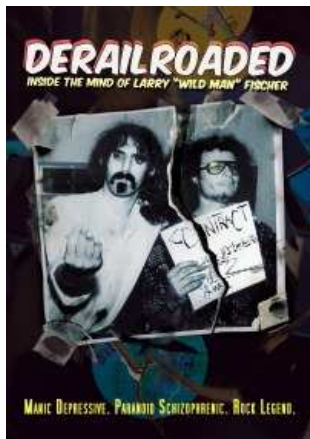


CRAWDADDY!
MAGAZINE


[FEATURED](#)
[REVIEWS](#)
[COLUMNS](#)
[NEWS](#)
[VIDEO](#)
[RANDOM](#)
[search for an artist](#)

Film Review: Wild Man Fischer, *Derailroaded*

j. poet published on January 21, 2011



Wild Man Fischer
Derailroaded DVD
(MVD Group, 2011)

I first ran into Larry “Wild Man” Fischer on Haight Street during the Summer of Love. He was wandering through the crowds of hippies and clouds of marijuana smoke with a manic gleam in his eye and his mouth hanging open. He was tall and moved with a curious gait, all elbows and knees. People instinctively shied away from him, although he was dressed in the usual brightly colored garb of the day: Yellow dashiki and jeans. Suddenly, he’d turn on his heel and stick his face into yours and shout, “Want to hear a new kind of song? Only 10 cents.” If his intended customer pulled away, he’d increase his volume. “Only 10 cents. All original. Come on. What have you got to lose?”

With a dime in hand, Fischer would start belting out one of his hits—“Merry go, merry go, merry go round, toot toot toot...”—with spittle flying out of his mouth. I was wary of him, but some of his tunes, like “Merry Go Round”, “My Name Is Larry”, and “Jennifer Jones”, to name just three, implanted themselves into my mind. And they’re still in there, dancing around with the odd phrase from a Beatles or Greg Brown tune.

Fischer was diagnosed as paranoid schizophrenic and bipolar. When I moved to LA, I saw Fischer on the Sunset Strip doing his “new kind of song” act for the LA hippies, and when the two-album set, *An Evening with Wild Man Fischer* (produced by Frank Zappa, no less) appeared in record stores, I bought a copy. Zappa says in the liner notes that Fischer’s tunes are “not exactly musical,” but I disagree. His best tunes are insanely catchy. If he’d been medicated enough to forge a working relationship with proficient musicians, he might have even had a real career.

Josh Rubin and Jeremy Lubin, AKA the Ubin Twinz, were Fischer fans. A few years ago, they followed him around with their cameras and produced the biographical documentary *Derailroaded*. Using old home movie footage and photos from family members, tapes of Fischer’s appearances on *Laugh-In*, phone machine messages, and reminiscences from family and friends like Zappa, Mark Mothersbaugh of Devo, Bill Mumy (Art Barnes of Barnes & Barnes), Solomon Burke, and Irwin Chusid, they give us the whole Wild Man Fischer story. It’s at turns amusing and heartbreaking, and there’s no happy ending.

The film opens in 2003. Larry Fischer had just spent months living on the streets. Someone was shot in the hotel he was living in, and the incident sent him into a paranoid frenzy. As he regains his composure, he tells the camera the story of his life. “My father died when I was young,” he says. “My mother never loved me.” Fischer’s brother David says that Larry was always disturbed and would lock himself in his room for hours at a time to sing. In 1966, when he was 16, he attacked his mother with a knife and was institutionalized. He received shock therapy, represented here with unsettling black and white footage of the process. He returned home briefly, but his family couldn’t put up with his outbursts. They threw him out. He’s lived on the streets and in cheap hotels ever since, but he also started his career, as haphazard as it is, singing his songs for a dime on Sunset Boulevard.

Frank Zappa heard Fischer and produced the album that gave him his first taste of fame, *An Evening with Wild Man Fischer*. It could have launched a sustainable career, but Fischer’s paranoia led to fights with Zappa that culminated with him throwing something that almost hit Zappa’s baby daughter, Moon Unit. That scenario is repeated over and over again. Every time Fischer’s close to getting some recognition, he self-sabotages. Richard Foos and Harold Bronson of

[Facebook](#)
[Twitter](#)
[Feed](#)


STRAIGHT TO VIDEO

[Autolux, “Turnstile Blues”](#)



March 2, 2007 at Independent in San Francisco, CA

RECENT RECORD REVIEWS

ARTIST: [Cut Copy](#)
ALBUM: [Zonoscope](#)

You can credit Cut Copy, along with some of their unexpectedly authentic sounding peers like Yeasayer, for flushing the irony from the 2002 strain of ‘80s nostalgia that quickly became something much bigger than the Rapture’s *House of Jealous Lovers*. From LCD Soundsystem to Ed Banger to micro-house, “indie-dance” has now mostly [read more](#)



MOST READ ARTICLES

[Origin of Song: The True Story of Talking Heads’ Naïve Melody, “This Must Be the Place”](#)

Rhino Records, then a small underground record store, asked Fischer to write a song for them, and that song sparked their idea to start a label. The first Rhino single was Fischer's "Go to Rhino Records", and their first album was *Wildmania*, but Fischer destroyed the relationship, paranoid that Rhino was stealing money from him.

Fischer was almost impossible to work with. His bipolar cycles were rapid and he could be sunny and singing one of his unclassifiable, decidedly catchy songs one moment and raging or comatose the next. Despite the difficulty they had with him, Foos and Bronson hooked him up with Barnes and Barnes, the duo who had a surprise hit with "Fishheads." They produced two more albums for him by recording him in the streets and adding backing tracks in the studio. *Pronounced Normal* and *Nothing Scary* capture some of Fischer's essence.

It's not exactly accurate to call Fischer a singer; he's more of a performance artist. He blends his uncontrolled voice, a powerful tenor full of hiccoughs, vocal sound effects, and verbal ticks, with spoken words, snippets of something like poetry and screaming rants. Lacking mental and emotional filters, Fischer's songs are raw, unruly, and often painfully truthful. Devo's Mark Mothersbaugh says that in a different culture, Fischer might have been a shaman and appreciated for his unique view of the world. When he was on, his performances had a winning childlike exuberance, but when you looked into his eyes you could always see the madness and despair he was constantly fighting off.

Fischer had moments of actual fame. He appeared on *Laugh-In*, and opened a high profile show in LA that starred Janis Joplin, Joan Baez, Buffy Sainte-Marie, and the Byrds, but his triumphs were few. Early in the film, the directors ask him why he sings. He says we wants to be famous, impress his family, make money, and get girls. He also confesses, "I'm scared of people. People are always trying to kill me." He was driven by his fantasy of the happiness fame would bring, but unable to accept any of the successes he had without decompensating.

Fischer broke or ignored all the rules that could have secured his fame, or infamy. The filmmakers don't sugarcoat his story, delivering a warts-and-all portrait of a goodhearted but seriously disturbed man. *Derailroaded* isn't easy to watch, but Rubin and Lubin are sympathetic to their character, and as Fischer's condition deteriorates, you feel yourself pulled into his hopeless, but not joyless, world.

Watch the trailer for *Derailroaded*

[KUSF Has Left The Building](#)

[Dueling Critics: The Fall, This Nation's Saving Grace and Gang Of Four, Content](#)

[James William son: The Return of Raw Power](#)

[The White Stripes: 1997-2011](#)

[Film Review: Wild Man Fischer, Derailroaded](#)

[Who Covered It Best: Cat Power Does Tom Waits One Better for "Yesterday Is Here"](#)

[Rockabilly Barbie Infringement Lawsuit Shocker!](#)

[Crawdaddy!'s Top 50 Records of 2010](#)

POLLS

With the unfortunate news of the White Stripes' breakup, we ask you: What's your favorite White Stripes record?

- The White Stripes (1999)
- De Stijl (2000)
- White Blood Cells (2001)
- Elephant (2003)
- Get Behind Me Satan (2005)
- Icky Thump (2007)

[View Results](#)

[Polls Archive](#)

ROCK ART ROCK



See more in the [Rock Art Rock gallery](#).

CONCERT FINDER

enter an artist name search >

The Walkmen
One Eyed Jacks, 615 Toulouse Street, New Orleans, LA

MAR 02 [ALL TOUR DATES](#)

Willie Nelson
Montgomery Performing Arts Centre, Montgomery, AL

FEB 09 [ALL TOUR DATES](#)

[see more bands on tour >](#)

[2 comments](#) IN COLUMN [Film Review](#), [What Goes On](#)

TAGS: [Derailroaded](#), [film review](#), [Larry Fischer](#), [Wild Man Fischer](#)

12 people like this. Be the first of your friends.

ShareThis

« [Stream Five Songs From Panda Bear's Upcoming Tomboy](#)

The (Last Few) Week(s) In Singles:
[New Music From Elbow](#), [Best Coast](#), [Lady GaGa](#), and [More >](#)

Post a Comment

2 Comments

Crownboy

Posted January 25, 2011 at 1:28 pm | [Permalink](#)

I bought...and cherish the double album...in 1969 on my way to my draft physical in Seattle... still think having that album under my arm got me my 4f

Rick Stack

Posted February 9, 2011 at 7:37 am | [Permalink](#)

Still have my copy of the double LP right here in front of me, where it belongs. Can't wait for the film.

Features

[Feature Story](#)

[Introducing](#)

[Classic Vantage](#)

[The Switchback](#)

[Lyrical Communique](#)

[Audio and Video Interviews](#)

[Open Mic](#)

[Before the Hype](#)

[What Goes On](#)

Reviews

[Record Reviews](#)

[Live Reviews](#)

[Book Reviews](#)

[Film Review](#)

[Dueling Critics](#)

[Crate Digger](#)

[Ex Post Facto](#)

[New Classics](#)

Columns

[The Smoke-Filled Room](#)

[Riot Gear!](#)

[Dollar Bin Diving](#)

[Livin the Dream](#)

[Origin of Song](#)

[Songwriters Speak](#)

[My Life Is the Road](#)

[Music Box Sounds](#)

[What Makes a Legend](#)

[Bandcamp Band of the Week](#)

Live Music

[Live Reviews](#)

[Show Footage](#)

[Concert Photography](#)

[Studio Sessions](#)

[Tour Dates and News](#)

[Watch the Editors Yap](#)

About

[Advertising](#)

[History](#)

[The Crowddaddy! Team](#)

[Crowddaddy! Credo](#)

[Archives: 1966-1968](#)

[Press](#)

Wolfgang's Vault

[About](#)

[Listen to Live Concerts and Studio Recordings](#)

[Check out Music Memorabilia](#)

[Find Show Listings In Your Town](#)