

# arts

## Slipped Discs: chaos on vinyl

**MUSIC REVIEW**  
*A World Without Gravity*  
The Jim Carroll Band  
Rhino Records

by Leslie J Furlong

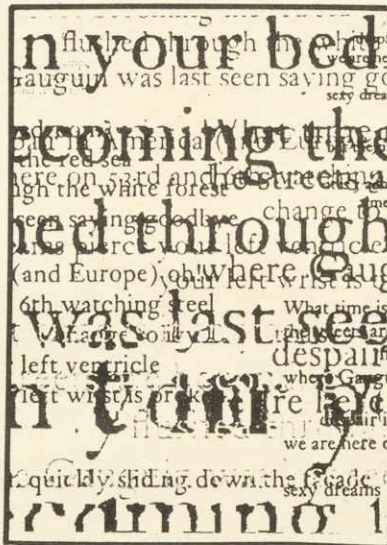
Pop music, now more than ever, is driven by the frantic energy of musicians beating their instruments into submission. The art of lyric writing, with a few exceptions outside of country and rap (Leonard Cohen, The Tragically Hip, Pearl Jam's "Jeremy"), has been a casualty of rock's rediscovery of the Id. I got to thinking about this while listening to "It's Too Late", one of the eighteen tracks found on Rhino's compilation of the best of the Jim Carroll Band, *A World Without Gravity*, and it made me wonder why in the majority of cases you could have either good lyrics or good playing, but not both.

In the space of a trinity of albums from the early to mid-eighties, from

the required *Catholic Boy* through *Dry Dreams* to *I Write Your Name*, Carroll wrote some of the most provocative lyrics in rock music, drawing from the same life experiences that allowed this New York poet to write his gripping memoirs *The Basketball Diaries* and the poetry found in *Living in the Movies*. The songs recreate the images from his New York youth with all of their harsh beauty intact, from the tribute to fallen friends-turned-anthem "People Who Died" to the destructive embrace of heroin addiction of "Lorraine" through the obsession over lost love found in "I Write Your Name". The pain is always in the open, plain and raw, while salvation waits in the background just within reach.

This selection of material also allows the listener to observe the growth of Carroll as a lyricist over the course of three albums. The songs from *Catholic Boy* are the simplest but yet the most effective, so it's no wonder that seven

of the songs here are from that album. The selections from *Dry Dreams* are the most complicated, trading up from



couplets to iambic verse, forcing the music to wrap around the words with noticeable difficulty, while *I Write Your*

*Name* marks a return to the simpler lyrical style.

The Jim Carroll Band was first and foremost in the business of creating rock 'n' roll, but without Jim Carroll's words to build upon, the music would have just been — there. The playing was always tight and professional, pushing the songs headfirst towards their conclusion, but the dated arrangements only occasionally rose above the level of cookie-cutter quality while the musicianship was strictly play-by-numbers. There are gaps in this collection that remain unfilled as well (what collection doesn't?). The rest of *Catholic Boy*, especially "Three Sisters", deserves at least an honourable mention, while the band's cover of "Sweet Jane" is regretfully, though understandably, absent. Still, there are those words, those thoughts and images, and they are more than enough to elicit a recommendation for this collection of rock poetry.

**MUSIC REVIEW**  
*Bat Out of Hell II: Back Into Hell*  
Meatloaf  
Epic Records

by Colin DeWolfe

In 1977 a very large man with an equally large voice released a collection of songs written by Jim Steinman. This album was *Bat Out of Hell* and was an unqualified success, although to this date a lot of critics can't understand why. Seventeen years later, after a long run of failed releases, Meat Loaf has again teamed up with Jim Steinman to bring us *Bat Out of Hell II: Back Into Hell*.

Most of the original contributors are back, most notably Ellen Foley of Night Court fame and Todd Rundgren. The producer of the original *Bat Out of Hell* was Todd Rundgren but this time Jim Steinman has taken over those responsibilities with Todd Rundgren's role reduced to arranging background vocals. I don't know whether it is the new producer or just the seventeen years, but this one sounds big, much fresher and musically much more up to date.

If you have seen the cover of the original album, the cover art for this one will come as no surprise with its gothic bat and motorcycle rider. But this time, instead of blasting out of the graveyard, he rides his bike bronco-style into a smog-filled city containing the Empire State Building, Big Ben, and Notre Dame. The rest of the jacket and dust sleeve art has a fantasy and science fiction theme.

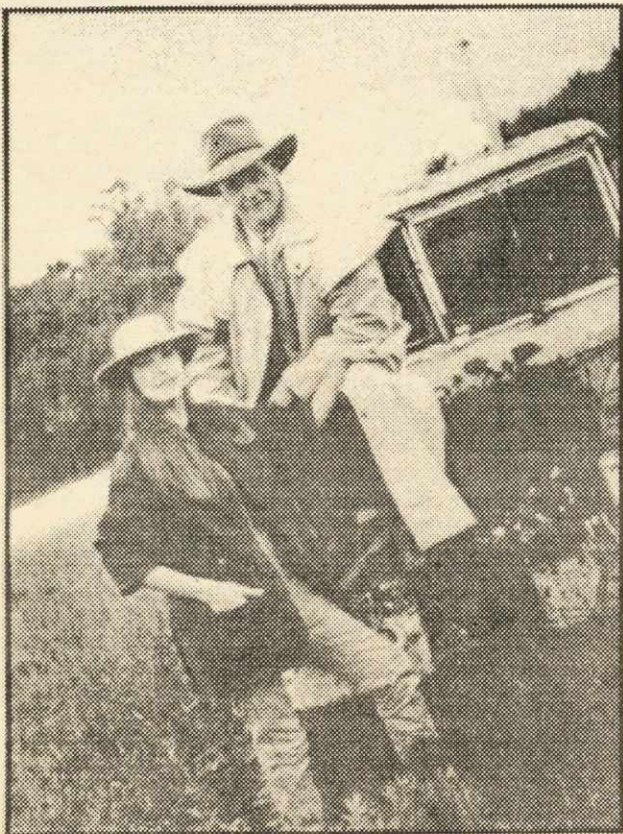
This is one of those albums that has to grow on you. The first time I listened to it, I was not overly impressed but on second listen I found a few of the songs very infectious, mostly because of the driving rhythms and the strong and effective background vocals. The reason it took a while was that there are a lot of lyrics to learn, making it difficult to sing along to. And this is an album to be sung along to. Very few lyrics actually make much sense though, but for the most part the strong vocal work more than makes up for it. If you liked the first album for this reason, then you'll most definitely like this one.

There is a lot of chaff to sift through, but you do eventually find the nifty metaphors and interesting mental images such as a soul being a car on the highway of life with things chasing it down, and a woman using her body as a bandage to heal wounds. In keeping with the useless lyrics, almost in recognition of them, some of the song titles are also quite useless. For example, "Life Is A Lemon and I Want My Money Back", and "Objects In The Rear View Mirror May Appear Closer Than They Are". No matter how silly these titles are, they are actually the best songs on the album. I think this kind of says something about musicians taking themselves and their lyrics too seriously at times.

When you put all these metaphors and images together, however, the general theme of the album is about wasted youth and living life to its fullest, with lots of "Sex, Drums & Rock 'n' Roll". This is probably why I found it to be the perfect music for listening to in the car on a sunny autumn day. And if you own *Bat Out of Hell* and your roommates hate it, my roommate says that this one "isn't anywhere near as annoying."

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