

National

Obituary: Wild Man Fischer



Stephen Smoliar, Classical Music Examiner

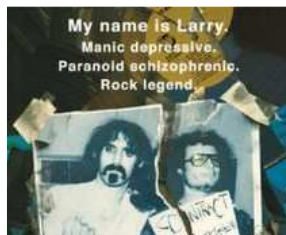
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A portion of the poster for Rubin's documentary

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Sooner or later, any advocate of avant-garde practices comes up against the question of when “over the top” crosses over the boundary into “going too far.” During my student days, the musician whose work first obliged me to think about that boundary was Larry “Wild Man” Fischer. This was when Fischer’s primary champion was Frank Zappa, who provided Fischer with opportunities to both perform and record “Merry-Go-Round.”

Fischer died on Thursday in Los Angeles at the age of 66. Cause of death was heart failure; and, prior to his death, Fischer had been residing in an assisted-living facility for mental patients in Van Nuys. At the time of the recording of “Merry-Go-Round,” Fischer had already been institutionalized twice, the first time for attacking his mother with a knife.

I am not sure whether or not my thoughts were ever quite as focused as those of Margalit Fox, whose [obituary](#) for Fischer appeared in today’s *New York Times*. Nevertheless, I basically agree with one of her summary assessments:

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Whether Mr. Fischer was a naïve genius whose work embodied primal truths, or simply a madman who practiced a musicalized form of ranting, is the subject of continuing debate.

Most of my own knowledge of Fischer came from Josh Rubin's documentary *Derailroded*, and I recommend that anyone curious about this guy should watch the film and then make up

his/her own mind. My personal opinion is that my own thoughts about "going too far" were definitely shaped by "Merry-Go-Round;" but there is a difference between "definitely" and "definitively." Fischer is certainly an icon of a period when "doing your own thing" was more important than "going to far;" but trying to make him some sort of an object lesson for those times would, itself, probably be going too far.



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Stephen William Smoliar obtained his PhD in Applied Mathematics and his BSc in Mathematics from MIT. His doctoral dissertation was one of the...

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