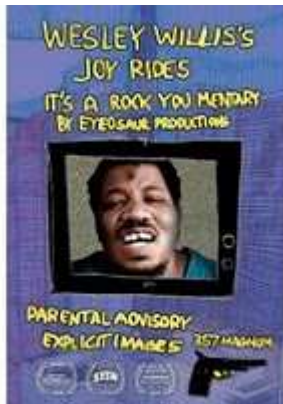


Roctober

Wednesday, February 17, 2010

Wesley Willis's Joy Rides It's A Rock You Mentary DVD (MVD)



In 2003 a documentary about Wesley Willis showed the Chicago behemoth doing what he did -- selling his CDs, headbutting people, dealing with his mental illnesses as best he could, and writing strange, monotonous songs that played to white rock audiences lurid expectations of seeing a big crazy black man curse and rant (and reference

their favorite bands). The documentary didn't so much give an insightful portrait of Willis as it (appropriately) gave an outsider's view on how people saw him, dealt with him, and exploited him. This was done by giving as much, or more, camera time to people who interacted with Willis because his oddity amused them as it did with people who really cared for him and sacrificed and negotiated bureaucracies to keep him as healthy as possible. This documentary, obviously long in the works (Willis died around the time of the first doc's release) definitely leans towards the latter group of people, as with a few exceptions (an art collector with a disturbing glint in his eye) this portrays the people who genuinely cared for him. Some of these are family members who shared his challenging childhood (they even track down his estranged father). If you lived in Chicago during Willis' rock scene days he was really a person you had to experience to appreciate (and I don't mean seeing him perform, I mean having him hustle CDs and have sideways conversations in your direction), and listening to disc after disc of his hundreds of similar songs may not be the best way to understand his presence. This documentary does a pretty good job telling the world who Wesley was and what he did for the last decade of his life.

Posted by Roctober Magazine Reviews: at 7:40 AM

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Roctober Magazine Senior
Tastemaker

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