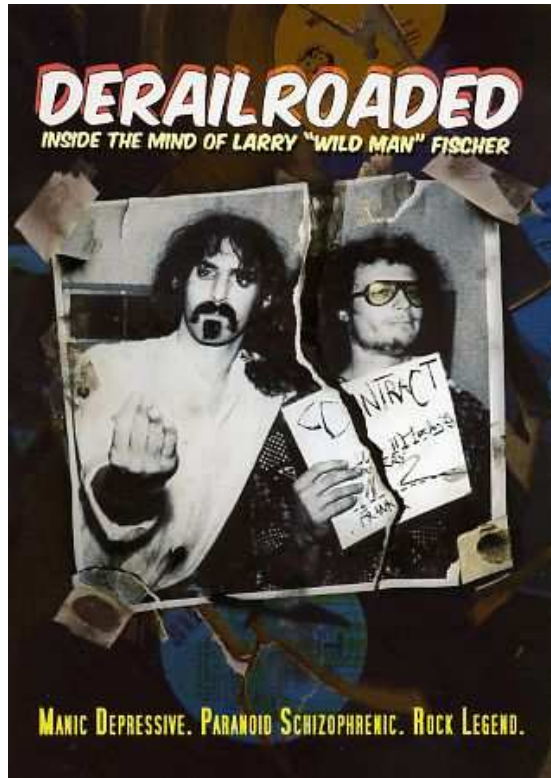


FAME Review: Wild Man Fischer - Derailroaded: Inside the Mind of Larry "Wild Man" Fischer



Derailroaded: Inside the Mind of Larry "Wild Man" Fischer

[Wild Man Fischer](#)

[MVD Visual](#) - MVD5049D (DVD)

Available from [MVD Entertainment Group](#).

A review written for the Folk & Acoustic Music Exchange
by **Mark S. Tucker**
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Before opening the chest cavity of this hypnotizing ground level documentary on one of rock and roll's oddest components—Lawrence Wayne Fischer, long celebrated near and far as 'Wild Man Fischer'—we should note that Frank Zappa, his patron into the spotlight, more than once cogently abstracted the music world as the filthiest business on Planet Earth. Well, capitalism's old standby, war, is in truth the extremest far side of business' face, but Frankie wasn't far off. The artistic realm does, however, boast some fascinating sidepockets, and MVD Visual, increasingly a champion of contrarian viewpoints as well as glimpses of worlds just around the corner, has underwritten a gutter level immersion into that unlovely milieu while setting the record straight on Fischer...or as straight as it's possible to get with such a loopy and tragic gent.

Early on, Fischer makes a complaint of Zappa and the record business in general, but the story, inasmuch as Frank & Co.'s part in it may or may not be as Larry accuses—and the chances are almost nil that unethical events went down—is much more complex than that. You see, Wildman Fischer is genuinely paranoid, schizophrenic, delusional, manic depressive, and God only knows what else, conditions he's surprisingly self-aware on and has suffered for more than a half century. Thus, as with a number of jostled luminaries, he, in any truthful revelation, has to stand foremost among his own enemies, something that becomes painfully clear and makes the 'what could have been' possibilities the meatiest aspect of director Josh Rubin's celluloid baby.

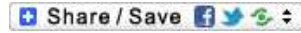
Opening with a series of shots of Fischer in latter-day "concerts", then quicksplitting to the famous for commentary, the true commencement of the film lies in a seedy dilapidated house that obviously was once a swanky set of digs in the Hollywood Hills, Santa Monica, or somewhere else close to the South Bay area of Southern California, a crash pad the Wildman is tending for a sick aunt (who lived there alone for 26 years) and which stands as a graphic illustration of his interior state. An array of sympathetic notables—Irwin Chusid, music journalist; Billy Mumy, actor and musician; Mark Mothersbaugh, Devo frontman; and so on—segue innumerable insights, but all the immutable basics inevitably come down to two things: an apparent genetic anomaly grossly augmented by what psychologist Alice Miller has posed as a milestone theory of human aberration: childhood trauma at the hands of, in this case, a parent, Larry's mother. Music, it becomes obvious, was Fischer's escape from the brutal reality of a loveless life inflicted when he possessed no means of fighting back—except, later, the indiscreet choice of going after mom and a brother with a kitchen knife, for which he was institutionalized at the tender age of 16.

There, the one-day-to-be wild talent was introduced to the wonderful world of thiorazine, electroshock therapy, and a panoply of psychiatry's gifts to the world. This, when one thinks about it, may well have been his grimly errant muse. Zappa ran across the released inmate years later, and there's footage here of the two together, Fischer singing and strumming an untuned six-string while Zappa, also holding an acoustic, tries to figure out how in hell he can accompany a style of music even more bizarre than his own. Nonetheless, FZ's interest was genuinely piqued, and he became responsible for unleashing Fischer upon the public, an event without which none of us would ever have encountered the man. But things rapidly shade into darkness when the footage switches to an animated series of apparently advertorial still shoots in which Larry attacks a life-size cardboard figure of his mother with a knife, ketchup-blood soon slathered on the replica while Frank voiceovers that Fischer is genuinely mental.

Oh, but there's a good deal more. For instance, Dr. Demento recalls a time when, as Zappa guested on his nationally syndicated show, he played the famed maestro a later Fischer single completely unknown to the moustachioed celebrity. The cut, entitled "Frank", wasn't exactly a love paean, as Fischer has forever maintained that his patron cheated him of monies off an LP that, um, bombed by selling only 12,000 copies, never even paying off studio costs. Zappa, a connoisseur of the weird and unorthodox in everything, strangely became livid with Demento and almost threatening, a eyebrow-raising reaction from one supposedly innocent quv (Frank) to a completely innocent quv (Demento) about a quv (Fischer) who was and is misfortunately nuts.

But many incidents like that and a wealth of direct running commentary from Fischer in his later years, as well as a plethora of singing footage, are what make this shoulder-shot live form of journalism so absorbing. The feature length *Derailroaded* stands solidly with Jeff Feuerzeig's *The Devil and Daniel Johnston*, another parable of urban dementia about an equally off-kilter musician, but the DVD comes with many extras, the most amusing of which is Weird Al doing a deadly accurate version of Fischer's most famous tune, *Merry Go Round*, and the most inviting of which is the optional director's commentary. So, if you'll excuse me, I'm off to watch the flick a second time, because, as with *The Aristocrats*, that sort of insight makes for, for me, a whole separate dimension of interest.

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