

WILD COMBINATION IN PORTLAND

The Oregonian

April 29, 2008, Stan Hall

PDX Fest 2008 kicks off Wednesday night with "Wild Combination," a documentary about the late Arthur Russell, a cellist and songwriter who made great music in a number of disparate genres (folk, dance, chamber pop) but whose obsessive perfectionism was his biggest obstacle to wider exposure. A moody, gorgeously filmed tribute to a man whose sounds were not just ahead of their time but virtually outside of any time, 25-year-old Matt Wolf's film is among the best music documentaries in recent years.

May 1, 2008, Kristi Turnquist

Fortunately, Wednesday night's opening feature, "Wild Combination: A Portrait of Arthur Russell" was a perfect blend of intriguing subject and artful technique.

"Wild Combination" examines the life and work of Arthur Russell, an avant-garde composer, singer, musician, cellist and sometime disco producer, who died of AIDS in 1992. What could have been thuddingly conventional—lowa boy goes to New York, comes out, finds expression as an artist—is handled with sensitivity and feeling. Wolf interviews members of the New York art world, such as composer Philip Glass and the late Allen Ginsberg. During his short life, Russell found a place in the avant-garde world -- he worked at the famous performance center, the Kitchen, and collaborated with Ginsberg and David Byrne, among others.

With a limited supply of footage of Russell in performance, Wolf nevertheless suggests the man's personality—self-conscious about acne scars on his face, shy, eerily focused, unwilling to complete recordings, stubbornly protective of his music. And Russell's music -- transcendent, pulsing, achingly tender by turns—is mirrored in Wolf's use of re-created scenes, empty lowa landscapes, photographs from the '70s, and images of Russell at work in his apartment, surrounded by tapes, keyboards and microphones.

Best of all, Wolf doesn't fall into the too-hip-to-evoke-emotion trap. The core of the film are interviews with Russell's salt-of-the-earth Oskaloosa, lowa parents, and Russell's partner, Tom Lee. The affection and respect they feel for Russell comes through with utter sincerity, and makes his loss feel painfully real and intimate.

WILD COMBINATION IN PORTLAND (Continued)

M *the Portland* **MERCURY**

April 30, 2008, Erik Henriksen

Wild Combination: A Portrait of Arthur Russell, Matt Wolf's touching and gorgeously shot documentary about avant-garde singer/songwriter and producer Russell. Russell's evocative, captivating work was obscure when he recorded it in the '70s and '80s, but recent compilation albums have raised his profile significantly; *Wild Combination* ties together archival footage of Russell's life and music, insights from his collaborators (like Allen Ginsberg and Philip Glass), and interviews with everyone from Jens Lekman to Russell's charming parents. ("We never did understand his music too well," his mother says, and his father follows, "I call it music you can't really tap your foot to.")



Willamette Weekly: April 30, 2008, Aaron Mesh

Wild Combination: A Portrait of Arthur Russell is a swift, wistful documentary tracing the 40-year life of a musician from Okaloosa, Iowa, who moved to New York City and composed both club hits and faintly melodious cello arrangements before dying of AIDS in 1992. Russell's music was above all graceful—in recordings, he sounds like Nick Drake discovering disco—and director Matt Wolf's movie is true to its subject. *Wild Combination's* horizontal tracking shots accentuate the flatness of the Iowa plains; Russell's compassionate parents transcend it.