods, rocks out in extremely perfunctory fashion, which leaves it up to Carroll to ignite things.

For a rookie rock vocalist, Carroll is reasonably successful. He can't carry a tune, so most of the time he talks his way through his songs a la Lou Reed. He clearly believes that what he has to say is important, which both helps and hurts him.

The credibility is there, but Carroll sings as if the fate of the universe hinges upon his every word, and what at first sounds powerful occasionally sounds mannered.

And what of his much-touted poetic talent? He sometimes has trouble fitting his words into the rhythms of his songs, but he's not the first writer to have that problem, and it's not a fatal flaw. His subjects range from his heroin addiction to his religious upbringing.

What matters is not whether he can master the fundamentals of poetry, but whether he can use his talent in that field to create rock songs that work as rock songs.

His most successful effort is in some ways his most bizarre, a song called "People Who Died": *Teddy sniffin' glue, he was twelve years old / Fell from a roof on East Two-nine / Kathy*

was eleven when she pulled the plug / Twenty-six reds and a bottle of wine.

The list goes on and on. People contract hepatitis, have their throats cut, get pushed in front of subways, and hang themselves in jail cells. It doesn't seem to make sense — a rocker like that shouldn't concern anything heavier than cars and girls.

The rest of *Catholic Boy* ranges from fair to very good, with "City Drops Into the Night," "Day and Night," and "Catholic Boy" deserving special notice.

Carroll's lack of stage presence at a recent Eugene appearance indicates that for now, at least, the best place to hear his music is on the album. With



rock apparently stalled at the edge of its musical limits, the wave of the future may very well be poet/rockers like Carroll and England's John Cooper Clarke.

Uneven though it is, *Catholic Boy* is an honest, intriguing step in that direction.

By Phil Bernstein

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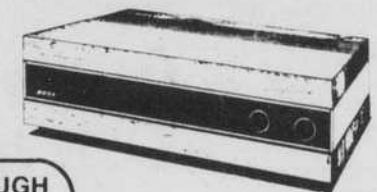
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