

The pen, mightier than the needle

Book review by Kitchener Prijitt

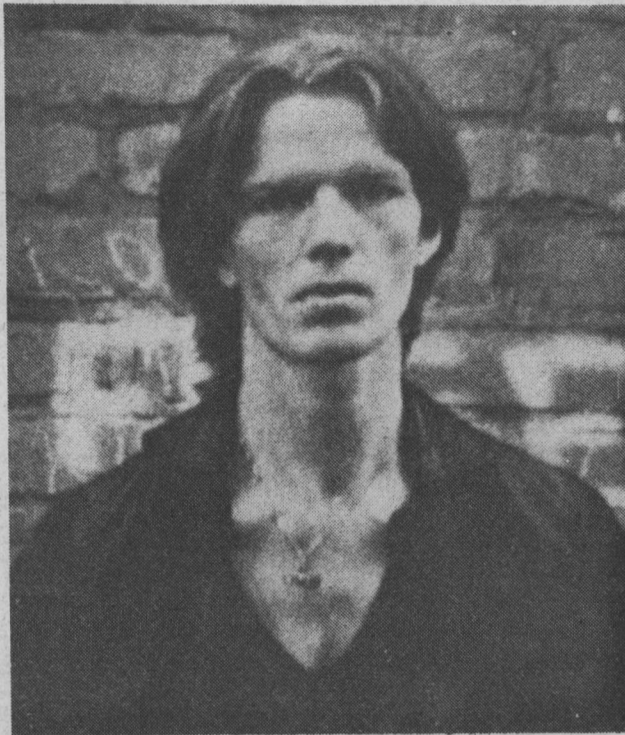
"Now I got these diaries that have the greatest hero a writer needs, this crazing fucking New York." He sure does. Jim Carroll's got New York pulsing through every cell of his junked up body just like Huck had the ol' Mississippi tumbling its muddy waters through his dreams.

But what dreams has an inner-city youth when the streets teach him how to be cool, how to squander his basketball talents, waste himself on every drug imaginable, steal and finally hustle the gay joints to feed the monkey on his back? One dream perhaps, and Carroll has it: the dream to shape life into words. *The Basketball Diaries* is a tragic, brutal, incomprehensible and sometimes strangely beautiful account of Carroll's dream.

Carroll originally wrote *The Basketball Diaries* between 1963 and 1965 when he was 13-15. They were excerpted in the *Paris Review*, turning on people like Jack Kerouac and William Burroughs. An extremely limited edition was published by Timboubou Books, but this month, Bantam Books will publish the first mass-market paperback edition of the *Basketball Diaries*.

The *Diaries* are a somewhat fact, somewhat fantasy journal of Carroll's life on the streets of New York. Written entries are simply indexed as Fall 63, Winter 63, or Summer 64, etc. At the beginning of the accounts, Carroll's a 13 year old star basketball player in the Biddy League (organized BB for kids under 12) who gets his kicks by sniffing Carbona cleaning fluid. At the end of the diary he's a wired out 15 year old junkie who's found that dope is "just another nine to five gig in the end only the hours are a bit more inclined toward shadows."

In between, he and his friends have fun, albeit qualified of course. You know, things like stealing money out of the other teams' lockers when they're supposed to be playing basketball. Or, up in upper Manhattan, jumping off cliffs into the Harlem River, but having to be very careful and timing their jumps so



Jim Carroll, author of the *Basketball Diaries*.

they miss the "shit lines" being pumped out of the sewers and down the river every few seconds. Or dressing up in drag so a friend's mother can act out her incestuous lesbian fantasies.

Of course, as Carroll gets drawn into a heroin addiction, life becomes an opponent he must battle every day to survive and remain sane. New York becomes a grid of street numbers as Carroll works the town, doing what he has to do to feed his habit. And

eventually Carroll realizes the urgency to write, although the *Diaries* end with little indication that Carroll will last long enough to write anything else.

But so what? Why read another book about a burned out street punk in the hell-hole of New York? Street punk, street rap — whatever you want to call it — the seventies' perverse fascination with street culture is continuing into the eighties. It's big right now, look at all those snotty little punks slipping into their tough threads for a Friday night at the Princess. But Carroll's diaries predate the cosmetics. When he wrote the *Diaries*, Dylan was hustling through Greenwich on his way to the top, LSD was still legal and America was suffering the original WW III paranoia blues.

Carroll's got the rap, if that's what you want to call it, and it's beautiful. It's not the Queen's English, but it's a language that bursts with vitality against the limitation of words. Stylistically, he probably owes a lot to the beats though he's not as extravagant in his word spending and imagery as someone like Kerouac. His prose is leaner, laced with succinct street diction and leaning towards a surety for detail and narrative that makes him a very fine bullshitter indeed.

There are inconsistencies in the *Diaries*. For example, how can Carroll's bartender father afford to send Carroll to one of the most exclusive private schools in New York? Why does he go there when all the guys are "lames" and his real friends are down on the lower side? How can he continue to play basketball and go to school when he's riding a heroin addiction? Ah well, these questions really don't matter much. It's the story that counts, and Carroll is unerringly aware of this.

Carroll did survive, and since the *Basketball Diaries* he's written several books including a Pulitzer Prize nominee for poetry, *Living in the Movies*. In March of this year his debut rock 'n roll album will be released by Rolling Stones Records. If the album is rock 'n roll with a good stench of the street, Carroll deserves the title street-punk. After all, he was there fifteen years ago with the *Basketball Diaries*.

Cruising isn't a lot of gay fun

Movie review by Marni Stanley

William Friedkin does not make the kind of movies that you can take your mother to when she comes to see what her child is doing in the big city. First there was the *French Connection*, then *The Exorcist*, and now *Cruising*.

Cruising tells the story of cop Steve Burns (Al Pacino) who adopts a homosexual cover in an attempt to capture a brutal murderer preying upon the gays of Manhattan's seediest heavy leather bars. Slowly he becomes entwined in the world which he unwillingly entered, until, in a rather enigmatic conclusion, we are left with the impression that he may never escape its effects.

Unfortunately this film does not give us enough

information about Burns. In spite of all those camera angles that purport to be showing us his perspective we do not see why the changes in him are so drastic. He is, in effect, possessed by the spirit of the killer and in the final showdown (which can be viewed as a grotesque parody of the classic western gunfight) he assumes the murderer's role.

What we do get in this film is black leather and studs. Much of this movie was shot in dark clubs with intriguing names like Ramrod and Cockpit where the clientele indulges in explicit sadomasochistic behavior. I felt the deluge of bare bodies, blood, and corpses was unnecessary and by the end of the film I was too blitzed by the whole mess to feel anything for the protagonist.

It is difficult to view a film like this one without questioning the director's motives. Even though the

film is prefaced by the note that it is "not intended as an indictment of the homosexual world" and we are constantly reminded that the group dealt with is the minority, the after effect is still one of repulsion. In spite of Pacino's obvious efforts to give the film some sensitivity, one has the impression of watching cheap pornography. The possibilities that this film will satisfy the curiosity of people with more money than brains and that it will encourage the anti-gay movement can not be ignored. After all, heterosexuals have been known to indulge in practises just as kinky or murders just as brutal and disturbing.

Cruising has other perplexing features as well. James Contner's camera seems to look upon everything with a curious revulsion and the director indulges in some heavy-handed symbolism. Murky music oozes out whenever fathers are mentioned and the murderer has an Edvard Munch print of women over his bed (and we all know how well Munch got along with women!).

Paul Sorvino is totally believable as the captain who comes to realize that he may have asked too much of Burns and the one female member of the cast, Karen Allen, gives a sympathetic but uninspiring performance as Burns' artist girlfriend.

If you go to this film out of curiosity please extend it to a consideration of the director's motives. If *Cruising* was less graphic in its sexual scenes and more intimate in its exploration of Burns' dilemma it might have been a good movie — instead it is almost as cheap as some of the hustlers that populate its frames.

Jazz the good old way

There are still some jazz musicians left who play jazz and remember that it is a fine blend of head and heart. Fraser MacPherson and his friends remember. They will be playing next Thursday, February 28, in SUB Theatre.

Fraser and Friends has its musical roots in the pre-bop, big band and combo days of the nineteen-thirties and forties. That doesn't mean old fashioned. It does mean that they are committed to melody, both in their choice of tunes, and in their improvisations.

Fraser and Friends is a trio formed in March of 1975. They are the first Canadian jazz group to have toured the Soviet Union. This 1978-79 tour was very successful. Their nine concert schedule was extended (not at gunpoint) to thirteen "Standing Room Only" performances.

The trio's leader, Fraser MacPherson, is a Canadian jazz veteran, and one of Canada's foremost saxophonists and flautists. Born in Winnipeg, raised in Victoria, he's been working out of Vancouver since 1949. For twenty-three years MacPherson was involved with broadcasting for CBC Radio and Television. He was also a band leader for 15 years, accompanying such luminaries as the great Ella Fitzgerald, Tony Bennett and Al Martino.

Oliver Gannon is the group's guitarist, but his guitar is amplified, not electric. The difference might seem trivial, but his approach to the guitar is founded in a jazz guitar style that has not been influenced by the post-Hendrix predominance of electronics over natural tones and concepts.

Gannon has done session work for commercial music, radio recordings and TV on the West Coast. A product of the Berklee School of Music in Boston, Gannon is also a member of the Pacific Salt Jazz Group and the Bob Hales Big Band.

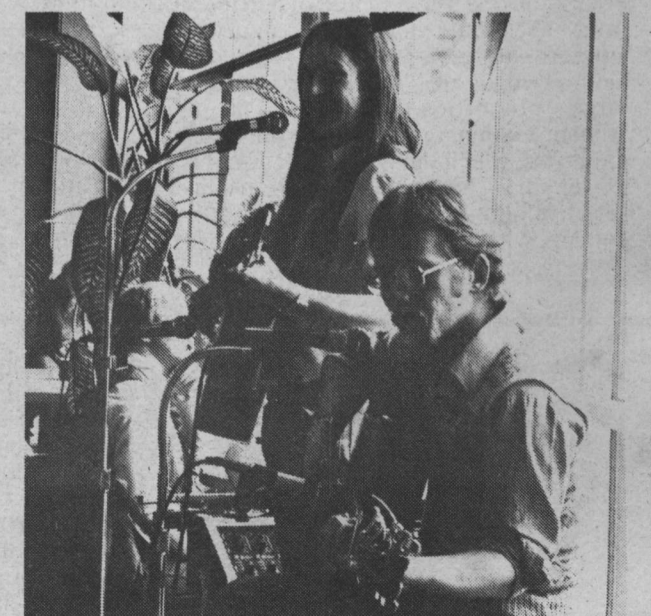
Bassist Wyatt Ruther has toured and recorded



Fraser MacPherson

with a "who's who" of jazz — Brubeck, Garner, Basie, Ellington, Buddy Rich and Lena Horne.

Fraser and Friends will give two concerts, one at 7 and one at 9:30 p.m. Tickets are \$4.50 and available at HUB and BASS outlets. It promises to be an evening of mellow, friendly jazz.



Scottish folkies Doug McLean and Alan Roberts jiggled and reeled their way through an enjoyable noonhour performance at L'Express coffee shop in SUB last Thursday.

photo Nancy McGill