



Denver



The documentary "Wesley Willis's Joyrides," about the late artist and cult musician, screens tonight at 9:30 at the Starz Film Center. Check denverfilm.org for more information. *Eyeesaur*

"Joyrides" takes filmgoers on tour of a gentle musical mind

By Ricardo Baca
Denver Post Pop Music Critic

Colorado fans of Wesley Willis knew that the musician/artist loved it here. He connected with the people, head-butt by head-butt, and he relished his mornings spent eating at Watercourse Foods and his nights performing at the 15th Street Tavern in Denver or Tulagi in Boulder.

The greater truth was that Willis, the subject of the new documentary "Wesley Willis's Joyrides," loved it everywhere — and was loved back.

"Joyrides," screening tonight at the Starz Denver Film Festival, is a loving portrait of an outsider artist who

transcended the underground music scene. Willis, known and loved for softly head-butting each of his fans before and after shows, died at age 40 in 2003.

Directors Chris Bagley and Kim Shively have called Willis, who suffered from schizophrenia, "the most complex person we've ever met."

Here are three questions we asked "Joyrides" co-director Shively.

Q: Every documentary has its own challenges. What was most difficult about finishing this one?

A: The process of going back and looking at the tapes again after he passed away was pretty hard. That was the most difficult thing we came across.

Q: You also wanted to dispell some myths, correct?

A: Well, he wasn't ever homeless, and that's something that's been written about him a lot. He didn't play a Casio keyboard. That was important to him, I guess. And there was also the whole question, "Is he aware of what he's doing onstage?" And he was. He knew that his music made people laugh. He knew it was funny.

Q: I was lucky enough to meet him several times, and he seemed like a kind and gentle person.

A: Yeah, he was so great in the way that he made you rethink the way you perceive people. People were so turned off by him at first. But he wouldn't give up on people. He'd persist until they'd give him a head-butt or buy a CD. You don't meet many people like that.