

Derailroaded (MVD Visual, NR)

Written by Pete Timmermann
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One thing that you have to understand, and which Derailroaded goes to great lengths to elucidate, is that Wild Man is the so-called godfather of outsider music.



It has been almost exactly six years since its 2005 world premiere at the SXSW Film Festival and about that long since its 2005 screening at the St. Louis International Film Festival, but we're finally getting Josh Rubin's documentary on Larry "Wild Man" Fischer on DVD here in America. Like Captain Beefheart, Wild Man Fischer is one of Frank Zappa's protégés/collaborators, and though he's all but forgotten today, his story is one of the more interesting ones of Zappa's entourage, which is most certainly saying something. Wild Man was a manic-depressive paranoid-schizophrenic who had been committed by his mother to a mental institution twice before recording his first album, *An Evening With Wild Man Fischer*, which Zappa produced. Zappa originally found Fischer singing for passersby on the streets of Los Angeles for ten cents per song, and his songs are doozies—his best-known is "Merry-Go-Round," (track one, side one from *An Evening With*) but many of his others, like "Derailroaded," the song that lent this film its title, "Go to Rhino Records," an ostensible ad for Rhino Records, and "My Name is Larry" are catchy and memorable. Of course along the way we have bumps in the road in the form of Wild Man's falling out with Zappa and flare-ups of his aggravated mental state, and really when it comes down to it *Derailroaded* is not a particularly happy film.

One thing that you have to understand, and which *Derailroaded* goes to great lengths to elucidate, is that Wild Man is the so-called godfather of outsider music. Which is to say if you're imagining this to be a portrait of a traditionally radio-friendly musician, well, you've got the wrong idea. Think more along the lines of Daniel Johnston (and/or the film *The Devil and Daniel Johnston*) or Wesley Willis (and/or the film *The Daddy of Rock 'N' Roll*), and you're getting a lot closer. Not that Wild Man didn't get radio play (he was a mainstay of Dr. Demento and John Peel) or that he didn't influence musicians you know and love (Weird Al Yankovic and Devo's Mark Mothersbaugh appear as talking heads in this film, to name two; he also once recorded a duet with Rosemary Clooney), but that said you've probably never heard anything quite like him.

The DVD release is replete with good special features, I'm happy to report, starting with two commentaries. One of these consists of phone conversations between Rubin and Wild Man; the other is more standard commentary fare. (At the premiere Rubin and producer Jeremy Lubin said they were hoping to record commentary of Fischer watching the film for the first time, which I'm sad to see didn't come to fruition.) Also included are your usual smattering of deleted scenes, extended interviews, and the like. If you happened to catch the 2006 Plexifilm release of this film in the U.K., this new MVD release is virtually identical; the only difference I can see between the

4/1/2011

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two is that the booklet here is missing a comic about Wild Man.

While I'm disappointed that *Derailroaded* never got more of a theatrical push and that it took a very long time to find its way to DVD, I can't help but wonder if the film will benefit from Captain Beefheart's recent passing. I know a lot of people out there are catching up with Beefheart's insanely good discography and are more open right now to checking out Frank Zappa's cohorts now than ever before. If that winds up being the case, so much the better. Now to just work on getting *An Evening with Wild Man Fischer* back in print—I'm not letting anyone anywhere near my crusty old vinyl copy. | **Pete Timmermann**



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