

# Jandek on Corwood a Documentary Film

## Press Kit Section 1

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## A Writer's Guide to Jandek

Thanks for your interest in Jandek on Corwood. We'd love to have you write about our documentary for your favorite magazine, newspaper, zine, website or book. We'll address some of your questions about the movie on page two, but we'd like to answer some of the frequently asked questions about Jandek right out of the gate. It strikes us that a good way to do this is in question and answer form.

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### Q: Who is Jandek

Jandek is a musician from Houston, Texas. Jandek has released 35 albums in the last 25 years, all on his label, Corwood Industries.

### Q: So, this guy's mysterious, right?

Jandek is the most mysterious American musician of the last half century. He's never played live, never been interviewed, and only one person has ever claimed to have met him. Jandek's cloak of secrecy is impregnable, and he's never let it down, even for a moment.

### Q: What is his music like?

Jandek's music has been characterized as "atonal, abrasive, and harsh" but has also been called "austere, beautiful, and honest." One thing almost everyone can agree on is that Jandek's music is very hard to describe. Music writers, feel free to flex your music writing muscle and flaunt almost every ten-dollar word and concept you picked up during your long, dreary undergraduate work. If you're not a music writer, read on to the next paragraph.

"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. 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.

### Q: What is "Corwood Industries" ?

# Jandek on Corwood a Documentary Film

## Press Kit Section 2

Permission freely granted by authors to reproduce any materials herein for review or commentary

## A Writer's Guide to Jandek

There have been a few articles about Jandek on Corwood written, and a few (rather good) interviews as well. We reproduce them here for your perusal, and invite you to take direction from them, or avoid similarity to them... whichever suits your fancy.

If you'd like an interview, we'll make every effort to accommodate you. We prefer long-format interviews (who doesn't) but we will adapt to the needs of your publication. The creative element of Jandek on Corwood fancy themselves "good talkers"--feel free to read the interviews below and draw your own conclusions.

Of course, you can always [email](#) us with questions you might have.



the Wire Review - Originally Published November 2003

## Jandek on Corwood

Chad Friedrichs, Director  
by David Keenan

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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## THE MAN WHO WASN'T THERE

NEW DOCUMENTARY GOES SEARCHING FOR JANDEK  
John Elsass

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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# Jandek on Corwood a Documentary Film

## Press Kit Section 3

### A Writer's Guide to Jandek Frequently Asked Questions about Jandek on Corwood

Here's where we try and answer some of the more basic questions about the movie *Jandek on Corwood*. Remember, you can find answers to your questions about Jandek on Page one of this press kit.

As always, if you have any additional questions, please don't hesitate to [email](#) us.

**Q: Who are the people behind Jandek on Corwood?**

**A:** Chad Freidrichs (26) is the director of the film. He is also the co-producer, along with Paul Fehler (25). Both are graduates of the University of Missouri, and are based out of Columbia, Missouri. This is the first feature-length film for both.

**Q: When was this project started? When was it completed?**

**A:** The project started in March of 2002, the film was completed in May of 2003.

**Q: Is Jandek in the film?**

**A:** No

**Q: Can you give me some semi-interesting stats about the interview process?**

**A:** Sure

- People interviewed: 24
- Hours of interview footage shot: 55
- Miles Traveled: 22,000

**Q: How long is the finished film?**

A: 88 Minutes

**Q: Who is in the film?**

- John Trubee (recording artist and music writer)
- Dr. Demento (radio personality)
- Amy Kelley (filmmaker)
- Calvin Johnson (recording artist and K records founder)
- Byron Coley (music writer)
- Richie Unterberger (music writer, Option magazine editor)
- Jake Austin (television personality)
- Ben Edmonds (station manager, WHPK Chicago)
- Angela Sawyer (Twisted Villiage Records)
- Gary "Pig" Gold (music writer)
- Brooks Martin (KAOS, Olympia WA)
- David Rauh (Op Magazine co-founder)
- Toni Holm (Op Magazine co-founder)
- John Foster (Op Magazine co-founder)
- Dana Squires (Op Magazine co-founder)
- Nils Bernstein (Matador Records)
- Douglas Wolk (music writer)

**Q: No Jandek?**

A: No, Jandek is not in the film.

**Q: Where did you travel while filming the documentary?**

A: (in something very close to chronological order)

- Olympia/Seattle, Washington
- New Jersey/NYC
- Boston
- Chicago
- St. Louis
- Houston
- Austin
- Los Angeles
- San Francisco
- Boston (again)

# Jandek on Corwood a Documentary Film

## Press Kit Section 4

### Synopsis and Director Bio

#### MOVIE SYNOPSIS

(Long version)

*"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 88-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."

--Jaime Freidrichs

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## DIRECTOR BIO

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 26, has been studying, critiquing, and (making attempts at) creating films for over ten years, although he has only been able to fully appreciate the Orson Wells masterpiece Citizen Kane for the past eight.

Freidrichs was born in New Ulm, Minnesota, and his family moved around to various small Midwestern towns. Just before high school, 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 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, and 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 from Seth Tissue's Website. Freidrichs agreed that Jandek would make a perfect documentary 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, \$5,000 (not including the camera), 60 hours of footage, 500 hours of editing, Freidrichs proudly releases Jandek on Corwood.

Corwood Industries is Jandek's label. It would seem as though their only product is Jandek sound recordings. Like the word "Jandek" itself, no one is quite sure of the significance, or origin of the name. Corwood Industries operates out of Post Office Box 15375 in Houston Texas.

**Q: I'd like to run a rather long piece on Jandek on Corwood, but I'm worried that the dearth of information about Jandek will make for a few hundred words of challenging, awkward text. Are there images of him out there? What can I run with the words to catch my reader's attention?**

You are a lucky person. Jandek has about 35 images for you to use, and every one will stop your readers in their tracks.

Jandek's album covers are some of the more eerie, spooky things you'll come across. They are absolutely beautiful, and in spite of their ages, have a distinctively modern appearance and design sensibility. We invite you to sample some of them. A complete listing of album covers can be found on [Seth Tisue's Jandek Discography page](#) (click each individual image on Seth's site for a rather large JPG).

**Q: I'd like to include some names of people known to be fans of Jandek's work in the article.**

That's not really a question, but here's a few.

Thurston Moore (Guitarist, Sonic Youth)  
Calvin Johnson (K Records, Beat Happening, Dub Narcotic)  
Kurt Cobain (Guitarist, Nirvana)  
Bright Eyes (Saddle Creek Records recording artists)  
Amy Denio (songstress)  
Beck (Internationally acclaimed recording artist)  
Perhaps 500 other people in the whole world

**Q: Can you give me some quotes to use in my article?**

Absolutely! Here are some great ones.

"The longest-running, weirdest, loneliest enigma in popular music is a guy from Texas who calls himself Jandek." -- Douglas Wolk

"It's a dark night, there's a wet road and you've been in an accident. As you bob on the edge of consciousness, a faint, barely graspable song of longing floats through your head. And it's beautiful. So beautiful and so rich and so deep you can barely fucking stand it. Then it's gone. That's what Jandek's like. I guess it's enough." -- Byron Coley

"When it comes to idiot savants with mystique, no one can beat Jandek, the Houston eccentric who has self-released over two dozen albums featuring spooky, slightly demented stream of consciousness ramblings and guitar playing which rarely strays from set notes and chords, none of which pick out anything close to a melody. His voice can range from a hushed whisper to a Janovian primal scream; unsettlingly, he hardly ever mines the wide territory between those extremes." -- Richie Unterberger

**Q: I'd like to get in touch with Jandek and interview him for the piece I'm writing... How do I do this?**



Unfortunately the short answer is, "you don't." You can always try mailing him at Corwood Industries, PO Box 15375, Houston, Texas. But you should consider yourself lucky if you get a "no thanks" (most people get much, much less).

Don't let this discourage you from writing him with questions (or ordering copies of his CDs, which he's made extremely affordable). We will tell you that in our experience a few very simple questions will usually get more thoughtful answers than several complex questions.

**Q: I'd like to do some more research before writing my piece. Can you direct me to some Jandek resources?**

Certainly. We'll remind you that answers to several questions about the movie can be found on pages two and three of this document (see the large, red arrow at the bottom of the page). We are very aware that there are many of you who will enjoy researching this topic in a much more thorough way than space and time permits on this page. Below are some very helpful links.

- [Seth Tisue's Jandek Website](#) -- The bible of Jandek scholarship. Of special interest to you in your research is his [Jandek Background page](#).
  - [Wikipedia entry on Jandek](#) -- Good source for Jandek release dates, album titles, and album covers.
  - [Junkmedia interview](#) with Jandek on Corwood filmmakers
  - [Mystery Man, the Jandek Story](#) -- By Douglas Wolk. Originally published in The Providence Phoenix.
  - [Jandek: the Great Disconnect](#) -- Stirring, well-written counterpoint by Jandek non-fan and author Irwin Chusid.
  - [Jandek](#) -- 1990 Spin Magazine piece by Jandek Poet-Laurate Byron Coley. Wonderfully written.
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