

LAWEEKLY

July 9, 2008

WILD COMBINATION: A PORTRAIT OF ARTHUR RUSSELL (USA) The queer avant-garde isn't dead — but ironically, thanks to assimilation and rampant commodification, it may be more marginalized than ever. The late musician Arthur Russell, who sought to fuse the worlds of experimental and pop music, embodied the tensions between margin and center, avant-garde and Top 40. In his diverse musical interests — cerebral folk, pioneering disco (Loose Joints' "Is It All Over My Face"), nascent electronica — the consistent thread was a searching intelligence, an impatience with easy formula. Director Matt Wolf's documentary is filled with interviews with Russell's lover and his loving parents, home movies, stock footage and testimonials from folks like Philip Glass and Allen Ginsberg. What arises is the portrait of an almost scarily talented man who, even after death, is still ahead of his time. (DGA 1, Tues., July 15, 7 p.m.) (EH)

December 30, 2008

TOP SEVEN MUSIC THINGS OF THE YEAR THAT WEREN'T COMPACT DISCS

WILD COMBINATION: A PORTRAIT OF ARTHUR RUSSELL A DVD to own, if only to reinforce the notion that the work of an undersung American original deserves to be heard by the masses, and to encourage the executors of Arthur Russell's voluminous estate to continue to issue loving compilations of the late New York musician's output. Russell, who died of AIDS in 1992, started making music in the 1970s, first in San Francisco and most successfully in New York City. From the mid-'70s until his death, he merged the downtown art-music scene with the gay disco scene. Under various guises, Russell made brilliant, deeply lyrical and personal cello and synthesizer songs, some stretching to 10 minutes. He produced early proto-house music as Dinosaur L that set New York lofts afire. Wild Combination director Matt Wolf's loving hands-off documentary stitches old performance footage with first-person recollections from family and friends, and the result is a glimpse at a man whose life was cut tragically short. Thank goodness Russell was an obsessive archivist. He left behind nearly 1,000 tape reels of music.