

## Morrison biography:

# Chaotic Search for the Truth

by Bruce Rae

He was called 'the young lion' in his earlier days, and later, 'the Lizard King'. The head would often be inclined slightly toward the left shoulder, one hip cocked suggestively to the side, the eyes burning with disturbing intensity as though he were probing the very souls of those around him. His behaviour was chaotic and unpredictable. He spoke of 'breaking through' to the other side of reality. To many he was a god with a message so deep and terrible it rang with truth; to others he was just a pompous ass given to delinquent and pointless exhibitionism. At the very least, Jim Morrison of the Doors was truly a rock music phenomenon.

It has been nine years since Morrison died in Paris and only now are the facts about this enigmatic figure coming to the surface. In their newly-released biography of Morrison, "No One Here Gets Out Alive", Jerry Hopkins and Dan Sugeran attempt to enlighten the reader by offering a detailed account of Morrison's actions and the major events in his life from his pre-Doors period up to the final days. The book was seven years in the making, both writers being former aides and confidantes of Morrison. They used first- and second-hand accounts, interviews, clippings and the like to come up with their portrait of this Mephistophelean figure.

The book's opening section recounts Morrison's high school years and his early days on the West coast. It forms one of the more interesting and illuminating parts of the book by delving into Morrison's psychological

development, his emerging icons and the germination of his later philosophies on life and reality. Through a series of episodes we discover his strong opposition to any form of external authority, especially those that seek to limit experience and objectivity. We observe his obsession with alcohol and pills as he often engaged in all-night bouts of drinking and frenzied behaviour. As the authors point out, however, Morrison's attitudes and actions simply could not be dismissed as the distorted perceptions of a raving madman, for they were grounded in a profound sense of the 'real', and an intellectual clarity that subtly balanced a broad spectrum of emotion and experience.

The growing problem was that the spectrum was so broad that Jim could find no personal definition or identity. He began to lapse into extended periods of despair; a nihilism shook the very cornerstones of his spirit. All the while, Jim had been writing—personal observations, ideas, scraps from newspaper and magazine clippings—and finally blossomed into a legitimate poet. Images of violence, magic, isolation and death signified the darkness of his vision.

The solution was to create a new outlet for his raging disillusionment at the illusory nature of the lives he came in contact with. He soon met Ray Manzarek, a fellow UCLA cinematography graduate, who had led his own groups in the past and who, like Jim, was seeking a new medium for his message.

They began to write melodies to fit the vast wealth of poetry Jim had written.

Robbie Krieger and John Densmore soon joined them and the Doors were born. "There is the known and the unknown and what separates the two is the door. I want to be the door," explained Morrison as the band embarked on a series of all-night stands in the local clubs of L.A. The book winds through the band's ascent and offers recurring splices of Jim's bizarre behaviour. The Doors' meteoric rise in popularity was due partly to Morrison's stage performances which were wildly orgiastic and blatantly sexual. He soon adopted his stage persona, the Lizard King, as he shed his cover, and bared himself for screaming audiences. Behind the theatrics, however, the songs smoldered with fiery intelligence and insight as Jim repeatedly descended to frightening depths of personal exploration, emerging with such foreboding songs as "The End" and "When The Music's Over".

The whole time Jim's drinking and drug-use were increasing to unbelievable proportions, fueling not only his artistic vision but also a mounting paranoia. His songwriting revealed an accent on the darker side of the heart with recurring themes of deserted houses, strangers, and endless highways leading nowhere.

The Doors signed with Elektra Records in 1966 and soon became the top band in America, for two years riding the crest of a tidal wave of popularity. Then disaster struck at a Miami concert in 1969. Jim's on-stage antics led to a series of obscenity charges being laid against him and the tour they were on was cancelled. The Doors were subsequently banned from many of the important concert halls and radio stations in the country. They toured after that and continued to record, sometimes coming up with excellent material (Morrison Hotel, LA Woman—arguably their finest album) but the Morrison mystique had lost something; the awe and enthusiasm for America's rock 'god' had lost much of its potency. In the end he found it increasingly difficult to write and he felt twisted and torn by the conflicting demands of the people in his orbit, whose lives he had so dramatically changed. In 1971, in the depths of a terrible despondency, Morrison died of a heart attack in his Paris apartment.

On the whole, Hopkins and Sugeran deserve admiration for their attempt to get at the truth behind a figure about whom so little is known. Their writing is clear and is presented in a forthright and forceful manner. The authors wisely avoid that nasty trap that so many music writers fall into of using ridiculously esoteric language that no one could possibly be expected to understand. Unfortunately, the chronological (which is



logical) and episodic (which is often illogical) structure that they have chosen only serves to confuse the reader. Morrison's life unfolds through a rapid succession of seemingly arbitrary events without enough time devoted to reflection upon what happens and the reasons behind it. Because of this, Morrison's character changes in the middle and later Doors days are difficult to follow. What begins as a nice mixture of action and reflective insight in the first section later becomes more a mish-mash of drunken

side', beyond the normal boundaries of experience and perception. He desperately sought an understanding of what is real and in the process ripped away that veneer of illusion that is so often mistaken for reality. His dark, apocalyptic vision led to an instinctive understanding of the essentially disordered nature of the times, and indeed of life itself.

Part of the Doors' lasting significance derives from the extent to which Morrison recognized and grappled with one of the basic tenets of life:

"It's a search," Jim said, "an opening of one door after another. As yet there's no consistent philosophy or politics. Sensuousness and evil is an attractive image to us now, but think of it as a snakeskin that will be shed sometime. Our work, our performing is a striving for metamorphosis. Right now I'm more interested in the dark side of life, the evil thing, the dark side of the moon, the nighttime. But in our music it appears to me that we're seeking, striving, trying to break through to some cleaner, freer realm." Jim Morrison, 1967.

antics and slurred speech.

In the Introduction the authors humbly admit that the book outlines Jim's life but not explicitly his meaning. How true. I'm sure that the two men were sincere in their efforts but still it is difficult to escape the feeling that the book resembles a long, over-drawn publicity work. It is too short on interpretive insight and too long on sensationalist action and absurd stunts, when dealing with a man as complex and intriguing as Jim Morrison such a lopsided approach becomes a poor error in judgment.

However, after all that, let me say that the book is still worthwhile reading because somewhere between the lines of dialogue and beneath the accounts of his erratic behaviour lies Morrison's timeless poetic vision. He was a keen observer of life, a hard thinker, and a formidable poet. He broke through 'to the other

when stripped bare of our imposed illusions of order, meaning, and permanence, life reveals itself truly as being chaotic and without purpose. In order to survive we all must preserve inviolate a small island of order amid the surrounding disorder of matter and values. The island is an illusion but a necessary one as it protects us from the fatal truth. Morrison's devotion to the truth about life and his passionate desire to reveal it to others sparked his chaotic behaviour and his disturbing message. Said Morrison, "That's okay, we like it here. It hurts and it's hell, but it's also a helluva lot more real than the trip I see everyone else on." Men either chose quietly to preserve themselves, or they embark upon a course of uncontrolled experience and self-destructive revelation. There is no doubt as to which path Jim Morrison chose.

