

Wesley Willis's Joy Rides Synopsis

A portrait of the self proclaimed rock 'n' roll star and "Chicago City Artist," Wesley Willis.

An underground rock icon and revered artist, the late, great Wesley Willis attracted and offended people the world over. *Wesley Willis's Joy Rides* follows the life of the prolific and controversial artist on his journey from obscurity to fame.

A Chicago native, Wesley Willis became an underground rock icon, revered artist and hero to many before his untimely death in 2003. Termed by some as an "outsider artist" due to his schizophrenia, the film examines Wesley's ability to draw people in despite his intimidating facade. Through his force of personality and his artistic talents, Wesley's music and art attracted people from all walks of life. Greeting people with a headbutt and a request to say "rah" and "roh," Wesley quickly stood out in a crowd. Through interviews with friends and footage from the last four years of Wesley's life, a portrait emerges of a man whose day-to-day existence was wrought with pain and joy. Although his life was troubled, Wesley never stopped creating. He continued to draw pictures and write songs up until his death.

Wesley Willis's Joy Rides won the Gold Hugo for the Chicago Award at the 2008 Chicago International Film Festival. It premiered at the Slamdance Film Festival in January 2008, and has since been shown at Noise Pop Film Festival, Hot Docs, SXSW, and The Starz Denver Film Festival.

Wesley Willis – A Super Born Hustler

A self-titled "Chicago City Artist," Wesley Willis began selling his drawings out of necessity as a teenager on the streets of Chicago. Consisting mainly of cityscapes of his beloved city, his renderings of Chicago contained an amazing amount of detail, down to the ads on the city buses and the license plate numbers on the multitude of cars rushing by.

Wesley developed schizophrenia and along with his drawings he turned to music to drown out the demons that ceaselessly plagued him. Wesley announced to a friend one day he would like to become a rock star and once he set his mind to something there was no stopping him. He filled his albums with his unique artwork and humorous, often disturbing songs about his everyday struggles. Beginning with his band The Wesley Willis Fiasco and moving on to a solo career, Wesley carved out his own niche in a scene that was surely not prepared for such a force of nature as Wesley Willis.

Eventually gaining a cult following for both his music and artwork, Wesley became known for his prolific output of work and his relentless hustling. He would offer up CDs for sale to everyone he encountered; doctors, priests, waiters, he did not discriminate when it came to making a sale. Those sales would often be preceded by a request for a headbutt (Wesley's favorite way of greeting people). He made it impossible to forget him.

By the time of his death at the age of 40 in 2003, Wesley had recorded more than 50 albums and had drawn and sold an untold number of pen and marker drawings to people all over the world.

Filmmaker Biography

Chris Bagley and Kim Shively have been partners in crime since 2001, creating Eyeosaur Productions (www.eyesaur.com) to explore their mutual interest in fringe culture and engage in fearless film and video experimentation. Embracing the “do-it-yourself” aesthetic, they have created numerous music videos, documentaries and experimental pieces. *Wesley Willis’s Joy Rides* is their first feature-length film.

Directors' Statement

Wesley Willis’s life was extraordinary and chaotic - an artist, rock ‘n’ roll star and schizophrenic, he was the most complex person we have met. Being a fan of his music and wanting to know more about him, we were determined to make a film about Wesley.

The Wesley we knew was a rock ‘n’ roll machine. When he wasn’t touring he would be at the recording studio or selling CDs to local music stores. Wesley wrote new songs every day, ending each song with a commercial slogan like “Petco, it’s where pets go.” He would always be on the lookout for a new slogan whether it was a billboard on the side of the highway or on a ketchup bottle. His pockets were filled with ads he had written down throughout the day. But there was more to his story than being a rock star (as if that wasn’t enough).

Unfortunately, Wesley wasn’t able to share the rest of his story with us; he passed away in 2003. By the time of his death at the age of 40, Wesley had produced over 50 albums and thousands of drawings – more than most of us could hope to achieve in a lifetime. The decision to continue with the film was difficult. Wesley had become a great friend to us over the years. It was too painful to tackle right away, but slowly we began working on the film again, the many unanswered questions about Wesley’s life and his art motivating us to persist.

Telling Wesley’s story has been like deconstructing one of his expressway drawings – layers of buildings, countless lanes of traffic, billboards and advertisements dotting the landscape. The drawings themselves pointed us to his past. The places he drew contained the stories of his development as an artist. Through interviews with friends and footage from the last four years of Wesley’s life, a portrait emerges, one filled with violence and joy and beauty where you’d least expect it.

- Chris Bagley and Kim Shively, directors of *Wesley Willis’s Joy Rides*

***Wesley Willis's Joy Rides* Production Info**

Featuring

Wesley Willis as himself

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Production

Directors: Chris Bagley and Kim Shively

Producers: Chris Bagley and Kim Shively
(Eyeosaur Productions)

Co-Producers: Henry Ansbacher and Davis Coombe
(Just Media)

Cinematography: Chris Bagley

Post-Production

Editors: Kim Shively, Chris Bagley and Davis Coombe

Animation: Wesley Willis and Chad Herschberger

Composer: Marc Koeplin

Additional Music: Friends Forever, Magicyclops, Tyler Potts

Sound: Eliot Case

2008 • USA • 78 minutes

Press and Hi-Res Images

For press releases, hi-res images, and other related materials visit press.wesleywillissjoyrides.com.

DVD Info

Product Details

- *Format: DVD
- *SKU: MVDV4927
- *UPC: 760137492795
- *Street Date: 12/08/09
- *PreBook Date: 11/03/09
- *Label: MVD VISUAL
- *Genre: Documentary
- *Run Time: 150 mins
- *Number of Discs: 1
- *Audio: 5.1 SURROUND
- *Year of Production: 2008
- *Director: Chris Bagley and Kim Shively
- *Producers: Chris Bagley, Kim Shively, Henry Ansbacher, Davis Coombe

Bonus Materials

- *Art Gallery
- *Over 50 minutes of bonus footage
- *Photo Gallery

View Trailer / Purchase DVD

To view the trailer or purchase the DVD for individual use visit www.wesleywillissjoyrides.com.

For bulk DVD orders intended for resale contact [MVD](#).