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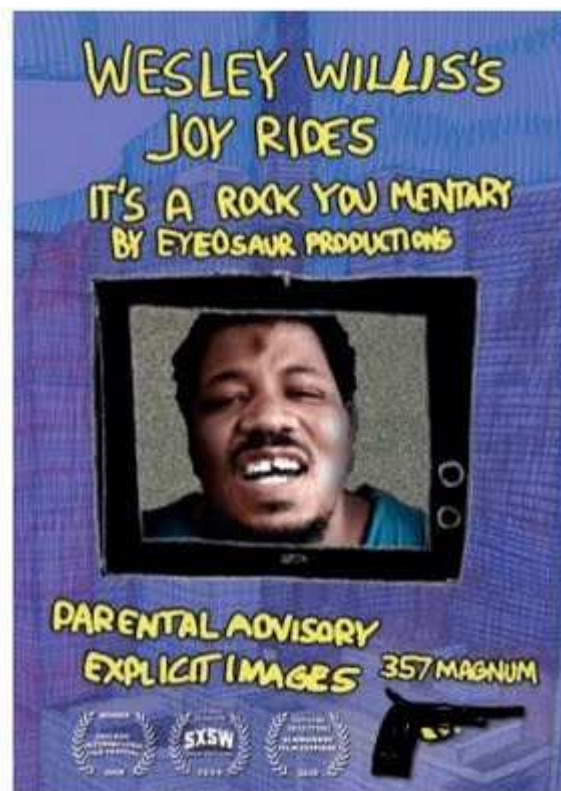
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Friday, December 11, 2009

[Documentary - Wesley Willis's Joy Rides](#)



[Wesley Willis's Joy Rides](#)

Wesley Willis's Joy Rides

Wesley Willis's Joy Rides is a 2009 documentary about Chicago outsider artist and musician Wesley Willis. Willis was a well known fixture on the streets of Chicago where he could be found drawing or selling his art and CD's throughout the 1990's and until his

death in 2003.

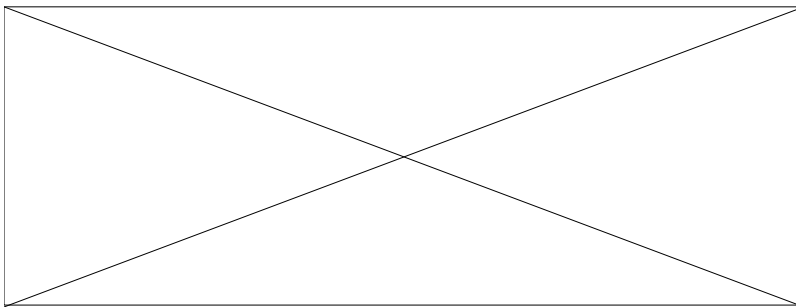
To some he was a local icon, to some he was an artist, and to many he was just a crazy freak on the streets to be avoided. There is no doubt though that if you ever met Wesley, you were likely to remember that encounter. He managed to create a living for himself and an interesting body of work despite suffering from chronic schizophrenia.

Wesley Willis Joy Rides Trailer

Wesley Willis Documentary Reviews

The Wesley Willis documentary "Wesley Willis's Joy Rides" is a look into his life story, his art, his music and friends. I think it does a great job of telling his story and providing insight into his art and music whether you've heard of him before or not. Joy Rides shows both the good and the bad in Wesley Willis without exploiting his schizophrenia for cheap laughs or sympathy.

Exploitation of Wesley Willis has been an issue for a lot of people who feel that Willis was turned into a gimmick and paraded around by record companies to be laughed at by audiences. One person who addresses those accusations is Jello Biafra, whose record label Alternative Tentacles released four Wesley Willis albums. He said that although a few people accused him of exploiting Wesley, that all he did was help him release his music and tour, which is what Wesley wanted. Should Biafra not have released his albums because he was schitzophrenic? Wouldn't that be discriminatory?



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Despite the obvious mental health issues and limitations that Wesley Willis had to deal with, he was able to create music and artwork at an exceptional pace, in the process becoming a cult icon. He didn't just make music and art, he sold it as well and made a living doing so, something that many allegedly sane artists are unable to do.

Wesley released dozens of albums, signed to a major label, appeared on Mtv, toured the United States and Europe, created hundreds of drawings and sold his artwork to collectors. At the same time, he kept himself out of trouble, out of jail, out of a mental

institution and was never ever accused of harming anyone. He truly did accomplish much with very little.

I found Wesley Willis's Joy Rides to be an entertaining documentary; insightful and fun to watch. There were some laugh out loud moments but at the same time, I felt like it didn't exploit him. The documentary showed Willis as a sympathetic character, while at the same time not shying away from the "hellride crazy" that he wasn't always able to control. There are interviews with friends, bandmates, art collectors and family. You get to hear music and see a lot of his drawings. The movie covers a little bit of everything about Willis and was so enjoyable to me that it went by quickly but also didn't seem to be too short.

Wesley Willis's Joy Rides was a great documentary and I would recommend it to anyone who thinks it sounds interesting, whether they were a fan or know nothing about him.

More Wesley Willis's Joy Rides Reviews

This is not the first documentary that has been made about the life of Wesley Willis, but it is by far the best. I was struck by how well edited the film was, how much homework the filmmakers had done, (like tracking down Wesley's siblings, father, and high school art teacher), and how respectful the filmmakers were of their subject. It would be easy to tell Wesley's story in the wrong way, (see "The Daddy of Rock & Roll"). It was a relief, and a pleasure to see that these two created something that is long overdue, and will certainly be treasured by many for years to come. - D. Buttler

It is the best Wesley Willis documentary available. The filmmakers go into detail concerning Mr. Willis' early life, his early art career selling drawings of the Chicago cityscape on the street and how a schizophrenic and borderline homeless man became a musical legend. In the film there are interviews with family, friends, roommates and those who encouraged his art. - William E. Wallin

I'm almost too happy to speak. I watched this yesterday on Pitchfork. I don't go to that website but I was bored and just typed it in and they had this on their front page and said it was playing for one week so I CLICKED IT! 77 minutes of Wesley drawing, singing, talking and friends and family talking about him. It's really amazing that they have this stuff on film and could make this film. It definitely lets you get to know Wesley and how artistic and nice he was and about his demons and life. Really recommended! - Will A.

[Buy Wesley Willis's Joy Rides at Amazon.com](#)