



## **The Jesus and Mary Chain: Barbed Wire Kisses**

*Zoë Howe*

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Musically, culturally and even in terms of sheer attitude, the Jesus and Mary Chain stand alone. Their seminal debut album *Psychocandy* changed the course of popular music, and their iconic blend of psychotic white noise and darkly surreal lyrics that presaged the shoegaze movement continues to enchant and confound.

Zoë Howe's biography is the fierce, frank and funny tale of the Jesus and Mary Chain, told by the band members and their associates for the very first time. The story begins in the faceless town of East Kilbride, near Glasgow, at the dawn of the 1980s with two intense, chronically shy brothers, Jim and William Reid, listening to music in their shared bedroom. What follows charts an unforgettable journey complete with incendiary live performances, their pivotal relationship with Alan McGee's Creation Records and those famous fraternal tensions—with plenty of feedback, fighting, and crafting perfect pop music along the way. It is high time this vastly influential group and sometime public enemy had their say.

## The Jesus and Mary Chain: Barbed Wire Kisses Details

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Author : Zoë Howe

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## **From Reader Review The Jesus and Mary Chain: Barbed Wire Kisses for online ebook**

### **Arthur Graham says**

I turned 36 this year, and so I find myself in the peculiar position of being simultaneously too young AND too old to be so into these guys, but they're STILL like one of my most favorite bands EVER, so I guess it just is what it is.

Enjoy...

Never Understand  
Just Like Honey  
April Skies  
All Things Pass  
Darklands  
Head On  
Snakedriver  
Rollercoaster  
Always Sad  
Happy When It Rains  
Sidewalking  
You Trip Me Up  
Blues From a Gun  
Reverence  
Come On  
Almost Gold  
Mood Rider  
Sometimes Always  
Some Candy Talking  
Halfway to Crazy  
Cracking Up  
Here Comes Alice  
Something I Can't Have  
Far Gone And Out  
Between Planets  
I Love Rock 'n' Roll  
I Hate Rock 'n' Roll  
War on Peace

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### **Christina says**

I've been on a tear reading biographies of rock bands. I'm currently reading *Stealing All Transmissions*, about the Clash's rise to popularity in America.

Jesus and Mary Chain are one of my favorite bands.

I used to play their music on the radio in the 1980s when I was disc jockey at WSIA, 88.9 FM, a college radio station that broadcast left of the commercial end of the FM dial. The music played on that station was alternative.

Barbed Wire Kisses is a riveting, gut-bucket inside account of Jim and William Reid's band The Jesus and Mary Chain and its incarnations over the years with various old and new members.

Sadly, it appears The Chain didn't get the accolades they deserved.

Oasis stole the radio transmissions and "Wonderwall" has pulverized FM radio into dust. Of course I like that song too.

Yet I'm driven witless now that a song like "Take Me to Church" is played every hour on the hour on so-called alternative stations.

Back to the book. It does the Jesus and Mary Chain justice and revives the dialogue about why the Chain matter.

The guys were creative geniuses if searing hotheads as well from what I've read of the band. Reading the book you'll be privy to the truth: the inside-out version of what went on in the band's early years up through the early 2000s.

Read, listen, repeat.

You can now buy their music on iTunes, by the way.

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## **Chet says**

It really pains me to give this book 2 stars. Firstly, because St. Martin's Press was kindly enough to give it to me as an ARC, but also because JAMC was a great band and I love their first few records. I honestly thought this would be a really good read about a band that that I genuinely like, but that I know little about. Unfortunately, though, the band just isn't that interesting. Honestly, the most interesting thing that happens to these guys their whole career is that the crowds became unruly. They dabbled in alcohol and drugs, but not to any great extent. There are a few good anecdotes scattered here and there, but really, they get lost in the plodding story of recording the albums...which is really the only story there is. Things pick up a little near the end, when the band starts to fall apart, but compared to a lot of bands, even that was pretty tame. I'm honestly not sure if the band is actually this uninteresting or if Zoe Howe just failed in her job to make them so, but either way, this book is really only for JAMC superfans. If you, like me, thoroughly enjoy books about music, but you're not a hardcore fan of this particular band, you're probably not going to find much here to interest you. The writing is mediocre (it reads like a really long magazine article that is struggling to fill space), the bands exploits are pretty tame and the Reid brothers are, honestly, pretty unlikable with their constant bickering, complaining and general distaste for pretty much everything and everyone.

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## **Peter O'Connor says**

I loved the Jesus and Mary Chain before and now I love them even more. This pair so cantankerous and miserable still manage to take the music world by storm purely by tipping it on its head. Uncompromising and seemingly disdainful of everything and everyone around them (this was the Wham! era, remember), this is a great tale of the band that inspired so many to change their take on what music was all about. Most biographies are interesting for all of the accounts of the other musicians they cross paths with - this one is more interesting for the fact that they go out of their way not to cross paths with any of them. Zoe Howe knows her stuff gives everything just the right amount of weight to make this a must read for any fan of Indie music.

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### **Heather says**

*Musically, culturally and in terms of sheer attitude, the Jesus and Mary Chain stand alone. Their seminal debut album Psychocandy would change the course of popular music, and their iconic blend of psychotic white noise and darkly surreal lyrics that presaged the shoegaze movement continues to enchant and confound.*

Howe's book is a great timeline of the band, from their youth in East Kilbride through to their split and reunion with a look to the future. There's an abundance of anecdotes on their dour nature, short shows, interview snips, brotherly tension, booze and drugs and generally hating everyone. And it's just good. It's balanced (or, as balanced as it could be when one of the Reid brothers chose not to take part) and gives many sides to same stories - particular highlights come with Murray, their drummer, who was clearly not on the same page on many levels, but got the job nonetheless.

Can't imagine there being another book with such input from those on the ride. Just a generally unpredictable and destructive journey, etched to the page with wit and frankness. Fun, fucked up and highly recommended for JAMC fans.

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### **Shannon says**

This is a very good book that fills a gaping hole in the world of music biographies. It covers all the highs and lows of the band's influential discography and tumultuous career. Expect all the best anecdotes about their reputation for 15 minute shows and failed interviews, infighting, boozing, and especially, noisily innovating a pop-punk fusion at a time when new wave dominated the UK charts.

Two things prevent this from earning a 5-star review:

One, I think it's a bit too sympathetic to attribute all the Reids' drunken antics to their social anxieties.

There's not much criticism or discussion of negative consequences here. The author really takes the position that their reputation is much maligned, but some of their behavior seemed genuinely destructive. And two, I read an advance copy of this US publication of the book, and there were no photos. I hope the physical book has some photos in it, because look at that cover. Perfection.

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### **Ben Winch says**

You wanna know why the Mary Chain are great? Find the album *Barbed Wire Kisses*. (Or, since it's deleted,

find “deluxe editions” of *Psychocandy*, *Darklands*, *Automatic* – they’re on Spotify – and assemble as below.) First, check out “Sidewalking”, peak of their classic/avant thing (and a more even balance of those ethos than Sonic Youth ever managed). At 15, six months into my guitar apprenticeship, I could not only play it but learnt it by ear, and could make it sound half-decent with my bassist friend Reed “Bleed” Cathcart and a Roland drum machine. Plus, it was contemporary, not “Transmission” or *Seventeen Seconds* or Ziggy Stardust. Made it to #8 on the UK charts in ’88. That’s some phenomenon. In terms of their benevolent/provocative effect on mass culture, you ask me, it’s their high-water mark. First single “Upside Down” (40,000 copies, sleeves folded by the band in manager Alan McGee’s flat) may have barnstormed the indie charts, but that was UK-only, a modern legend you could read about in the music papers, and in any case it’s here on *Barbed Wire Kisses* too. The thing about this album, as compared to *Darklands* (too fey, too classic) or *Psychocandy* (too smothered in dirt) is it’s got some of everything – every trick, technique or mood they’d used by then and would continue to use for all of four more (you ask me) lacklustre albums, during which time I tuned out completely, could have cared less, and not till I bought discounted CDs of the first three albums in the early 2000s did I accept it: the JAMC had a *major* effect on me. Still can’t stand the later albums though. Still think by “Sidewalking” they’d covered all the territory. Still think when original member Douglas Hart left (chops or no) they were done for. Started to believe their own schtick, maybe? “Head On” came out and it rocked, sure, but it was just “April Skies” sped up, with a new cynicism in Jim’s vocal that gave them away: they were playing the game. And “Blues From a Gun”? That was “Sidewalking”. Take these two songs and extrapolate them and you’ve got 75% of the rest of their career.

But enough moaning! Check out “Head” (lost track from *Psychocandy*, too minor, too soundtracky, too avant for that “buzzsaw pop” album). Want more noise? “Just Out of Reach”. Wanna taste of *Darklands* romanticism? “Don’t Ever Change”. Major-key pop? “Happy Place”. William does Billy Idol? “Head”. Wanna know a secret? It’s William singing, on two tracks out of three, here. Conspiracy by Jim and WEA to keep the darker brother down? Or just that he’d conjure this shit on the spot as the clock rolled for end of the session, the single cut already and only the b-side up for grabs? If it were me and I was writing this book, I’d have pressed for more information about the sessions. Zoe Howe tries, to be fair, but either the band aren’t telling or they don’t remember (possibly unlikely given they had a no-drugs-or-liquor in the studio policy until, you guessed it, *Automatic*). And anyway, that’s my criticism with all these books.

You wanna know why the Mary Chain were great? You’ll learn a thing or two from the early chapters here – much of it encapsulated in the earlier Creation Records book, sure, but not so much that it makes this book pointless. Things I learned: the brothers’ father gave them 500 pounds when he was laid off from his factory job and they bought a Tascam Portastudio (analogue 4-track), back when such a thing was high tech, with which they recorded the demo that sold them to Alan McGee. I read (for the second time, but in detail) about Bobby Gillespie’s discovery of that tape and the connection that formed between him and the other three because of it. From here, it was partly a rehash, but there was information (a little) about the recordings, the early trip to Europe, and yeah that whole riot-causing-new-Sex-Pistols speel that McGee and the music weeklies cooked up together. A double-edged sword (as the band make clear): the infamy sold records, got them signed to Blanco y Negro (subsidiary of Warner’s), but what the fuck did they want with signing to Warner’s anyway? And from then on, it was never (in the eyes of the media) about the music. Good to read: they regret the decision; they *did* change with *Automatic* and know it; the bit about no drugs during recordings in the beginning. While McGee sold them as rock ’n’ roll animals, these were just three shy kids (and the outgoing Gillespie) with paper-dry wit and serious pretensions to greatness.

Of course after “Sidewalking” I could really give a shit. From there, the story descends into inanity. The same drug stories, the same band politics, the same “if I could do it again” and defensive assessment of recordings (you ask me) increasingly bereft of wider significance – same as any band in a downward spiral (except this wasn’t a band, but two guitarist/singers and a revolving cast of back-up musicians). Lollapalooza

'92, that was the turning point. Illusions were shattered. Going on early afternoon after Pearl Jam high on coke without lights or smoke machine, looking pasty and ill while the other bands chugged protein shakes and did bench-presses. Interesting to know, I guess, but depressing to read. In short, I don't jibe with this "impressive canon of work" theory that Zoe Howe outlines in her preface. To me, they burnt brightly and briefly – like Joy Division, like Nirvana. Three albums only, but they were enough. Living legends.

Oh, and whatever I've said about the book here it's good to see it out. As band biographies go it ain't bad, but it ain't earth-shattering. Meantime 33 1/3 do *Psychocandy* in 2016. Me, I woulda preferred *Barbed Wire Kisses* (nothing against *Psychocandy*, just I'm sick of hearing about it) and I was halfway through working up a pitch to that effect when I heard the news. Knew it'd be a long-shot of course, but Zoe Howe's appreciation for the album gave me hope. Expect more soon at whatever outlet'll print me. Meantime, I don't suppose anyone remembers that Marianne Faithful lyric?

### ***Barbed Wire Kisses* track listing:**

Kill Surf City  
Head  
Rider  
Hit  
Don't Ever Change  
Just Out of Reach  
Happy Place  
Psychocandy  
Sidewalking  
Who Do You Love  
Surfin' USA  
Everything's Alright When You're Down  
Upside Down  
Taste of Cindy  
Swing  
On the Wall (William's 4-track demo)  
Cracked  
Here it Comes Again  
Mushroom  
Bo Diddley is Jesus

(20 tracks, 12-15 of them as good as their best, but "Kill Surf City", "Surfin' USA", "Mushroom", "Bo Diddley is Jesus" I could live without. Replace with "Ambition" (Subway Sect cover) and "Vegetable Man" (Syd Barrett) and you've got all the missing pieces of the early Mary Chain story. The "Sidewalking" 12-inch – avant dance-noise discord Bolan Boogie – wouldn't hurt neither. Yeah-hey-hey.)

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### **Allan Heron says**

A hugely enjoyable biography of the Reid brothers' musical exploits. I hadn't been overly familiar with their background so it was the image of the band that was in my mind as I started out on this.

They do get bonus point for their sheer ordinariness but the idea of them being some kind of innocents that

just happen to leave a trail of chaos in their wake does wear thin somewhat.

Author Zoe Howe has an engaging writing style and this sits nicely alongside her Feelgoods-related books.

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### **Benjamin Whistler says**

The Jesus and Mary Chain are fascinating. They're my favorite band. But what I had hoped for was more a snapshot of their lives, of the 1980s, of the [indie] kids who came together to form the JAMC, what their lives were like, who they were and what they liked. For little polaroid pictures of the greatest band of the 1980s. Stories mixed in with dates, a proper history. Instead, the biography is just a collection of what was mostly known already. Some of what I wanted comes through, little things (like McGee's use of green ink in his first letter to them, buying their brothel creeper shoes and stomping in and out of the flat to the chagrin of the neighbors, spending a whole day tripping on mushrooms in front of a metro station only to come down at the same time as they realize the crowd watching them is made up of the commuters who saw them that morning as they left for work), but a lot of it doesn't. For example, did you know that Douglas Hart is a talented filmmaker in his own right? It barely gets touched on in this book and I only found out when I stumbled across an interview from the Criterion Collection in which he mentions his ten favorite movies and the reasons why (including anecdotes that this book should have had, such as the time he was at his girlfriend's for a family movie night with the mother and saw the 1970 movie *3 Women* on TV, which the mother thought was utterly perverse, to which Douglas responded, "it's one of the best films I've ever seen," losing any approval the mother had for him). Things like that, the personality mixed with the bits and pieces of the times, the nostalgia, are what people would want in a book that takes on the JAMC, a book that slices into them the way their music first sliced into the ears (and hearts) of listeners back in 1985. But 1985 feels completely missing from this book. They're rendered "anybodies," which is maybe appealing to the shy Reid Brothers themselves, but not to us, who want to know the band that altered the music landscape in 1985 and whose style is still seen in bands today. To get a feel for that, to catch a glimpse at that much-wanted-slice of the indie kids who lit the music world on fire and the world they inhabited, you can watch their interviews on youtube, you can look up old reviews of their concerts in the LA Times and in the NYTimes (for an American perspective) or in NME (for a British perspective), with a simple google search. But the burning questions go unanswered in this book. Maybe they're just too personal. Or maybe all the alcohol and drugs have caused Jim's, Willam's, Bobby's, and Douglas's memories to fade too much (though I doubt this).

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### **Lisastrawberry says**

truthfully, I abandoned this book months ago. I tried several times to finish it and the writing wasn't all I hoped for. The first part on the making of *Psychocandy* was fun, just because I wanted to read how one of my favorite albums got made, but that's it. Meh.

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### **Laurence says**

I didn't like the style of the writer much. It felt like the writing was rushed a bit, but I enjoyed the anecdotes and finding out how it was like for the group at the start. It's packed with facts and many people contributed to the book which makes it enjoyable.



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## **Kurt says**

Overall, a disappointing read. I breezed through it pretty quickly, even though I found the author's prose annoying to the point that I often found myself rolling my eyes at the end of the sentence "cappers" she'd throw in. I could edit this and make it better. As a linear, chronological telling of the history of the band it works pretty well, and I do like the subjects and subject matter well enough to maintain interest. It's just that I felt like it was aimed at a teenage reader, and most of the Mary Chain's audience probably aren't teenagers anymore. I guess I will still have to wait for the Mary Chain book I'd like to read to be written, (which will never happen.) I would like to have something deeper. The Mary Chain's material is so psychologically rich that not to have William's input almost seems like the project would be destined to fail. Just as the band itself is the two brothers, the book needs that, too. It seems that William made a wise choice in opting out, because the book just feels like writing from a British magazine, or something. Unless someone like Nick Tosches comes along and writes the definitive JaMC bio we will just have to take what we've been given, which is still worth reading. I would like to know things like how and when they met Hope Sandoval, some of the intricacies of that relationship (not the physical intimacies, just how it played out), why did the brothers butt heads so often? A lot of these questions are left unanswered. We know that the brothers are shy loners and misfits, but we don't really have any of the internal, psychological depth fleshed out. To the writers credit, maybe it's just that the brothers are so evasive and elusive that there's nowhere else to go but where she went. Still, I don't think so. There are more ways to tell a good story than a straightforward narrative. Final analysis: read it for what it is, but don't expect to be blown away.

I want more.

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## **Niklas Pivic says**

Even though William Reid chose not to be involved in the making of this book, his brother, Jim, did. And so did a lot of other players from the days.

Howe writes the book pretty straight forward, dodging the usual tripe and drunken debauchery that often plagues music biographies by seeming obligatory when it's rarely so. The Mary Chain are described as a lot of moping persons who created music that defined the 1980s somewhat and influenced bands and artists for all time forth, probably.

I wish there'd have been pictures in the book - there are none, bar the cover image.

They wanted to sound like the Shangri-Las and Einstürzende Neubauten at the same time, and they somewhat did, while sounding like nothing else out there:

Musically the brothers had a voracious appetite, listening to bands such as the German industrial group Einstürzende Neubauten, The Beatles, The Birthday Party, The Doors, Dr Mix and the Remix, and 1960s girl groups like the Shangri-Las. But if they had to pick one single group who had the most impact on them, it would have been the Velvet Underground. When they brought home the The Velvet Underground And Nico album (famously bearing Andy Warhol's image of a banana on the cover), what ensued was tantamount to a religious experience. It was sweet and bitter, 'psycho and candy', all on one record.

They walked off stage if bored and practically did what they wanted to do, except for cater much to the media. And they didn't like their peers very much:

'The whole Scottish scene turns our stomach,' says Jim. 'The Welsh as well,' grins William. 'And the Irish,' shrugs Douglas, dourly. (from a Sounds interview with Sandy Robertson, 1985)

And yes, they were viewed as different, by all:

Their parents tried to be understanding of their sons' often insular behaviour – their mother once bought William a key-ring with the inscription 'I'm not weird, I'm gifted' written on it, which cheered him immeasurably.

And they didn't care much about virtuosity:

'I don't even think we auditioned Bobby,' Jim Reid admits. 'We just said, "Can you drum?" "Yeah, a wee bit." "Right, OK."'

Sounds like when Alan McGee thought of John Moore to join The Mary Chain:

Jim says of those early meetings: 'We'd kind of spotted John around the place; he was almost like a weird stalker. At the Sonic Youth gig John came up and said, "I saw you the other night." I thought, Oh God, is he coming on to me or what? What's going on? He was a bit of a hustler, you could see that. He'd spotted the drumming spot was vacant and he was going to go for it. It was McGee as well, he said, "There's this bloke who looks just like William, and he wears leather trousers. I think you should get him." We're like, "Can he drum?" "Er . . . oh, I don't know about that."'

...and speaking of drumming:

They actually wanted a drummer, but they couldn't find anyone who was right. 'We auditioned dozens of drummers,' says Jim. 'Purely on ability, we could have got one easily, but we wanted somebody we could spend ten weeks on a tour bus with. We kept getting these guys that started going on about what type of sticks they would use. We didn't give a fuck what type of sticks they were going to use! It's a bit of wood, you moron!'

The band didn't care much for being "correct" with the media:

The journalist asked how they felt about being described variously as both the best and worst group in the western hemisphere. William replied, after a contemplative pause, 'My favourite colour is gold.'

They loved their fans, who in some cases were as saddening as the band:

Douglas Hart says: 'I loved playing places like that because they were a bit like the places we grew up in. I remember in Preston this kid came up to me, really young, strange-looking guy, and he said, "I'd like to start a band." I was like, "You should, you should!" And he said, "But I've got no friends." God, what a thing to say. Kind of beautiful. It haunted me. I always wondered what happened to him.' This poignant exchange must have accessed a part of Douglas that would surely have felt similarly isolated – another outsider from an outsider town – had he and the Reids not found each other in East Kilbride when they did.

On The Smiths:

The other problem for the Mary Chain, Mick observes, was that The Smiths were increasingly stealing the Mary Chain's thunder as the decade wore on. 'People began to see The Smiths as the band of the 1980s,' he explains. 'But I still think Psychocandy was one of the albums, if not the album, of the 1980s.'

On picking support acts for their tours:

'I was friends with the label that had just signed Nine Inch Nails, TVT. The guy played me this stuff and I said, "Yes, that sounds like a band that should open for us." I sent the records to Jim and William. They couldn't care less: "Hey, you like them? Fine." Couldn't give a shit.'

All in all, the book's a labour of love and doesn't pander to the author's ego, but is about the band. Go read if you're into JAMC.

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### **Michael Parkinson says**

Great overview and history of the band. Left me wanting for a few more details around some of the on-stage antics, drunken fights, break-ups, etc. While these topics were certainly covered, I like my rock and roll bios the way I like my morning news... \*sensationalized\*

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**Alexa Rose says**

I will never stop loving Jim Reid

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