

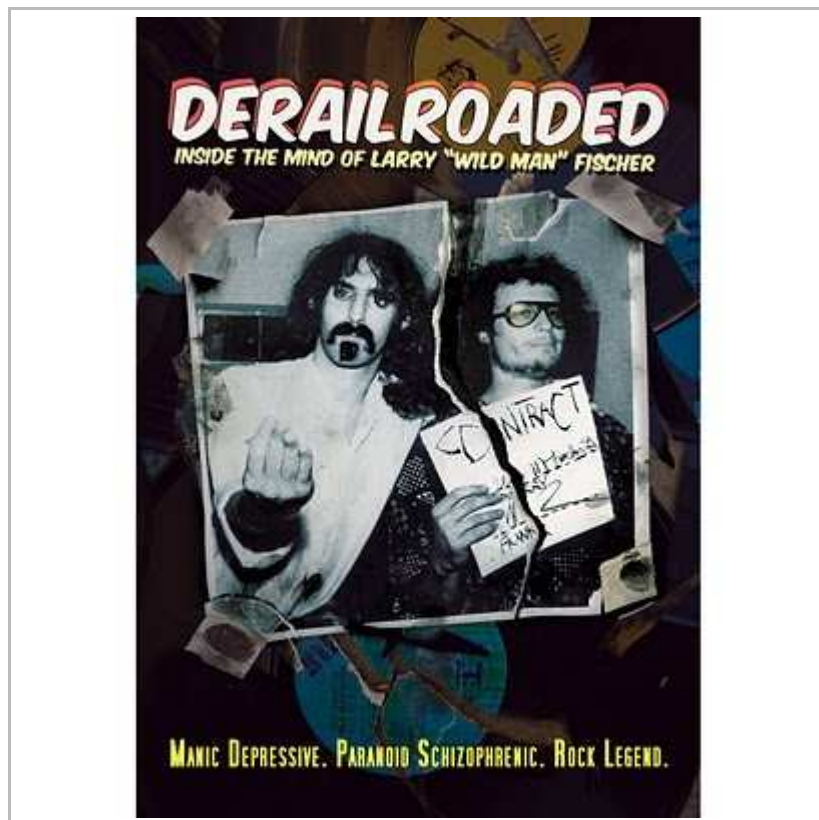
## FFanzeen: Rock'n'Roll Attitude With Integrity

Through the writings and photography of Robert Barry Francos, a view of the arts and culture, including everyday life.

SUNDAY, MARCH 27, 2011

### DVD Review: Derailroded: Inside the Mind of Larry "Wildman" Fischer

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 Images from the Internet



#### Derailroded: Inside the Mind of Larry "Wildman" Fischer

Directed by Josh Rubin

Produced by Jeremy Lubin

UbinTwinz Productions, 2005

86 minutes, USD \$16.95

[Derailroded.com](#)

[MVDvisual.com](#)

It is nearly impossible to have any kind of real discussion about what is known as *outsider* music without bringing up Larry "Wildman" Fischer. He is a figurehead of a musical subgenre that is often

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#### About Me

Robert Barry Francos  
 Currently living in Saskatoon (email at RBF55@msn.com for address). From 1977-88, I used to publish a print version of a music magazine in New York called FFanzeen, which dealt with the wide-ranging independent music scene. I also photographed many bands from the period (and since). Now I write this blog, and have a column at [jerseybeat \(dot\)](#)

ignored, dismissed, or just doesn't make it to mainstream consciousness.

Outsider music is a separate subgenre than the more populist novelty song, though oft-times they get lumped in together. Some examples of novelty songs may be anything by Weird Al Yankovic and Allan Sherman ("Hello Muddah, Hello Faddah"), or Napoleon the XIV's "They're Coming to Take Me Away, Ha-Ha." On the other hand, some of the Outsider artists are (or were) Jandek, the Legendary Stardust Cowboy, and the Shaggs. Arguably, among the biggest (including Tiny Tim) were Barnes and Barnes (Billy Mumy and Robert Haimer), the creators of "Fish Heads," and Larry "Wildman" Fischer, who all collaborated in the 1980s.

Diagnosed as a manic depressive paranoid schizophrenic, Larry Fischer spent some time in psychiatric hospitals as a youth in the early 1960s and underwent numerous electroshock and pharmaceutical therapies, which may have done more damage than help. This happened after he, according to legend, attacked his mom with a kitchen knife. Ending up in Los Angeles, he became a street performer singing original songs for a dime apiece. This is where he probably developed his talent for songwriting, making up songs on the spot, with a minimalist, almost Gertrude Stein-style wordplay. He also remembered and could repeat them, a talent unto itself.

Somehow, he came to the attention of his first patron, Frank Zappa, who produced his first (and double) album in 1968. Not surprisingly, as is true with most Outsider releases, it did not sell well. This caused the rift between Fischer and Zappa; that, and Fischer throwing an object in a fit of anger, and it just missing infant Moon Unit, leading to a break-up of collaboration. His time with Frank would be come a fixation point to the Wildman, who believed Zappa was trying to keep all the money the record supposedly made (he even wrote an angry ditty about it called, well, "Frank"). Despite that, the song "Merry Go Round" from that release became a cult classic over the years - though I'd always preferred "Do the Taster" - and it lead to an appearance on *Rowan and Martin's Laugh-In*.

From there he spent a few years roaming around living in Paranoiaville, and finally alit at Rhino Records, where he became not only their "mascot" (in his words), but also their first release ("Come to Rhino Records"), which was also used as an advert slogan. From there he wound up in the studio of Mumy and Haimer, who released the next batch of Fischer's LPs, sometimes under quite trying circumstances. Still, for over two decades, Mumy became the closest thing to a friend he had; Fischer even guest appeared with Billy's band, Seduction of the Innocent (made up of comic book artists and writers), on occasion. After that went the way of another dose of mental illness-inspired fury and delusion, Fischer's life started a further downward spiral.

That's when the team of Lubin and Rubin (hence, the wittily monikered Ubin Twinz) stepped in with their film crew. Through countless meltdowns, intense phone calls (many are shared in a

com (slash) quietcorner (dot) html. And the beat goes on.

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commentary track), and looking for a lost dog, the UT have released a touching portrait of the man. While they never shy away from Fischer's illness, they also don't only focus on it. It's more about what has happened to the man than a reflection on his problems (though many times they're obviously related). Included are photos and home movies of his early and teen years, film clips of him on *Laugh In* that are jaw dropping (as much for his great performance as the way he is both mocked and promoted on it; mind you, Rowan & Martin did this with the likes of the Legendary Stardust Cowboy and Tiny Tim, as well).

One thing that is obvious through this film, and it's probably very important to acknowledge, is that this is a document of admiration of the artistry and personage of Larry Fischer, despite all the *mishegas* the UT went through to get this down, including numerous daily phone calls, accusations by the man, and never really knowing if they would actually succeed in finishing it. That is dedication, and it shows. Fischer is never talked down to or belittled (though occasionally they have to bring him down from a manic state). This is a serious film about an artist has become lost in both his inner and outer worlds, though sometimes it's hilarious in the sheer extremes.

There are a number of interviews here, including Fischer's older brother David (who helps support him financially, but is derisive of his music), his aunt who houses him latter in life in her squalid house, a New Jersey psychiatrist who specializes in mental disorders and the arts, Devo-leader Mark Mothersbaugh (still wearing that stupid hat, only now dyed black), Gail Zappa to explain their side of the story in the present and some old footage of Frank (d. 1993) himself talking about the feud, Barret Hansen (aka Dr. Demento) who helped put him on the map of a larger public, Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductee Solomon Burke (d. 2010), for some reason Weird Al Yankovic (I'm a fan, but as I stated before, he's in the novelty sub-genre; I must add that he does a great impression of "Merry Go Round" in the deleted clips, though), and most telling, Mummy and Haimmer, who are the hub of this film.

For me, this is as important a presentation as, say, *The Mayor of the Sunset Strip*, about DJ Rodney Bingenheimer, another case of a walk on the bizarre side that deserves the telling. I do have to wonder, though, if any of this would have happened if Zappa hadn't decided to record him. I remember a guy with Down Syndrome who was loved and legendary named Vinny Bo Bo back in Bensonhurst, who would stand on the corner of 86th Street and Bay Parkway by the Chock full o'Nuts with his guitar of two strings, and shake back and forth and sing away for over 30 years ([facebook.com/topic.php?uid=2210285303&topic=7341](https://www.facebook.com/topic.php?uid=2210285303&topic=7341)), who never had the chance that Wildman did. I fully recognize, though, that there was something special about Fischer, and I'm glad he got the attention he deserved, but I still gotta wonder on a higher abstractive level, why him, and how would his life had been different - better or worse - if he and Zappa never met. One of those great philosophical questions, I guess.

There are lots of great extras included here, including additional

scenes, a very bizarre and overly long 20+ minute interview with *Dolemite's* own Rudy Ray Moore (d. 2008), who tries to pinpoint in a rambling and condescending way just what he thinks about Fischer, and whether or not Larry's music is the bluesc. Now, I've met and talked with RRM, and he was an absolute gentleman, but he comes across as a snob here.

The two commentary tracks are exceptional. On one, it's just phone conversations with Larry and the Ubin Twinz which is occasionally scary, and often heartbreaking, yet also seeing-an-accident amusing. The other is both Jeremy and Josh talking about making of the film, and what they had to go through, how they lucked out with particular footage (such as the high school years and the only existing film of Frank and Larry together) and photos (for example, the front cover Frank and Larry contract image), how they financed it, and mostly how it was to deal with Larry.

While Larry's story is not all butterflies and rainbows, it's important to recognize his place in the spectrum of his time, and the Ubin Twinz did more than an admirable job.

#### EXTRA VIDEOS:

**EXTRA EXTRA VIDEOS:**





Posted by Robert Barry Francos at [12:29 PM](#) 

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