

# *JANDEK ON CORWOOD*

A DOCUMENTARY FILM

## **MEDIA KIT**

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*More info, including a trailer, is available at [www.jandekoncorwood.com](http://www.jandekoncorwood.com)*

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## **Synopsis**

"The longest-running, weirdest, loneliest enigma in popular music is a guy from Texas who calls himself Jandek." So begins a 1997 Boston Phoenix article by Douglas Wolk. From the bluesy, atonal music and haunting lyrics, to the artist's steadfast seclusion and sheer longevity, everything about this man intrigues. Twenty-five years, 34 albums, and not a single live show or public appearance. Even the simple detail of the man's real name is a mystery.

*Jandek on Corwood* is the 89-minute documentary that explores this man, his world and his music. Jandek released his first album, *Ready for the House*, in 1978 on his own record label, Corwood Industries (he is, of course, the only artist on this label). The release went relatively overlooked until a review by Phil Milstein appeared in *Op* magazine in 1980. Bolstered by that slight measure of notice, Jandek set about releasing at least one album per year over the next quarter century of his unique brand of cacophonous rock and suicide-note blues. Slowly, word of Jandek spread, primarily through college radio stations and obscure fanzines.

In 1985, writer John Trubee was approached by the executive editor of a fledgling music magazine called *Spin* to submit an article about the artist of his choice. He immediately thought of Jandek, because "he's underground; nobody knew about him; he was doing things on a shoestring." This article spawned the only interview with the man behind the Jandek music and the Corwood Industries record label in which he speaks about the project. All subsequent attempts to glean any information on the subject have been respectfully declined.

Jandek's music is difficult to describe. "I usually tell people that it's someone who has a completely untuned guitar and is just sort of meandering and yelling over it," says Angela Sawyer of Twisted Village Records in Cambridge Massachusetts. "That wouldn't tell a person who has a bunch of Jandek records what it sounds like but for someone who has a bunch of Toni Braxton records or some U2 records, that will help them out." Reviewers have an equally troubling time describing what a Jandek song sounds like. An *Option* magazine article refers to his "anguished, moaning, impassioned vocals." A mention in a 1998 book compares his guitar playing to "a deathbed Neil Young." Certain words stick out in the multitude of reviews and articles that have appeared in various publications, like "spooky," "honest," and "wispy." Yet none can really capture the distinctiveness of Jandek's sound.

However, more attractive than the unique music is the impenetrable mystery. Who is this man who has persisted all this time, putting out at least an album a year, which 99% of the public will never hear? He refuses to promote his albums through live shows or interviews, and yet for years advertised in independent music publications such as *Op* magazine. Of course, his ads were as sparse and aloof as the man and his music. A white box with black type stating only "Jandek on Corwood; PO Box 15375, Houston, TX 77220." No graphics, no color, no information other than the artist's name, the label and the address.

What is Corwood Industries? "Corwood Industries is an industrial giant in the Houston area dedicated entirely to manufacturing and disseminating Jandek musical material," muses writer Byron

Coley. The only tangible evidence of the company is a post-office box. This ambiguity about the label raises the question of how the Jandek albums are financed. It is a safe assumption that he is not making a profit on the sales of these albums. Even if the only cost he has is the pressing of the records (or, since 1992, the CD's), which he has done at a small family-owned company called Houston Records, he gives away to radio stations, record stores, and music critics far more than he actually sells.

Nothing has garnered more speculation, however, than the appearance of other musicians on the albums. Before the fourth album, released in 1982, Jandek fans had grown accustomed to his music as a solitary endeavor. "I remember hearing *about* it much more than actually hearing it," reflects Sawyer. "I was much more interested in the idea there was this reclusive guy writing these songs that made no sense." And then suddenly, he has friends—or at least associates. When Coley first encountered the song title "Nancy Sings" on Jandek's fourth album, he initially thought, "It could be anything. It could be a song about Nancy singing. And then when you get there and it's actually a woman singing and you grab the album your looking at and it says 'Nancy Sings,' so you're like, 'I guess it's Nancy.' The same lyrics are used once again on the cut "John Plays Drums," when Jandek is joined by, you guessed it, a drummer. "I remember when I first heard the drums and how shocking that was because cumulatively you get the image of this guy alone in his room," reflects Milstein. The identities of the individuals are not revealed by any credits or liner notes with the albums (it should be pointed out that Jandek albums never contain any sort of credits or liner notes). Where did he meet these people? Who are they? John Trubee posed these questions to him in that infamous 1985 interview. He got no response.

Not only does the documentary *Jandek on Corwood* lay out these intriguing facts for its audience, it also explores their implications. How much does the mystery play into fans' appreciation of the music? Why do fans from diverse backgrounds come to similar conclusions about Jandek's biography despite the lack of any biographical information in which to ground these convictions? How much can we infer about the man behind the music from odd style and tone of his art? How much, for that matter, about any artist? How much of each fan's image of Jandek is simply a reflection of him or herself?

One of the biggest questions that remain (besides the identity of the artist) is how the Jandek story will end. Music critic Douglas Wolk has been fooled three times about the end of Jandek. "He always sounds like he's about to sign off," Wolk reflects, "and then he never does quite. And then there's always another [album] that comes after it." Most Jandek fans hope he will keep releasing about an album a year forever. Perhaps not the most realistic prediction, but they just can't imagine the man behind the mystery putting a stop to it. Likewise, they can't imagine ever knowing the whole truth about this man, his life and his music.

As the man at Corwood Industries wrote to *Jandek on Corwood's* producers when they began the documentary, "You may not get all the answers you want. It's better that way."

## CREDITS LIST

Director.....Chad Freidrichs  
Producers.....Chad Freidrichs and Paul Fehler  
Associate Producer.....Jaime Freidrichs  
Music.....Jandek  
Photography.....Chad Freidrichs  
Editing.....Chad Freidrichs  
Additional Photography.....Paul Condon

### Interviews (in alphabetical order):

Jake Austen  
Nils Bernstein  
Byron Coley  
Dr. Demento  
Ben Edmonds  
John Foster  
Gary Pig Gold  
Toni Holm  
Calvin Johnson  
Amy Frushour Kelly  
Brooks Martin  
George Parsons  
David Rauh  
Angela Sawyer  
Eric Schlittler  
Dana Squires  
John Trubee  
Richie Unterberger  
Katy Vine  
Douglas Wolk

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## **Director's Biography and Filmography**

### **BIOGRAPHY**

Chad Freidrichs makes his directorial debut with *Jandek on Corwood*, a feature-length documentary exploring a reclusive Texas musician who has released 34 albums in the last 25 years. Freidrichs, age 27, has been studying, critiquing, and (making attempts at) creating films for over ten years.

Freidrichs was born in to the son of a farmer and the daughter of a farmer in Farmington, Minnesota, and his family moved around to various small Midwestern towns. Just in time for his high school years, the Freidrichs family settled in Wentzville, Missouri, a suburb of St. Louis. There Freidrichs met Paul Fehler, his co-producer for *Jandek of Corwood*, who sat next to him in the alphabetically-arranged gym class. They teamed up for their first film during their senior year at Wentzville High School, an adaptation of Chaucer's "*The Pardoner's Tale*" for a senior English project.

After high school, Freidrichs attended film school at New York University's prestigious Tisch School of the Arts. However, financial constraints forced him to drop out after just one year, and he moved back home with his parents and began his first in a long string of factory jobs.

However, Freidrichs recognized the importance of a college education and, once he got back on his feet, followed Fehler to the University of Missouri-Columbia, where he graduated with a bachelor's degree in English and met his future wife, Jaime Elliott.

After college, Freidrichs obtained a job making television commercials for the local ABC and FOX affiliates. This job taught him much about shooting, editing, and making pompous local businessmen who have no business being in front of a camera sound intelligible. After hours, Freidrichs made attempt after attempt to get a film off the ground. Unfortunately, the lack of funding, equipment, and trained actors stood in his way.

In November of 2001, Fehler told Freidrichs about Jandek, whom he had discovered during his extensive hours spent on the Internet. Freidrichs agreed that Jandek would make a perfect documentary subject and as he had recently spent his girlfriend's (now wife) student loan money on a digital video camera, he had the equipment necessary to make the film.

After 40,000 miles of travel, 60 hours of footage, 500 hours of editing, Freidrichs proudly releases *Jandek on Corwood*.

### **FILMOGRAPHY**

*JANDEK ON CORWOOD* (2003)

# Meet Jandek the Invisible

by Steve Hochman

**Los Angeles Times**

Originally Published February 16th, Page E3r. 2004

Most documentary filmmakers go out of their way to get their subject on camera. Chad Freidrichs and Paul Fehler actually went out of their way not to. What's more, they didn't just avoid filming the musician who is the subject of "Jandek on Corwood," which will be screened Thursday by the American Cinematheque at its Egyptian Theatre. They avoided even meeting him.

Before a trip to Houston to get a shot of the post office box that serves as the business address for Corwood Industries, the record label that releases Jandek's music, the pair wrote a letter to the subject to warn him.

"We said, 'We'll be at your post office box at such a time and such a date, and if you want to meet us, we won't tape you, but you can come by,' " says Freidrichs. " 'But if you don't want to meet us, stay away.' We go down to shoot, and he's not there."

That will come as no surprise to anyone who knows even the slightest bit about Jandek, one of the odder cult figures in music. Combining a public profile that makes J.D. Salinger look like Britney Spears with music that has limited appeal at best, Jandek's quarter-century career — using the term loosely — is the embodiment of obscurity.

If you can find someone who's heard Jandek's music, you'll likely hear that it's either the most haunting or most annoying thing they've ever heard. A typical Jandek recording (and there have been a lot — 35 albums since 1978) consists of sparsely plucked, carelessly tuned acoustic guitar with a man's shaky voice warbling drawn-out, arrhythmic portrayals of isolation and despair, with occasional mood swings into anger, exuberance or pique. Mid-period albums saw him "going electric," while later ones were often spoken-word, but all with the same pervasive sense of desolation.

Album covers generally consist of fuzzy snapshots (the interior or exterior of a house, sometimes a photo of a young man who may or may not be Jandek, staring intensely like an albino Robert Johnson or posing rakishly). On the back, under a plain-type song listing, each album has only the Corwood Industries name and post-office box address.

Jandek, or a man purporting to be Jandek, has given only one interview (in 1985) and the small, but intense, body of fans he has accrued has been left to blind speculation about who this person is and what exactly he's doing.

"Initially we considered doing a 'Hard Copy' thing, knock on his door and confront him and make him say why he's doing what he's doing," Freidrichs says. "But it seemed silly to do that. The reason people are interested in Jandek is the mystery. If you take that mystery out, what's the point of making the movie? We stayed away from any type of biographical

material and just go for the mystery. It's almost like his nonpresence in the film, that's his presence."

The film, then, examines the Jandek mystery through those who have become obsessed with it — a handful of music critics and record collectors who live their lives decidedly off the beaten track. These are people who have dug deeply into floating and discussing Jandek theories, which began germinating with the first Jandek album's release and have proliferated in the Internet age.

A few of the more common ones: Jandek is really a rich industrialist pulling an extended practical joke. Jandek recorded hundreds of hours of music in one mid-'70s burst and has released it according to his own master plan. Jandek is a loner who never leaves his house. The person seen on many album covers is not actually Jandek but may be a deceased brother.

Then there are the "clues" to his life and identity contained in lyrics and on album covers, developed in remarkable detail. Is the woman who suddenly appears singing — beautifully — on the 1982 album "Chair Beside a Window" (on a song titled "Nancy Sings") a new girlfriend? Is her name really Nancy? Is the house on some of the covers actually where Jandek lives? Is it even in Houston? Where are those European-looking street scenes on some of the recent albums? Cork, Ireland? Where Jandek went on vacation?

A few details are clarified in the film, one or two in the centerpiece, the playing of an audio-taped 1985 interview by musician-writer John Trubee for a story in Spin. But mostly, "Jandek on Corwood" paints its portrait of the artist through the perceptions of others.

"By far the most interesting things we discovered were the fans' interpretations, how people create the image, given so few clues," Freidrichs says.

The filmmakers were not actually among the ranks of Jandek obsessives before starting this project. Friends since their St. Louis childhoods, they were merely looking for an enticing topic for a documentary.

"Paul was living in L.A. and came across this Jandek guy on the Internet and contacted me," says Freidrichs, who had been working at a local TV station in Columbia, Mo., since graduating from the University of Missouri there. Freidrichs listened to the music "and kind of became a fan." But it was the mystery that really caught him and convinced him that there was a phenomenon worth documenting.

They didn't accomplish the project entirely without communications from Jandek.

"When we initially started thinking about the project, we wrote Corwood asking for rights to use cover art and actual music," Freidrichs says. "He wrote back and said, 'Sure, feel free to use whatever you want,' and sent a whole bunch of CDs. Every now and then we'd write and ask specific questions: What does this song mean? Who is this person? He wasn't forthcoming. Sometimes he sent messages like, 'It's better this way.' "

And while Jandek didn't show up at the post office box, he did make contact soon after.

"We headed to Austin and were at a Mexican restaurant, and he called on the cellphone," says Freidrichs. "Wow! I'm talking to Jandek!" "

Even that, though, didn't diminish the mystique.

"It was a pretty mundane conversation," he says. "But it was the exact same voice as on the interview. Tended to have long pauses, which is typical of people who have spoken with him."

**Steve Hochman**

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## Jandek on Corwood

by Hazel Dawn Dumpert



Originally Published February 12, 2004

Since 1978, the insistently obscure Houston musician Jandek has been self-releasing albums at a steady clip through a shadowy P.O.-box entity called Corwood Industries. Familiarity with, and worship of, the mysterious figure's melancholy vocals set to spare, deceptively crude instrumentation has become a point of pride among music geeks of a brainier stripe, but filmmaker Chad Friedrichs' portrait of the musician and his cult of personality, *Jandek on Corwood*, is no mere ode. There are elements of that, certainly, as outstandingly nerdy - and, admittedly, thoughtful - journalists, DJs and collectors hold forth on Jandek's distinctive sound, and/or speculate rampantly about his life and mental health. But as Friedrichs deftly blends these talking heads with pointed, atmospheric imagery (an amusement-park ride set against a huge full moon or a misty winter creek), with album covers, reviews and photos and, of course, excerpts from Jandek records, a smart, cohesive film emerges. In the end, Friedrichs proves less interested in the more mundane question of who Jandek really is than in how the artist has managed to maintain his singular mystique. As one expert notes, and as *Jandek on Corwood* cleverly confirms, by withholding his own persona from fans, Jandek has created a far more intriguing, far more compelling image.

**Hazel Dawn Dumpert**

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# Jandek on Corwood

Chad Friedrichs, Director  
by David Keenan



Originally Published Nov. 2003

It was never going to be the easiest of tasks: to assemble a 90 minute documentary film around a musician about whom the only verifiable facts are that he operates from behind a PO box in Houston, never gives interviews or plays live, and over the past 25 years has released 35 of the most emotionally traumatic and formally wayward recordings ever broadcast via the tongues of humans. Yet *Jandek On Corwood*, a feature length investigation into the solitary Texas musician known as Jandek put together by director Chad Friedrichs and producer/interviewer Paul Fehler, is, against all the odds, a fantastic evocation of one of the most compelling soundworlds ever to orbit the contemporary underground.

Working from a series of talking head interviews with Jandek scholars and obsessives, including critics Byron Coley, Douglas Wolk, Phil Milstein and Gary 'Pig' Gold, the two film makers assemble a composite portrait of a character that wouldn't be out of place in one of Paul Auster's oblique, circuitous novels.

The film is broken up into a series of revealing chapters, wherein layer upon layer of myth and reality is sifted through and extrapolated upon. Wolk describes Jandek's back catalogue as being almost akin to a "33 volume suicide note," but the theory that all his early work had been cut in one huge burst as part of some kind of herapeutic mental health programme is shot down almost as soon as it rolls off the first critic's tongue.

Coley is particularly lucid, describing Jandek's body of work as being reducible to three semi-distinct phases. Back in 1978 his first album, *Ready for the House*, recorded under the group name *The Units*, introduced the kind of blasted interior landscapes that dominate his first seven records, with an expiring acoustic guitar, apparently tuned to the movements of the stars, coiled like barbed wire around a distressed, semi-articulate vocal that conflated eschatological blues imagery, religious iconography and hermetically personal visions of isolation.

1982's *Chair Beside a Window* signals the beginning of his second major phase, identifiable by a gradual accumulation of additional sonic elements, including overdriven electric guitar and contributions from a clutch of other musicians only identifiable by their first names, like vocalist "Nancy," and drummer "John." This phase lasts all the way up until 1987's *Blue Corpse* where, as Coley describes it, "the bottom dropped out again" and Jandek once more returns to the broken tongues of his earlier work, albeit with occasional echoes of his expansive middle period. Most incredible of all are the three chilling unaccompanied vocal recordings he

released between 2000-1: Put My Dream On This Planet, This Narrow Road, and Worthless Recluse, excerpts from which create some of the most chilling voids in the film. Comparing them to "creepy messages left on answering machines," even Coley admits that they're "not entertaining to listen to at all."

But it's not all about the fetishisation of dysfunction. Coley also makes the point that to automatically presume Jandek's work traces the arc of his life is to undermine the liberating power of art to create whole new alternative universes that aren't in the least bit representational. But Calvin Johnson of Beat Happening and K Records is the most incisive when tackling this subject, dismissing the idea that just because Jandek chooses to work outside of the music industry's systems of validation, we should immediately presume there's something wrong with him.

Nevertheless, it's a difficult notion to shake, and one that the film ends by reinforcing as they climax with a replay of the only recorded Jandek interview, conducted over the phone by the critic John Trubee in 1985. When Trubee asks him how he met collaborators like Nancy and John he's greeted with a minute's silence, followed by Jandek's assertion that he doesn't "think it'd be right to answer that," further fuelling a bucket load of spurious and infinitely offbeam theories.

But ultimately Jandek on Corwood is a huge success, proof that even this far into the game there are certain semi-desolate corners of the underground that remain impregnable to colonisation by the ever-encroaching monoculture and its accompanying pressures and pay-offs. No matter what the truth is, it makes you believe.

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## Who is Who? by Seth Porges



Originally Published Apr. 2004

Over the course of 25 years, Jandek has released 34 albums, making him one of contemporary music's most prolific musicians. The thing is--nobody is quite sure who Jandek is. Since 1978 the identity of this most reclusive of artists has remained a complete mystery.

Jandek has never performed live or made any public appearances, and only one journalist claims to have met him. The only clues to his identity are the records he ceaselessly records and releases, and the blurry, enigmatic photographs that grace their covers. Jandek's record label, Corwood Industries, consists of nothing more than a post office box in Houston.

While musicians such as the Residents have cloaked their identities behind masks and pseudonyms, their anonymity is more of a gimmick than an absolute; to be sure, there are people who know who the Residents are. If anybody knows who Jandek is, they aren't talking.

Moreover, Jandek's music is some of the most abrasive, instantly confrontational, unlistenable music to ever be released. Most of it is depressing, rambling, out-of-key singing backed by out-of-tune guitar strumming that sounds like a 34-album long suicide note played by an adolescent on his first guitar, and a dozen albums could go by over a decade with every song sounding almost exactly the same. Whoever Jandek is, he has invested an enormous amount of financial resources and time into recording his music--even if it is music that is essentially listened to by nobody: through 1985, his first nine records sold a total of about 150 copies. Along the way, though, Jandek's music has picked up a few vocal fans in addition to the rock critics and Harvard radio station DJs. "Jandek's not pretentious," Kurt Cobain explained in a *Spin* magazine interview in 1993. "But only pretentious people like his music." And Bright Eyes showed up on a Jandek tribute album in 2000.

More recently the Jandek mystery inspired Paul Fehler and Chad Freidrichs to make *Jandek on Corwood*, a documentary that explores the myth and music of the man. The project, which premiered last October at the Leeds International Film Festival, does not seek to answer all the lingering questions of Jandekalia--to do so might very well be impossible--but rather sinks its teeth into the unusual relationship between a reclusive artist and his audience. To that end, the film is related entirely in the words of his fans--a demographic so small that it makes one wonder if the film presents a sizable percentage of its entirety. The fans' reverence for an artist who essentially doesn't exist outside the confines of his obscure releases allows the film to communicate the idea that there's something special to the music beyond its unlistenability to outsiders. See *Jandek on Corwood* and you might walk away with more questions than answers about the indie icon, but perhaps that is the whole point of Jandek's work. As a note the filmmakers received in the mail from Corwood Industries put it: "You may not get all the answers you want. It's better that way."

## **Seth Porges**

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# THE MAN WHO WASN'T THERE

## NEW DOCUMENTARY GOES SEARCHING FOR JANDEK

John Elsasser

The Way Paul Fehler figures it; you could fit all the world's Jandek fans in one theater. But that didn't deter Fehler and Chad Freidrichs from making a documentary on Jandek, the mysterious singer/songwriter from Houston who's released more than 30 albums over the last 25 years on his Corwood Industries label. Only one person, a writer from Texas Monthly, has claimed to have met him—or at least someone who kind of looked like the guy on various Jandek album covers.

Jandek On Corwood, the first documentary on the subject, explores the man and his music (lonely, off-key warblings that sound as if he's contemplating suicide). While Jandek's haunting sounds are an acquired taste, he has plenty of fans in rock scribes, college-radio DJs and forward-thinking musicians, including Thurston Moore, Beck and K Records founder Calvin Johnson (who's interviews in the film). "I like Jandek's music," says Fehler. "But the mystery surrounding him was what made it an attractive documentary subject."

Despite making 34 albums, Jandek has never performed live; the only way to contact him is through his label's post-office box. (Jandek agreed to one phone interview: In 1985 with Spin's John Trubee.) His albums contain no liner notes, only song titles and the Corwood mailing address.

This tantalizing 88-minute documentary, which premiered at the Leeds International Film Festival this fall, embraces the strange beauty of Jandek's music and lays out the few known facts about the man. Honing a surrealistic aesthetic in Jandek on Corwood that would make David Lynch proud, Fehler and Freidrichs received permission from Corwood Industries to use Jandek's music in the film. His songs are set to rustic, offbeat images interspersed among the music writers and Jandek aficionados who offer their opinions on his music and life.

Those interviewed offer speculative comments on Jandek, digging into each record as if they were crime-scene investigators. For instance, on his first few albums, Jandek appears to be a solo operation. When writer Byron Coley first encountered the song title "Nancy Sings" on Jandek's fourth LP, he initially thought, "It could be anything—it could be a song about Nancy singing," he says in the film. "And then when you get there and it's actually a woman singing and you grab the album you're looking at and it says, 'Nancy Sings,' so you're like, 'I guess it's Nancy.'" There's also a song called "John Plays Drums," which—surprise—features someone playing drums. Who are these collaborators? These types of questions only heighten the curiosity level, but Fehler and Freidrichs never considered attempting a 60 Minutes-style assault on Jandek's front door—assuming they knew where his front door was—with the cameras rolling. (At the start of the production, they received a handwritten note from Corwood stating, "You may not get all the answers you want. It's better that way.")

Among the many challenges was deciding who the target audience was for a Jandek film. "We didn't make it for underground-music heads, because things geared toward them are almost guaranteed to not appeal to anyone else," says Fehler. "Not that we're proselytizing, but we wanted to bring Jandek the musician as well as Jandek On Corwood to a large number of viewers because we thought that there are quite a few people who would cherish it."

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Notes from the Underground -- Originally Published July 2003

## NOTES FROM UNDERGROUND

Jandek's long, strange trip from DIY nowhere to, well...

Not many people know who Jandek is, but the handful who've been following the dude's 25-year catalog are some of the most devoted fans on the planet. People like Kurt Cobain, Sonic Youth's Thurston Moore, The Simpsons creator Matt Groening--and, now, filmmaker Chad Freidrichs and producer Paul Fehler, whose upcoming documentary Jandek on Corwood is the first attempt to get the Houston, Texas, enigma's story on celluloid.

Thing is, Jandek himself doesn't appear in the film. Frankly, no one knows if Jandek's a person--though Texas journalist Katy Vine (who is in the film) claims she once drank beer with someone who looks like the guy on most of Jandek's LP covers. Of course, that cult of anti-personality's just half of what's made Jandek legendary. Jandek's music--try to imagine a post-lobotomy Lou Reed flailing at a detuned acoustic guitar and not really caring if anyone's there to hear it for 32 consecutive albums--is what's separated the devoted from the merely curious.

So, seeing as how this is A.P.'s first-ever DIY issue, we can't think of a better time to talk to Fehler about the task of documenting the sole artist on Corwood Industries (PO Box 15375, Houston TX 77220), the only home-operated record label on Earth that's so underground, it practically doesn't exist.

**AP: What's the Challenge of documenting someone whose very existence defies documentation?**

This project is really more about documenting the effect that a series of mysterious albums had on a relatively small group of people. The reason this can work as well as it has, is that these effects are often profound. This couldn't be done, of course, without addressing the

artist--which we do, in depth. But making a Jandek biopic would've been impossible, and relatively uninteresting.

**AP: What are some of the more interesting run-ins you've had with the person--or people--behind Jandek while shooting?**

I can honestly say that, under torture, I'd be unable to reveal anything about Jandek other than what I could report as other peoples' opinions. I don't know any secrets at all.

**AP: You can either use this film to perpetuate the myth or reveal the magician's secrets. Which did you choose?**

When it's presented somewhat objectively, there's no need to create a myth or a mystery surrounding Jandek. Honestly, it's just there. How mysterious was Jim Morrison, really? How mysterious was Kurt Cobain? It wouldn't take a cynic to deduce that there's a significant commercial advantage to making these men seem mysterious. Record labels frequently apply these "mysterious qualities" to musicians posthumously, making it even more disingenuous by not allowing the artist to consent. But if the mystery grows organically, like it has with Jandek, then you get something cherishable. If we bring this mystery to a larger audience, then we've succeeded. But I'll advise against trying to resolve the mystery; it can't be done. Not that anyone should take that as a challenge.

**AP: Will your film show Jandek fans anything they haven't already considered?**

Absolutely! If you're unfamiliar with Jandek, watching this movie will be a wonderful orientation. If you're a fan, you'll appreciate the treatment of the subject throughout the movie, and I promise you'll go home and stay up until 5 a.m. thinking about the last 10 minutes of the film. ALT

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Junkmedia Website Interview -- [Web Link](#)

## Man or Myth?

In search of the man behind the music of Jandek.

With each new year in music, a seemingly endless stream of artists finds new ways to capture our attention. For better or worse, 1978 was no exception: Never Mind The Bollocks, Here's

The Sex Pistols had just been released in the US alongside one of the most controversial tours in rock history; The Bee Gees mistakenly saw 1978 as a golden opportunity to turn The Beatles' Sgt. Peppers Lonely Hearts Club Band into a feature film starring themselves and Devo greeted the world with Q: Are We Not Men? A: We Are Devo.

1978 also saw Jandek, one of music's most reclusive artists, release his debut, Ready For the House. But who is Jandek? No one knows. His music has been described as haunting, desolate, naive, atonal and aggravating. He's released 32 albums—at least one a year since 1981—has never performed live and doesn't give interviews. His records have no liner notes, credits or clues, featuring only a Houston P.O. Box address for the Corwood Industries label. Are people listening? Yes. Spin magazine proclaimed Jandek as one of "the ten most interesting musicians of the 1980s." Kurt Cobain famously remarked, "He's not pretentious, but only pretentious people like his music," and a tribute album, Naked In the Afternoon, was released in 2000 boasting renderings by Low, Thurston Moore and Bright Eyes.

In 2003, a documentary titled Jandek on Corwood will help shed light on the many questions surrounding the mysterious Texas-based musician. Chad Freidrichs and Paul Fehler have taken on the gargantuan task of chronicling the life of Jandek without ever actually speaking with him. Through his music and his fans, Freidrichs and Fehler are piecing together a tapestry that explains the man through myth.

## What were your first reactions to hearing Jandek's music?

**Paul Fehler (Producer, Jandek on Corwood):** Most people hear about "the legend of Jandek" before hearing the music. Chad and I were not an exception... I remember being "prepared" for what I would hear to some degree.

**Chad Freidrichs (Director, Jandek on Corwood):** Well, I should preface this by saying that Paul had hyped the whole thing up a bit before I'd heard my first Jandek song. We had had several discussions and I had looked over Seth Tissue's website and mailing list before I finally listened to the music. After all that buildup, I suppose I was a little let down. I expected something more... well, insane. I'm sure that my response to the first Jandek song I ever heard was one of mild disappointment... but that would change.

**PF:** You can't instantly fall in love with the music, and it might not be all that important what someone's "first impression" is. Most people will instantly hate it; a much smaller group of people will be driven to listen to more, perhaps becoming engrossed because of the extraneous details of the Jandek Legend. Of course, for those who do dig deeper into it, who immerse themselves in it even to a small degree, there can be a tremendous significance borne of the music itself... completely free of any corrupting influence from speculation about the artists.

The music is very good, and it is very important. Some people seem like they would like to make Jandek into a Marcel Duchamp or an Andy Kaufman, delivering an arbitrary and inconsequential art to advance some larger conceptual piece of Art. I have a lot of respect for Duchamp and Kaufman, but this is very clearly not what Jandek is doing. The music is a very important thing... there are times that there seems to be a conflicted message, where this may not seem to be the case, but I am absolutely sure of it.

**Do you have any favorite albums? Mine's always been Six and Six; it's so dark.**

**CF:** My favorite albums are ones of transition. I like Blue Corpse because of what goes on in the previous album, Modern Dances, and the transition that seems to take place between them. As with many of Jandek's fans, I have an elaborate back-story that connects these albums with the successes, failures and predispositions of the man singing. I believe Paul is a You Walk Alone fan.

"Back-story"?

**CF:** While the back-story has great personal significance, it's probably wrong. There are enough random interpretations of Jandek material floating around out there without me adding another one.

I read that you got the initial idea for the documentary in 2001. How long was it until work on the film got rolling?

**CF:** "Rolling" meaning "cameras rolling"—four months. But we had started preparing long before that.

How did the interviewing process go?

**PF:** We had a very open policy towards interviewing people. We made every reasonable concession to find anyone who thought they had something to say about Jandek. We had some initial misgivings about this, thinking that because of the obscurity of the subject the signal to noise ratio would steadily approach zero as we interviewed more people. But I'm very happy to report that the opposite was true, and that Jandek fans, to a person, were always accommodating, intelligent and generous with their time.

**CF:** We traveled all across the country and performed around two dozen interviews. Most interviews lasted two hours or more... this is pretty extraordinary when you consider how little is actually known about Jandek.

**PF:** The interviewees were always amazed when we told them how much tape they had used; they would always underestimate the time spent, significantly.

**CF:** Paul and I talk frequently about how easily the words came to the people interviewed, and I remember a comment Paul made after a particularly long interview. He said something like, "You can write what's known about Jandek on an index card... and that guy just talked about him for three hours." I can't think of any other person whose biography is so cobbled together and incomplete, yet has a fan-base that can talk for hours about their perceptions of him.

**PF:** Jesus... maybe?

**CF:** [laughs]... Yes, I suppose that fits for Jesus.

Shakespeare?

**CF:** Yeah... he works, too.

**PF:** uh... King Tutankhamen...?



**CF:** Tutankhamen doesn't have a fan-base in any conventional sense. The first two were good... now you're just stretching it.

**Anyone our readers would know about, any of indie music's best and brightest?**

**PF:** No indie musicians, no... Most of the indie musicians we approached were pretty standoffish. We did get some very good interviews from Steven Tyler, Donald Fagen... uh... Izzy Stradlin was great... let's see...

**CF:** None of those people are in the movie. We had a productive interview with Calvin Johnson from K Records; we should be interviewing Thurston Moore here in the coming month. We shot an amazing interview with Phil Milstein, who is probably better known for his writing than his music. We also interviewed Dr. Demento, more of a "music personality" than a musician... but a very obliging and intelligent man.

**PF:** We're still trying to get in touch with Matt Groening, who is known to be a Jandek fan, and Beck Hansen, who has to be a fan if his music is any indication.

**How pleased are you with the footage so far?**

**CF:** Very pleased. We've gotten a great range of responses, but there is generally a central core of belief with most things relating to Jandek. Going in, I wasn't expecting any sort of consistency. I was very surprised at the uniformity of some of the answers; on several matters there seems to be a consensus. Of course, there were plenty of puzzling responses as well, which were fun.

**Any problems?**

**CF:** There are always problems, but I can't recall anything that amounted to more than a minor inconvenience.

**PF:** Washington State didn't sell hard liquor in grocery stores... but come to think of it that was more "hassle" than "problem."

**Has filming ended yet?**

**CF:** We have a few interviews remaining... once those are completed, we will have enough footage to make a compelling documentary. The door is still open, though, to anyone who absolutely must say something. I started the preliminary edit about a month ago. All told, I'll be paring down about 35-40 hours of footage.

**Is a February 2003 release still within your grasp?**

**CF:** A February 2003 completion date is definitely our goal. The details of the release will be trickier. We're committed to entering this project in major festivals, and as such we have to be careful to maintain eligibility. We will try to get copies of the film to the members of the Jandek community as fast as we can.

I hear that you've had help from Jandek's label, Corwood Industries.

**PF:** Corwood's help has been significant. Our communications with them have also been a tremendous boon to our morale.

How cooperative have they been with providing necessary materials?

**PF:** Anything that Corwood sent us *became* necessary, anything not sent was *by definition* unnecessary. We bristled initially when we thought that a reasonable request for insight was refused, but our attitude changed quickly. When we changed our mindset we had no more problems.

I think it's in my nature to want to "dig deeper" into anything I'm researching, but to extend that analogy, "digging deeper" doesn't help if you don't know what you're digging for, or if you don't know if you're even digging in the right spot. We stopped thinking of Corwood's omissions as being obstacles or... as perforations in our understanding. Part of it is blind faith; part of it is undoubtedly a justification.

Many fans have tales about receiving cryptic messages from Corwood as replies to letters.

**PF:** We've heard this, and I think we've experienced this to some degree. As a single document, an individual Corwood reply might seem cryptic... but if you look at several of these messages you begin to realize that they're not as cryptic as they are abrupt.

Did you have any initial goals or guidelines in beginning this project?

**CF:** We have wanted to give the subject of Jandek the most even-handed and holistic treatment that we could. We found ourselves in the unique position of having to acquire as much information as we could, and yet recognizing that following the sparse information to its root would have been counterproductive. If we had gone the Hard Copy route and knocked on Jandek's front door with a camera, the movie would have suffered... it would have failed, because we would have shattered the distance that is so essential to Jandek's mystique. The interest in Jandek lies somewhere in this improbable and indefinite gestalt... a situation created just as much by the fans as by Jandek himself. When you get down to it, Jandek on Corwood deals with nothing more or less than the divination of the forces that created that mystery.

Are you familiar with Katy Vine's interview with a Jandek-like person?  
What do you make of it?

**CF:** Paul and I talked with Katy Vine on several occasions and interviewed her very recently. We found that Ms. Vine was very personable and insightful and was wonderful to work with.

**PF:** I am very convinced that Katy Vine had no exploitative intent when she wrote the piece. She's pleasant to talk with and a very good writer. That being said, I'm not entirely convinced that writing and publishing this story was entirely morally defensible. I am not questioning her professional ethics in any way... but I'm not sure that it was right to go about

investigating the story in this manner. Researching Jandek by going out to "find" "Jandek" is sort of like conducting an archaeological dig with a backhoe.

It's important to note that this is just my opinion, and it's not worth all that much. In one of our first letters from Corwood, they mentioned that they wanted us to meet with Katy... it wouldn't be very hard to interpret this as Corwood giving Ms. Vine's interview their "stamp of approval."

Also, what do you think about Irwin Chusid's writing on him? This was my first introduction to Jandek. In particular, referring to Jandek as the "original disconnect." Do you find it interesting, sensationalistic, condescending? I've always wondered what his actual stance on Jandek is.

**PF:** I'll tell you our bias on this question upfront, so that your audience can gauge their reaction to our response accordingly. Irwin Chusid cancelled an interview with us on very short notice, giving no reason other than that he had "...said all that [he] wanted to say about Jandek, and [that he didn't] want to talk about Jandek again." I'll go on record as saying that I disagree with almost everything Chusid has ever said or written about Jandek. However, I do respect him as someone who paid attention to Jandek during a time that most other people would not.

You've joked that viewers won't learn anything new about the people behind Jandek... understandably so. But what will we learn about the music, mystique, fans, etc... ?

**CF:** The film will reveal at least something to even the most die-hard Jandek fan. Most of what you'll learn will be from digesting the aggregate of Jandek's fans' opinions. It may be the populist in me, but I think that this is the best way to learn about anything... to sift through the wheat and chaff of public opinion and find what resonates with you.

You'll also find an amazing "paper trail" of reviews of his music and writings in various magazines and publications. Most of these articles had been lost for years in storage lockers, in pressrooms of college radio stations and in file folders in the back of closets all over the country. Many important components of my understanding of Jandek were formed after seeing how perceptions of his work had changed over time.

**PF:** ...and you'll learn that the fourth letter of the first song of Jandek's first eleven albums (not counting Later On whose first track, "You," has no fourth letter) makes a perfect anagram that can be transcribed into "Tenth Ruler"... which I'm sure has some significance to someone.

**Ronald Andryshak**  
**January 6, 2003**

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