

Wild Combination is a documentary about obscure artist Arthur Russell who wrote, recorded and produced transcendent music during the 1970s and '80s. Director Matt Wolf weaved rare archival footage of Russell with staged re-enactment scenes and faux archival material shot by Jody Lee Lipes on Super 8 film. The result is a documentary that crafts a fascinating story of Russell, whose work has recently found a following 15 years after his death.

Super 8 supplies right aesthetic for **Wild Combination**

Wild Combination includes interviews with Russell's family, friends, and closest collaborators. The film portrays his growth as an artist whose music spanned a diverse range of styles. It faithfully depicts his struggle to find himself and success. The documentary also captures some of the cultural history of San Francisco and New York.

Wolf and Lipes are both New York University graduates. They had worked together on several projects both during film school and in their nascent careers.

Lipes explains that the Super 8 format provided the latitude they needed and also served their aesthetic goals. To help the audience understand Russell and his music, they shot "fake archival material" and "realistic re-enactments" in Super 8 film format.

"We wanted the re-enactments and staged archival footage to look like they were scenes from that period of Arthur's life," he says. "There's a scene where Arthur's father discovers drugs in

his bedroom. That was one of the very few dolly shots in the film, and the only one we lit while shooting Super 8 because there were no windows or light sources in the room. Everything else was shot in

"We wanted the re-enactments and staged archival footage to look like they were scenes from that period of Arthur's life."

natural, existing light. For all of the night exteriors, we would just find a pool of light, open up all the way, and embrace the darkness. One night exterior scene at the Hudson waterfront is reminiscent of one of Arthur's songs about lights, so we utilized silhouettes and the New Jersey skyline in the background. I really like shooting night exteriors naturally, and working on film allows me that freedom."

The Canon Super 8 camera was on a tripod 90-percent of the time, and other scenes were handheld. Lipes chose KODAK VISION2 500T 7218 film for night exteriors and interiors, and 7205 250D

film repurposed in Super 8 film cartridges for day exteriors.

Pro8mm Inc. in Burbank, California, processed the Super 8 film, and Technicolor in New York transferred it to HDCAM format,

applying a look-up table to get all the information possible from the negative to the tape stock. In addition to Super 8, VHS and high-definition video formats were also utilized for portions of the film. Any archival material that was discovered came in an array of formats in various conditions. Ultimately all of the footage was run through a Teranex machine at Final Frame in New York and brought up to a higher definition resolution. Teranex provides video processing solutions and partners with Kodak to use their proprietary film restoration and enhancement algorithms for image processing.

To accommodate the various formats in post-production, the filmmakers color corrected the documentary at Final Frame. "We put a little contrast back in and either desaturated or saturated footage slightly to create a really nice texture to the film that wasn't dramatically different from what we achieved in camera," says Lipes.

"Super 8 was a natural match for *Wild Combination*," adds Wolf. "We chose to leave the Super 8 material in a square, pillar-boxed frame to give it more contrast and attention. The material integrated quite easily with the archival material and other formats, and I think viewers struggle to distinguish real archival footage from the staged material."

Wild Combination had its world premiere at the Berlin International Film Festival, followed by screenings at IFC Center in New York, the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, and at the Edinburgh and Karlovy Vary international film festivals.