

**Movie Review**

**Filmmaker opens bag of tricks for bizarre profile of Larry "Wild Man" Fischer**

By Tom Keogh **\*\*\*\***

**"Derailroded: Inside the Mind of Larry 'Wild Man' Fischer,"**



A documentary with Larry "Wild Man" Fischer, Frank Zappa, Bill Mumy, Mark Mothersbaugh, Solomon Burke. Written and directed by Josh Rubin. 86 minutes. Not rated (includes some swearing and a mental-illness theme). Northwest Film Forum through Sunday.

You don't have to be a fan of Larry "Wild Man" Fischer's batty songs to appreciate Josh Rubin's compassionate portrait of the bipolar, schizophrenic musician. Rubin's "Derailroded: Inside the Mind of Larry 'Wild Man' Fischer," however, doesn't give audiences much of an opportunity to make an objective assessment about the alleged artistry of the mentally ill busker from Hollywood.

At various times over 30 years, Fischer has drawn remarkable support from the likes of Frank Zappa, soul pioneer Solomon Burke and even Rosemary Clooney, who recorded a duet with him. Nonetheless, the documentary's snippets of mostly a cappella performances (captured from various points in Fischer's life) sound like unredeemable ravings.

A few seconds heard from his recordings suggest that Fischer's old albums are of interest largely because of the ambitious arrangements by Zappa and other producers around Fischer's infantile lyrics and yelps.

Yet Fischer's boosters — including Devo mastermind Mark Mothersbaugh, Barry "Dr. Demento" Hansen and the well-regarded, record-producing team Barnes and Barnes (half of which is actor-musician Bill Mumy) — make a strong case for the childlike prattler as an archetypal "outsider."

Raised (according to Fischer and his psychologically healthier brother, David) by a loveless mother who committed him twice to lengthy stays in mental hospitals, Fischer took solace in scream-singing on Sorrento Beach and at talent shows. Burke spotted him in the mid-1960s and took him on tour (he also gave him the nickname "Wild Man"); eventually, Fischer opened for Iron Butterfly and Bo Diddley.

Zappa's mentorship in 1967, an appearance on "Rowan & Martin's Laugh-In" and the support of upstart Rhino Records gave the impression that Fischer was on his way to some kind of success. But his paranoia and bouts of depression caused him to burn bridges with Zappa and others just when he had reason to hope.

Such unhappy endings prove a common theme in "Derailroded" as a delusional Fischer squanders the support of other key collaborators. Rubin himself is sometimes verbally assaulted by his subject while shooting footage.

But the way Rubin juggles history in "Derailroded," eschewing a linear narrative for a more timeless and tragic vision of Fischer as simultaneously youthful, middle-age and in autumnal disrepair — thin, withdrawn, living in filth — proves haunting and suggestively epic.

Rubin's clever use of animation, comic books (Fischer has been a favorite subject for several graphic novelists) and even puppets helps keep the story moving along when an uncooperative Fischer won't.

**Note: Tonight's 8 p.m. screening of "Derailroded" will include appearances by Rubin, producer Jeremy Lubin, comic-book creators J.R. Williams, Dennis Eichhorn and others.**