

FILM



CRY FOR HELP
Larry "Wild Man"
Fischer shouts his
pained lyrics.

Primal scream

In *Derailroaded*, an outsider musician goes off the tracks

By **Raven Snook**

Before a director begins making a documentary, he has to spend a lot of time raising money, finding a crew, securing permits and, perhaps most important, earning his subject's trust. The confidence-gaining process took an entire year for Josh Rubin, who decided to make *Derailroaded: Inside the Mind of Larry "Wild Man" Fischer*, about a 60-year-old underground singer suffering from paranoid schizophrenia.

If you've never heard of Fischer you're in the majority, which is one of the reasons Rubin and his producer, Jeremy Lubin, were so eager to tell his story. After Fischer attacked his mother with a knife at 16, he was institutionalized. A few years later he ended up in Los Angeles where he busked on the streets. He attracted many fans, including Frank Zappa, who produced his 1968 album *An Evening with Wild Man Fischer*. But Fischer's raw, confessional lyrics and screechy delivery—he sounds like Bobcat Goldthwait as a ranting homeless guy—weren't exactly commercial. Although he recorded other work, including the Rhino Records theme song, Fischer has been trying to recapture what he sees as his glory days ever since, an impossible dream considering that he's paranoid and violent,

and his music is definitely an acquired taste.

The filmmakers didn't know about Fischer until 2000, when for no apparent reason he approached Lubin at a restaurant on Melrose Avenue. "Jeremy and I were roommates at the time," Rubin says. "I remember he came home and said, 'I just met this guy and he told me this amazing story. I wonder if it's true.'" After researching

"Larry strikes a chord with me emotionally, but there's only so much you can take."

Fischer's life story on the Internet, the two tracked down a copy of *An Evening with...* and were floored by it. "The passion and emotion in his voice were so amazing," Lubin says. "We had never heard anything like it before."

The men knew right away that they wanted to be more than just fans. "I had studied film at NYU and was looking for a project to work on," Rubin recalls. "Once Jeremy and I listened to Larry's music, we

turned to each other and said, 'We have to do something on him.'"

But getting Fischer to agree to the movie wasn't easy. "We had to be patient and become friends with him," Rubin says. "We let him call us three or four times a day. Every time we met with him, we would bring a contract. He kept rejecting it. Once he even tore it up." In 2001, Fischer finally signed on, and the Ubin Twinz (as the directing duo is called) filmed him on and off for the next four years.

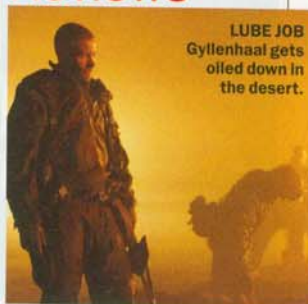
Neither Fischer's life nor his music is pretty, yet an impressive array of artists have collaborated with him, including Devo's Mark Mothersbaugh, child actor-turned-music producer Bill Mummy and singer Rosemary Clooney. In interviews, Mummy, Mothersbaugh and other industry players explain their fascination with Fischer's uninhibited work, but they also lament that he puts even his closest confidants through hell. The Twinz were no exception. "Larry strikes a chord with me emotionally," Rubin says. "He screams out to the world about what he's been through. But there's only so much you can take. Sometimes he'd call so much that we'd have to disconnect my phone. We care about him, but he doesn't talk to you. He just talks. And about the same stuff over and over."

Like Fischer's music, the documentary seems to elicit a love-it-or-hate-it response. Its critics have accused the documentarians of exploiting the man and his disease. But Rubin disagrees. "I think Larry's life is important," he says. "If we hadn't been around to film it, his art wouldn't have reached a larger audience."

Rubin remains in contact with Fischer, but the musician is a markedly changed man—he's taking medication for the first time in decades. "I saw him a few weeks ago and it was very disheartening," Rubin says. "Although I don't think his body could have withstood much more of what his mind was putting him through, his manic energy has been destroyed. His creative river is no longer flowing. If I had a conversation with him now, I wouldn't even think of making a movie about him."

Derailroaded is now playing at Pioneer Theater.

Reviews



LUBE JOB
Gyllenhaal gets
oiled down in
the desert.

Jarhead

Dir. Sam Mendes. 2005. R. 115mins.
Jake Gyllenhaal, Peter Sarsgaard,
Jamie Foxx.

Coincidentally being released as our current debacle in Iraq hit the 2,000-casualty mark, Sam Mendes's adaptation of Anthony Swofford's *Desert Storm* tour-of-duty memoir can easily be read as a cutting political commentary. But though the film's stance is resolutely against war—what is it good for? Absolutely nothing. Say it again!—Mendes has a more specific target in his cross-hairs: The hoo-rah! military culture that turns good ol' American boys into testosterone-fueled monstrosities. Watching these sociopaths-in-training singing along to Wagner during a recreational *Apocalypse Now* screening, you get the feeling that the war drums have been programmed into their craniums on an endless loop. Throw in mind-numbing boredom and a buildup to combat that never happens, and the mental deterioration of Swofford's screen surrogate (Gyllenhaal) seems inevitable. A recruitment poster this ain't.

The focus on the psychic damage wrought by the gung-ho marine mindset gives the movie a sense of relevance outside of a specific conflict, yet *Jarhead* ultimately feels as anticlimactic as the brief skirmish in its background. Swofford's book read like a blisteringly personal confessional, but after the initial boot-camp sequences, Mendes's movie degenerates into a momentumless roll call of loss-of-innocence vignettes punctuated by factual intertitles (days in the desert, number of troops). A few visual flourishes—notably a hellish landscape of flaming oil wells—lend a surreal ambience, but it won't be enough to keep moviegoers from feeling a little stir-crazy themselves near the end. (Opens Fri; see Index for venues.)
—David Fear

FILM

Don't miss!	101
Now playing	107
Art-house & indie cinema	113
Index	117
General-release theaters	119