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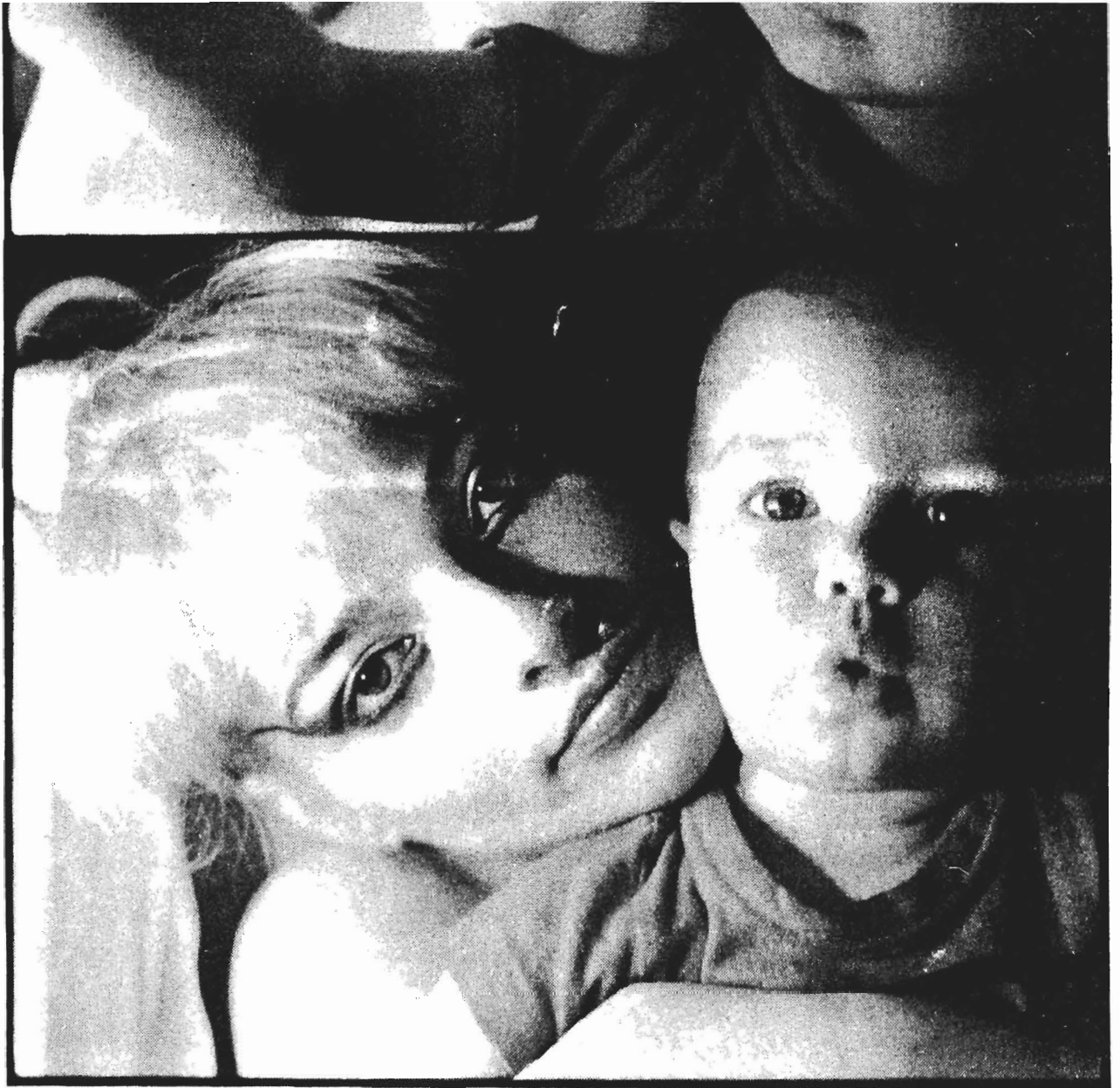
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CARROLLING ON

by Elliot Lefko



When Jim Carroll arrived in Toronto a few months ago, he looked as if he were finally beginning to enjoy the rock and roll lifestyle. It's been two years since he recorded his debut album, **Catholic Boy**, and this was his third Toronto appearance since then. His first was at the El Mocambo a couple of nights after John Lennon died, and then last December he was one of nine poets at a gigantic bard bash entitled *Wholly Communion* (Shades #22).

Carroll's third Toronto date was as an anonymous opening act for the J. Geils Band at Maple Leaf Gardens. Carroll bounded onstage with his new band and played most of the songs from his first album and a couple of covers, such as *Sweet Jane*. The set was poorly received until he launched into *The City Drops Into The Night* and *People Who Died*. During the final chorus of *People*, Carroll substituted John Belushi's name in the song, paying tribute to a friend.

"I got to know John Belushi a couple of years before he died," recalls Carroll. "He really hated the image of being liked by fraternities. He liked things that were outrageous, that were extreme. He tested people's balls. It's funny now, but he loved *People Who Died*. When he heard it he freaked out. He used to drop by our rehearsals and play it on drums. Now I've added the verse dedicated to him so I'll think about him every time I play that song."

Besides recording and releasing records, Carroll will shortly see two of his books of poetry published. "There's two kinds of poems. The first are the California poems which are a series of page-long poems. The second are *The New York Variations* which are delicate little poems which were culled from my diaries. And I've written a lot of poems since I started recording."

Carroll feels that the books are just as important as the records. "I really want to see those new books published. Rock and roll is great but it doesn't provide the pleasure of working on your own inner landscape. I'll always feel like a poet. It's my strength," he says.

Part of the problem with rock and roll for Carroll is the touring. He'd rather bypass that altogether and just release records, play a couple of hometown gigs, and write. Unfortunately circumstances dictate otherwise and he is forced into opening for J. Geils and having to deal with uninterested audiences and media.

"I did this phone interview with a d.j. from CHOM in Montreal. He was a real asshole. He starts off by asking if I've been in music a long time. Actually not, I tell him. Then he says, 'So this is your third album'. Actually it's the second, I point

out. Why don't they do research?"

Asked how he feels about his audience's ability to grasp what he's saying, he replies, "Let's face it. My music requires concentration. But you don't need verbal sophistication. You get it through the heart. It's hard to fool the kids. I think that they've got more imagination than creative writing students."

One of the reasons Carroll entered the rock race was because he didn't like what was happening to contemporary music. "Most groups just don't have any intelligence in their lyrics. It's cock rock lyrics, escape lyrics, and techno pop lyrics. It's background music for fucking. Music for the apocalypse."

He does have his favourites in today's music scene. "Belushi introduced me to Fear. And I know The Dead Kennedys. Jello is such a soft-spoken guy. He calls me Mr. Carroll. He's the Tiny Tim of punk rock," quips Mr. Carroll.

On the subject of punk, he says that he's sickened by the number of punk poseurs that have crept into rock circles over the past couple of years. "I can believe some of those kids. They've got a clear vision of themselves. But most are just using it as a fashion. I was at a concert with my wife and I see this guy in designer punk. He was wearing a swastika. I wanted to walk past him, but I was furious. I said, do you realize what it symbolizes? And he just looked at me with a pretty little smile. I said take it off, or I'll rip it off. Finally I smacked him in the mouth and pulled it off. I punched him again and kicked him and then some goons joined in — some for him and some for me."

While his emotions occasionally erupt in displays such as the fight with the pseudo-punk, Carroll says that he usually directs his feelings into his writing. "I'm working on a prose poem that is in the form of a diary. It's a surrealistic tale of a really crazy person. I'm cataloguing everything he would do or say. For instance he's in a bank holding the teller hostage. He wants the wetness, the darkness, the light; wants what's below. Her breasts are dormant. She won't get hurt."

Carroll's future includes another album, and hopefully a film of his frank, teenage-junkie novel **The Basketball Diaries**. Right now the book is being optioned by a Hollywood producer. Carroll says he's received money up front for the option, but the big money comes when the option is picked up and the movie is actually made. "I saw **Christianne F** and thought it was terrible. It was too explicit. You don't have to show the spike actually going in the arm. But on the other hand, Hollywood won't do much better. It'll probably be pretty tame. They don't want to confront audiences with reality."