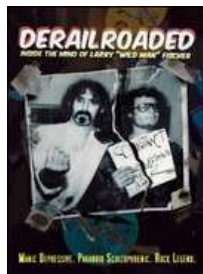




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Case Number 20951: Small Claims Court



Derailed: Inside The Mind Of Larry "Wild Man" Fischer

MVD Visual // 2005 // 86 Minutes // Not Rated
Reviewed by Judge Gordon Sullivan // March 22nd, 2011

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Scales of Justice
Judgment: 84

Perp Profile
Studio: [MVD Visual](#)
Video Formats:
• Full Frame
Audio For mats:
• Dolby Digital 5.1 Surround (English)
Subtitles:
• English
Running Time: 86 Minutes
Release Year: 2005
MPAA Rating: Not Rated
Genres:
• [Concerts and Musicals](#)
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All Rise...

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Distinguishing Marks
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The Charge

Manic Depressive. Paranoid Schizophrenic. Rock Legend.

Accomplices
• [IMDb](#)

The Case

Rock 'n' roll is not for the faint of heart, and the pages of its history are littered with the names of those who came, saw, and went insane from it. Guys like Syd Barrett, Brian Wilson, and Roky Erickson all had breakdowns (major or minor) from the stress, the drugs, and the struggle to express themselves. Less well documented, at least in the mainstream, are those fragile or already broken souls who are drawn to music as a way to tame their inner demons. These guys never were, and are unlikely to become household names. Daniel Johnston had a movie made about him ([The Devil and Daniel Johnston](#)), and Wesley Willis has received a number of posthumous tributes, but they're the rare few. To that list we could add the subject of **Derailed: Inside the Mind of Larry "Wild Man" Fischer**. The film presents a fascinatingly tragic portrait of the merger between mental illness and music, even if it can be tough to sit through.

Derailed: Inside the Mind of Larry "Wild Man" Fischer is true to its title. We go inside the mind of Larry Fischer, a man who obviously suffers from paranoid schizophrenia and manic depression, through footage of the man himself as well as interviews with (mostly famous) friends and associates. What elevates this documentary from others that tackle the mentally ill is that Wild Man Fischer used (and uses) music to help deal with his illness. In so doing, he attracted a wide range of influential friends and admirers in the music world, including the likes of Frank Zappa and Weird Al Yankovic. With his earthy, Captain Beefheart-inflected voice, childlike melodies, and unorthodox guitar playing, Wild Man won the hearts and minds of fellow musicians even as he struggled with paranoia and delusions. The documentary covers his life from his early days (including a stay at a mental institution at the age of twelve) to the present, weaving the contemporary material in with interviews and a more chronological rendering of Fischer's life.

Derailed is a difficult documentary to judge. Certainly it does an effective job giving viewers a peek into the life of its subject. But that, sadly, is a mixed blessing. Fischer has an undeniably powerful voice (though I'm not sure he's the best rock 'n' roll singer of all time, as some claim), and his musical style makes it very difficult to determine if he's a genius, a madman, or simply a mad genius. Where the trouble emerges is in his life, not his music. He blames his mother for putting him in an institution at a young age, but whether her fault or not, mental institutions were no place for the even marginally sane fifty-plus years ago. Music, however, was his passion, and that led to **An Evening With Wild Man Fischer**, recorded by Frank Zappa, still a highly sought-after vinyl album. **Derailed** makes a strong case for the growth of the Wild Man cult, whether through archival interviews with Zappa (who had a falling out due to Fischer's violent tendencies), or by more contemporary admirers like Yankovic and producers Barnes and Barnes.

If this were a VH1 *Behind the Music* episode, it would be easier to rate. Because it doesn't just stick to the past, but includes material from a contemporary Fischer, **Derailed** gets into difficult territory. There are moments where he is lucid, and

seems like a kindly and eccentric uncle talking about his past. Then there are other moments where he radiates paranoia and mental illness so strongly that it could be felt even through the TV. These moments are essential to creating a sense of Fischer the man, but they are also painful to watch. As with all outsider artists, the specter of exploitation looms over any attempt to document the life of the famously mentally ill, but **Derailroaded** is both sympathetic and honest enough about its subject to avoid those problems, though there are some odd moments throughout the film, especially during the live footage of Fischer performing.

I'm also seriously impressed by this DVD of **Derailroaded**. The film itself doesn't look that great, cobbled together from archival material and so-so looking video, but those problems are with the source, and not this DVD. The full-frame transfer does a decent job with this diverse material. The stereo audio mix keeps the interview material front and center, though some of the sources weren't recorded perfectly.

The extras, though, are where this disc really shines. They start with two commentary tracks. The first features the director and producer, who discuss the germination of the project, as well as the difficulties that were overcome while dealing with a mentally ill subject. The second features phone conversation between the director and Fischer, adding more depth to Fischer's side of his life's story. They continue with a number of outtakes and deleted scenes, including more material from interviewees (like Yankovic) and more Fischer material. There's also a bonus interview with Rudy Ray Moore, who they had been told (wrongly) was a Fischer fan. The rest of the interview is Moore's thoughts on Wild Man after listening to him that day. Finally, there's an essay in an included booklet from the director discussing the making of the film.

Derailroaded: Inside the Mind of Larry "Wild Man" Fischer is certainly a godsend for Fischer's fanatic cult. To fans of rock 'n' roll history it's also a valuable document. In fact, anyone with a strong stomach for sadness and an interest in documentary will find something to enjoy in **Derailroaded**.

The Verdict

Derailroaded is not guilty.

You, The Jury...

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Did we give **Derailroaded: Inside The Mind Of Larry "Wild Man" Fischer** a fair trial? [yes](#) / [no](#)



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