

February 2008

Wild Combination

Matt Wolf; USA 2008; Plexifilm/Region 0; 71 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.78:1; Features: 25 minutes of archival Arthur Russell performance footage, Allen Ginsberg's mantra at Russell's funeral, audio letter from Russell to his parents, covers of Russell songs by various artists

Film: Matt Wolf's documentary gives a visually inventive account of the life of Arthur Russell, a Midwest-born, gay 'funky white boy' and figure on the downtown New York scene who, from the mid-1970s until his death from Aids in 1992, created astonishing, singular music which moved between songwriting, avant-garde composition, disco and ambient soundscapes, and which is only now receiving its full due. The film began as a student project, with Wolf setting Russell's music to images shot from the Staten Island Ferry (a trip Russell would regularly take himself) but broadened into a fuller biographical portrait after Wolf contacted Russell's former lover, who introduced him to Russell's parents; their recollections of their son add a moving poignancy and compensate for the limited surviving footage of Russell himself. This is one of the finest music documentaries of recent years.

Disc: The generous and well-chosen extra features include an audio letter Russell recorded for his parents, extra footage of Russell performing live and film of Allen Ginsberg reciting a Buddhist mantra at Russell's funeral. (JB)