



Noise Pop: Joy Rides and Darby Crash test dummies

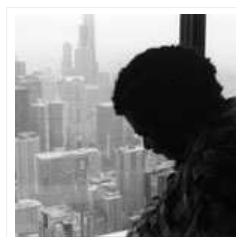
Noise Pop's film program encompasses labors of love and cheap shots

BY MAX GOLDBERG
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In the current glut of music biopics and documentaries, it seems any band or scene worth its salt in influence and innovation is fair game for the big screen. Chalk it up to corporate tie-ins or affordable filmmaking equipment, *Behind the Music* or DIY videozines, but chances are your favorite group will someday make it to a theater near you. Eschewing polished product for its annual film program, the Noise Pop festival spotlights several ragtag productions focused on left-of-the-dial music legends.



Wesley Willis's Joy Rides

To begin with the cream of the crop, Chris Bagley and Kim Shively's *Wesley Willis's Joy Rides* balances a measured introduction with an intimate appreciation of the titular hero. The film will inevitably be compared to *In the Realms of the Unreal* (2004) and *The Devil and Daniel Johnston* (2006) for its profile of an outsider artist and its clever animations of Willis's colorful cityscapes, but Willis was simply too one of a kind for *Joy Rides* to be anything but.



Willis's music and art flowed directly from the outsize personality of the hulking Chicagoan, who was raised in the projects. Bagley and Shively evidently spent a lot of time filming Willis in the years before his 2003 death, and their movie is much the better for Willis's constant jiving, affable head butts, and offhand bouts of inspired wordplay.

Not that all of *Joy Rides* goes down so easy. It's wincingly uncomfortable to watch Willis, who was a diagnosed schizophrenic, knock himself upside the head while trying to "get the demons out," and some of the film's talking heads veer dangerously close to "magical black man" territory. But there's a discernible difference between transparency and exploitation, and *Joy Rides* decidedly sways toward the former. Bagley and Shively had Willis create the documentary's credits sequences, which seems emblematic of a broader mutual appreciation. Given Willis's prolificacy, it's no surprise he would want a hand in the film: the next time I encounter creative restlessness, I'll be sure to think of Willis's maxim "The joyride keeps my ass busy."

Darby Crash was similarly driven during his brief life, but the punk vocalist's ferocity is blunted by biopic clichés in the weirdly saccharine *What We Do Is Secret*. Rodger Grossman's film follows the course of Crash's five-year plan, which took him from high school dropout to rock 'n' roll suicide. The director catches some of the excitement of the Germs' hopelessly abbreviated sets and lucks out in a nice performance by Bijou Phillips as bassist Lorna Doom, but his tendency toward sitcomish lighting

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and confessional monologues sinks the band's fire in a morass of conventionality. The original Germs recently tapped Crash impersonator Shane West for a cash-in tour, proving that some legacies are never safe.

A pair of low-key documentaries cast a wider net in their hard-rock forays, with varying results. *Such Hawks*, *Such Hounds* profiles a few of the most vibrant interpreters of heavy music (Comets on Fire, Dead Meadow, Om) but without much purpose. Filmmaker John Srebalus floats between ...

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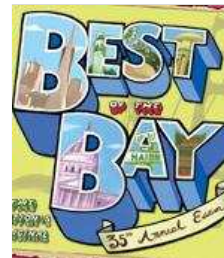
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