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Wednesday, June 29, 2011

Derailroaded: Inside the Mind of Larry

MVD Visual, 2011, Not Rated

By [Steven Rosen](#)

Frank Zappa loved his freaks. Through his record labels Straight and Bizarro, he recorded such one-of-a-kind acts like Alice Cooper, Captain Beefheart, the GTOs (a bunch of groupies) and, last but not least, Larry “Wild Man” Fischer. Fischer, who died a couple weeks ago at age 66, was a manic-depressive, paranoid-schizophrenic Los Angeles street singer whose songs (“Merry Go Around”) have an appeal to those looking for truth and purity in the art of “outsiders.”

Fischer brought an extremely unusual voice to the venture — an enthusiastic yelp that is equal parts joyful and alarming. Zappa produced a two-disc album called *An Evening With...* that sold all of 12,000 copies. Fischer, whose volatility once prompted him to pull a knife on his mother, was so angry at Zappa for failing to make him a Rock & Roll star that he threw a bottle at him, just missing Zappa’s infant daughter. That maybe should have been his end, but Fischer hung around L.A. as a local personality, even recording a song popularizing Rhino Records in the 1970s.

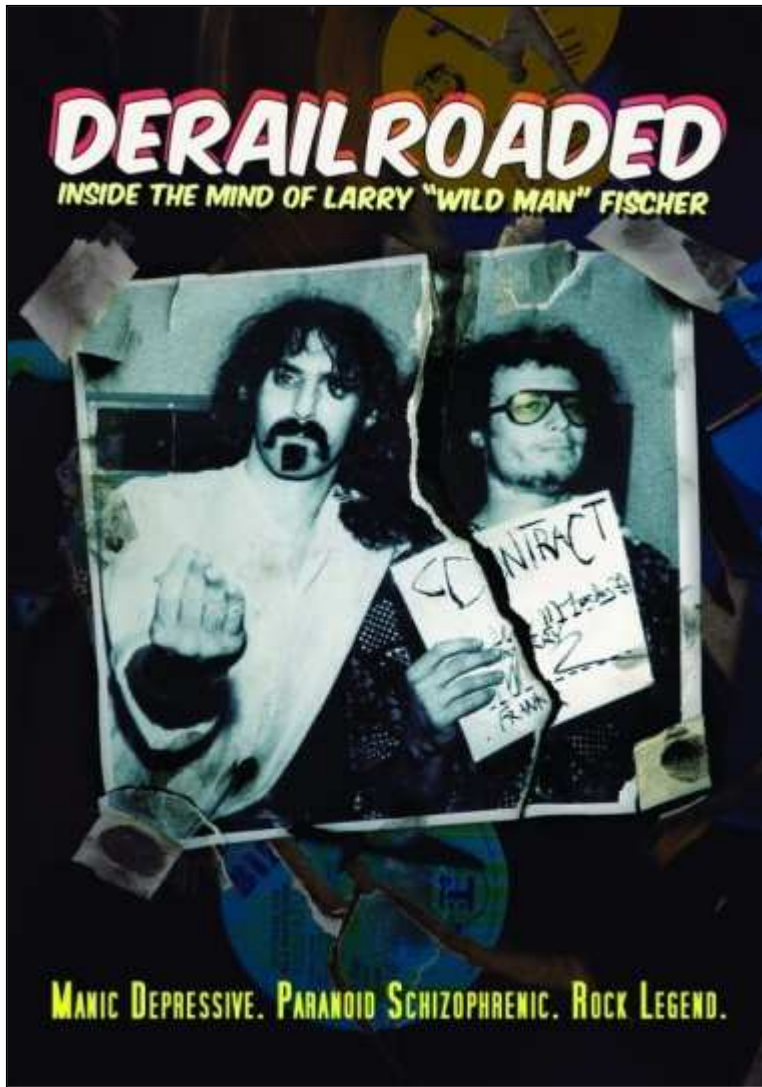
Derailroaded, which Josh Rubin and Jeremy Lubin named after a Fischer song and worked on for years as a labor of love, both with and without an often-troubled Fischer’s cooperation, considers whether Zappa insensitively opened a Pandora’s box without understanding the consequences, but it also shows that Fischer’s wild music and good humor — when he was in the right mood — was pretty infectious on those who encountered him.

The movie has a deeply sobering, sad side — as Fischer got older and more difficult, the weight of his illness bearing down on him and those nearby, you worry how he gets through every day. Yet even still there are those in the L.A. music business who try to help — especially the novelty-song producers known as Barnes & Barnes (Robert Haimer and Billy Mummy), who are extensively interviewed. They somehow arranged for one of the strangest chapters in Fischer’s career (and in the film), a 1986 duet with Rosemary Clooney on a song called, fittingly, “It’s a Hard Business.”

Grade: B

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