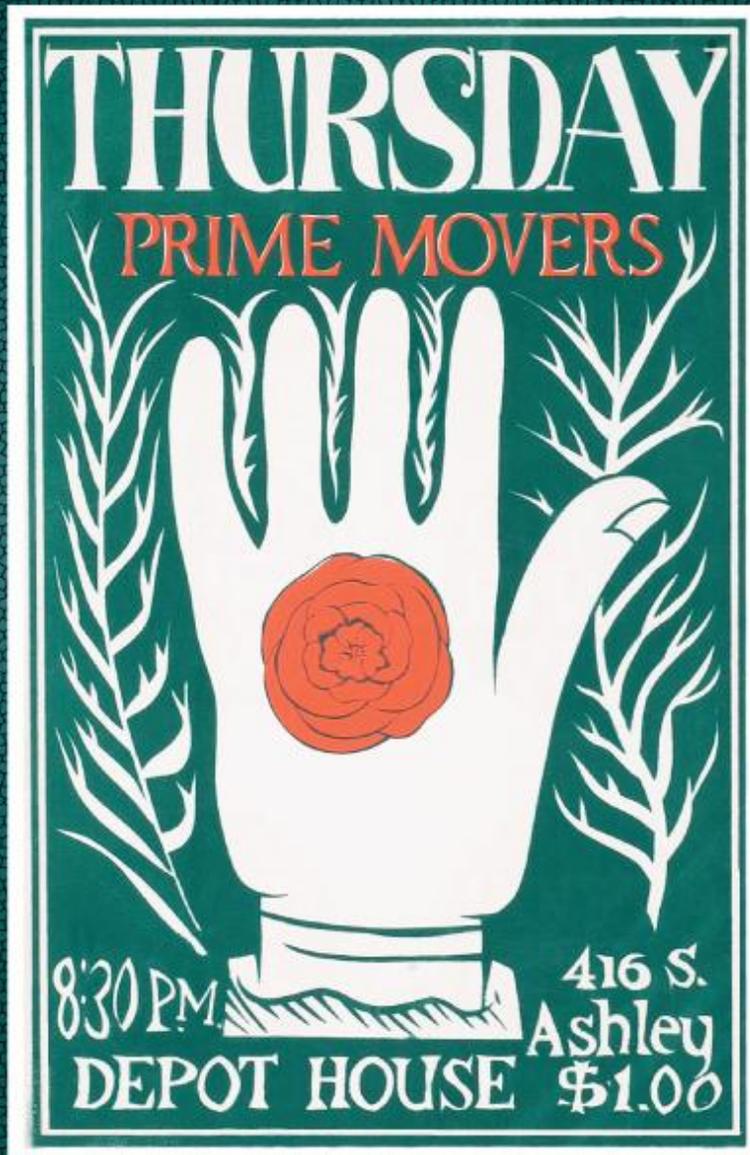


Classic Posters

The Interviews Book One



by Michael Erlewine

Classic Posters – The Interviews Book One

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to poster expert extraordinaire Eric King who patiently (and kindly) answered thousands of my questions over a period of many years. King also served as a host and guide for me in the Bay Area introducing me to the poster artists and collectors in Berkeley, San Francisco and points north. Eric King is good company.

Thank you Eric!

In addition, thanks to Phil Cushway, Jack Bodnar, Gary Grimshaw, Mark Arminsky, Sam Yeats, Jagmo (Nels Jacobson) and others for being kind enough to share their extensive poster collections with me for photographing.

I also want to thank Alton Kelley, Stanley Mouse, David Singer, Frank Kozik, Grant Mechinan, Penelope Fried, Phil Cushway, Greg Davidson, Russ Gibb, Randy Tutan, Victor Moscoso, Eddie Wilson, Chet Helms, Emek, Jermaine Rogers, and Dennis King for making time to interview with me.

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Cover poster art from 1967 by Michael Erlewine

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ClassicPosters.com - History

I have been in love with music concert posters since 1965 when I ended up in charge of advertising for my group the Prime Movers Blues Band. I guess no one else was interested or could figure out how to advertise but me, so before I knew it I had converted a small attic room in the Prime Mover House at 114 N. Division in Ann Arbor Michigan to a silkscreen shop.

It was there I spent who-knows-how-many hours cutting Rubylith screens and printing band posters. Replicating an image you love for a band you love was a slow but deeply satisfying process. The rest of the band (and me) would then take the freshly printed posters and put them up all over town. The posters didn't last long either. The next day many of them would be gone and we would have to do it all over again. I wonder where those posters are today.

This was in the mid-1960s and concert music posters were reaching a new audience and a new era. Of course, the main poster scene was in San Francisco. Eventually we heard about the poster artists there and saw their. Wow! We loved it.

So it is no wonder that my love for concert posters remained later when I became an archivist of popular culture and started AMG: the All-Music Guide, the All-Movie Guide, and the All-Game Guide. When I sold AMG in 1998 I had plans for the All-Poster Guide, but the company that bought AMG was not interested in my ideas once they purchased my company. The All-Poster Guide was canned from day one, but I never forgot about it.

Some years later, after I was kind of pushed out of my former company, as entrepreneurs often are, I decided to create the All-Poster Guide all by myself. However that URL on the web (by that time) belonged to someone else so I settled on ClassicPosters.com and dug in.

Some years went by as I assiduously compiled data on rock posters. I also began to photograph posters so that years from now scholars could study them. In the basement of my library/studio I built my own vacuum table and paid \$5000 for the latest professional camera in 2001, the Nikon D1x. Today that same camera is worth maybe \$300.

With my vacuum table to hold the posters in place, special lights to illuminate the posters, my Nikon D1x, I began to photograph and measure concert posters. Before I was done I had photographed over 30,000 posters, handbills, postcards, and original art.

Collectors from all over the country eventually trusted me enough to either bring their collections to my studio themselves or (while holding their breath) dare to send this priceless art overnight by FedEx.

And I made a number of trips to San Francisco and the Bay Area to meet the artists and collectors of these posters, those that were still with us.

To make a long story short, although I built a wonderful poster site, because I was delayed in my original impulse and idea, by the time my site was operational I had competition in WolfgangVault.com. They had something I did not have, which was deep pockets. I had no way to compete

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with them and they built a wonderful site and also bought up almost every major poster collection I know of.

It was disappointing but that is the way life works sometimes. You snooze, you lose. I was a day late and a dollar short, as they say. Anyway that is all water over the dam at this point.

I seem to keep getting older and I am told that is a good thing compared to the alternative, so it is time for me to share some of my work with anyone out there interested in concert posters. Now I am careful to say “Concert Poster” because I have no interest in what are called “Promotional Posters,” however beautiful they may be. I only ever cared about actual posters that were made and put up around town for a real live music concert. We won’t be discussing promotional posters here.

This is the first of what I hope will be several volumes of material on concert posters. I apologize in advance for any typos and the less-than-elegant formatting of this book. I don’t have the time or interest just now to clean it all up, although as you will see it is quite readable. I have too many other things to take care of while I am still on the planet, so please accept what I can offer, warts and all.

And ClassicPosters.com is still very much alive although run by someone other than myself. Please visit their wonderful site for images, etc. I have donated all my 30,000+ images, articles, data, database, etc. to them and also the the Bentley Historical Library at the University of Michigan, where my work will be available to scholars in the future.

What you have here are a group of seventeen interviews I did with some of

the most important poster artists and collectors I have been able to meet. Some of them are short, but most of them are long to very long. If you love concert posters and their history, at least in the mid-Sixties, then these articles will be a fun read for you.

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Interview with Chet Helms

by Michael Erlewine

[Chet Helms not only founded the Family Dog at the Avalon, but more important Helms was an incredible force in the San Francisco movement and a kind and generous person to all.]

Background in Texas

Michael Erlewine: What was your given name Chet?

Chet Helms: August 2nd, 1942.

Chet Helms: Born in Santa Maria, CA.

Chet Helms: Chester Leo Helms, Jr.

Michael Erlewine: You've done so much I can't hope to... everyone says you have a wealth of stories and knowledge. Basically, what I'd like to know is: how did you get to California or to this area of California? How did you get involved in the scene? How did you get started in this whole dance-hall scene?

Chet Helms: Chester Leo Helms, Jr.

Michael Erlewine: How did you get to California or to this area of California? How did you get involved in the scene? How did you get started in these whole dance-hall scene?

Chet Helms: Well, I think that's how it seems to be getting written in history right now. I think I and a lot of other people started this whole dance-hall scene. I was certainly one of the, I don't know, inner circle of maybe ten or fifteen people who kind of generated it.

My background was that I was...well let's put it this way: my background for presenting shows had to do with having grown up, after my father passed away when I was nine, under the tutelage, if

you will, of my grandfather. He was a fundamentalist Baptist minister who essentially made his living and way in the world by starting little churches all over Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and back there. And he had the Worth Bible College, and he had a correspondence school. You could take private lessons. You just sent him money and ultimately got some kind of a little doctorate of divinity or something of that order. But basically, many of the same fundamentals for creating and producing churches apply to creating and producing shows. So, a lot of the skills that I had, that I brought to that, came, really, pretty directly out of, in a sense, being back stage at a church. You know.

Michael Erlewine: Hmm, what would some of those skills be?

Chet Helms: Well, promotional skills, for one thing. How to communicate to the world that you're doing something at a particular time and place. Part of that came out the fact that my uncles were printers. I think my uncles and my grandfather got into printing initially, so they could publish Bible tracks. But to make a living at it, they also printed advertisements for newspapers and broadsides for local supermarkets and things of that order. My brothers and I had a canvassing distribution business when we were teenagers, which doesn't sound like much now, but we were makin' two bucks an hour, when there were plenty of grown men making fifty, sixty, seventy-five cents an hour in Texas. This was primarily because we guaranteed our work.

And if we covered one of these new tract-house subdivisions with hand bills and someone found some in a gutter or

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something of that order, if there was any question whatsoever about our coverage of it, we went right back immediately into that neighborhood and did it over again a second time. As you know, it's a tedious, monotonous, grueling (particularly in Texas heat) kind of work. More often than not, when people hired people to do that, the things ended up in gutters or in garbage cans and that sort of thing. I think we were, in a sense, too religious to do it that way, and also we were kind of, to some degree, supervised by my uncles and grandfather, who ran the print shops that got us the jobs.

And you know, for kids, we did pretty good at that. And later, when I was running shows here at the Avalon, I had my brother. He did all my canvassing and poster posting and things like that. He was the only person I knew that would do it in, essentially, an obsessive kind of way, and it would get done and they wouldn't be in a dumpster somewhere. He was the only person I could count on to get an ulcer doin' it, you know. I knew it would get taken care of.

From a promotional stand point, and I think it's kind of central to the whole poster thing, kind of at the core of my beliefs about promotion, that while the first order of promotion is the word of mouth; the second order, the most intimate means of communicating an event to people, is through a handbill or broadside because, again, it's a one-on-one contact. It's a person saying, "Here take this flyer, be here or be square," so to speak. My brother, in those days, really was my main conduit of information from the street. He was a very important gauge to me of how we

were coming across to the public. Because, in the course of his travels all over the Bay Area to put up the posters and to hand out hand bills and leave stacks of hand bills, people talked to him. "Oh I went to that show and that guy sucked," or, you know, "I had a hard time with the doorman and my friend said he had a hard time with the doorman," all this kind of information.

It came back to me through my brother, so it was a very important kind of gauge. I was a printer's devil in letterpress shops as a kid. I set type by hand and melted down all this, you know, slag type and stuff like that. I could run a Linotype machine, just a little bit. They were just beginning to train me a little bit on that. I was in charge of melting down all of the cuts and recasting from those little blotter paper molds with the casting machine. I'd make up the cuts, you know. They'd get mailed to you in the form of these paper molds, essentially, and then there was a way that you'd mask up this thing on the casting machine. You would pour the hot lead and antimony into it. I always had little pits in my arms that would never heal, because the metal blowback antimony is pretty toxic stuff. And those casting machines would regularly spew metal back at you and stuff like that. And I always had belt burns on my arms, because these big ol' presses that we'd use for the advertiser newspapers and stuff were built out of cast iron; built in 1880s, but still running. The big drum presses and newspaper presses were always breakin' down 'cause they had these big leather belts, and the most common thing that happened to them is that the leather belt would go and then my uncle would have to get in there and

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replace the leather belt or mend it or that sort of thing.

So that happened so frequently, he'd always leave the belt guards off, so as not to have to be taking them on and off all the time. So if you weren't careful, you'd walk into one of those belts. You'd be carrying a whole stack of posters or handbills or something like that and just brush against one of those moving belts and it'd burn your arm. I always had streaks on my arms from, you know, things like that.

Anyway, I spent a goodly time as a printer's devil. I always loved printing, loved pretty much anything to do with books or typography. Of course, my uncle used to get all these sample books, and he'd get so many of them, he'd toss them in the garbage. There were typography or big, thick books of stock cuts that you could buy little iconographic things, you know, printed one time in a big catalog book. You could order the little paper mats to cast these things from. And I'd always haul these things out of the garbage. I was always fascinated by them, and I'd hang on to them.

Michael Erlewine: Did you pour some of them, make them?

Chet Helms: Yeah, yeah,

Michael Erlewine: Oh, these weren't the molds?

Chet Helms: These weren't the molds.

Michael Erlewine: I see.

Chet Helms: You would order it from the company and they would mail you this kind of a papier-mâché mold, some kind of wet paper that was formed over it and then became the mold for it.

I first came to California in 1962, for a couple of reasons - really three immediate reasons. One was that I was born in California and I had a lot of idyllic memories of my childhood, when my father was alive. I wasn't happy about moving to Texas at the time that we did.

Michael Erlewine: What age were you when you moved to Texas?

Chet Helms: Nine years old. I considered myself into beat poetry and I was writing poetry and doing my obligatory hitchhike from coast to coast ... duty, to earn my stripes as a beatnik.

Michael Erlewine: And when did you come to San Francisco?

Chet Helms: I came back here in 1962, and I guess I was about 19 or 20.

Michael Erlewine: You came to this area?

Chet Helms: To San Francisco, right. Why I came to San Francisco is ... actually I think you made reference to this yourself about coming to Venice as a beatnik wannabe, but that was a major motivating factor for me. I considered myself into beat poetry and I was writing poetry and doing my obligatory hitchhike from coast to coast ... duty, to earn my stripes as a beatnik. I had read somewhere that a lot of beatniks got their mail on the bulletin board at City Lights Books, so when I got to San Francisco, that became my mail drop, and it probably was for about five years ... several years anyway.

Actually it was my primary mail drop for about three years, and as I had offices and things like that, then of course I was getting my mail there, But you know, for

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a good five years there were still letters coming from friends, who were traveling different parts of the world, that would be posted on the board at City Lights.

So one reason was to kind of regain my childhood, in a sense. I had wonderful memories of California as a child and so that was part of the motivation. Part of the motivation was to come to beatnik Mecca, you know.

Michael Erlewine: I remember that.

Chet Helms: City Lights Bookstore, the Co-Existence Bagel Shop, North Beach, and the Coffee Gallery, and all these places I had heard of.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Chet Helms: Then the other specific instance was a dear friend of mine, a graduate student at the university, was in the process of getting married and he was marrying a woman named Sandy Breuden ****??. She and David Frieberg, who later played bass with Quicksilver Messenger Service and was with Jefferson Starship. Anyway, David Frieberg and she and a guy with a long Polish name that I could never pronounce ... the three of them had set out as mendicant folk singers for peace. And they essentially were going on a peace journey to Moscow. They started with no money, just hitchhiking, and got as far as Mexico City. They were deported from Mexico as 'comunistas', as communists. They weren't communists, but they were deported to the nearest Mexican consulate, which happened to be in Austin, Texas. So I was at the University of Texas at the time.

Michael Erlewine: What were you studying?

Chet Helms: I went originally as a math major, but within about three weeks of being in school, they came to me and said, "Well, you did very well on the I.Q. test; you did very well on your SATs; you kind of aced the University of Texas entrance exam ... we're givin' you credit for this course and this course and this course." It was mostly English and math classes that I got advanced standing in.

And they said, "But you qualify for plan two," which is a liberal-arts tutorial program, where I'd have two years of fairly conventional classes, although they were structured for all the students in the plan-two program. Then I'd have two years where I would pick my own fields of study and I'd have a mentor, you know, on the faculty. And I could pretty much study anything in classroom or outside classroom, at my leisure. And frankly, I think I needed the structure and discipline of the conventional college education, but I elected to go into plan two and, as I joke about it, I kind of "plan two'd" right out of college, you know? Heh, I'll get to that one of these days, I "plan to."

Michael Erlewine: Right

Chet Helms: But I think that probably the main factor in my dropping out of college was just because with this kind of fundamentalist background, I was so musically and socially and artistically deprived in a lot of ways that, when I went to college, I had a lot of things to catch up to. I'd never dated and I'd never had a girlfriend, you know. I'd had a few odd beers here and there, but I was from a teetotaling family, so it was all very secretive, when I had done it. I just stumbled upon flats of peyote buds, being sold as decorative cactus...

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Michael Erlewine: No pot?

Chet Helms: Oh, not at all. Actually pot was a relative rarity, in general, then. My first psychedelic actually was in '61 or '62 ... I guess it was actually in '61. One of my roommates was a graduate student. I was an undergraduate. I don't know why, but my pals were all graduate students. You know, the guys I hung out with, my roommates, the people that I was involved with. Anyway, one roommate was an anthropologist or in the anthropology department and he had gone to Mexico to study the peyote ceremonies of the Tarahumara Indians.

Michael Erlewine: Right,

Chet Helms: And, as an official part of the university anthropological project, so he had gone and sat in on a lot of these sessions. He had never consumed it, but took notes, you know, went into the sweat lodges while they took these things, and kept notes, and so on. He was wandering with his girlfriend in a nursery in San Antonio, Texas and just stumbled upon flats of peyote buds, being sold as decorative cactus.

Michael Erlewine: Wow.

Chet Helms: And they realized what they were, because he had seen them in Mexico. So he bought a couple of flats and brought them home and ate five or six raw peyote buds.

Michael Erlewine: That'll do it.

Chet Helms: And we saw that he had a good time, though he was nauseous and what not, and that he didn't seem to suffer from it, certainly not on a permanent basis at all, you know. So about two weeks later, I did the same, but interesting ... that was totally unguided. Actually, everybody was

asleep. The ones that were at home were asleep, and other folks were out. And I ate six peyote buds, raw peyote buds, washed down with Coca-Cola. [Laughs].

Michael Erlewine: Really.

Chet Helms: Other than the chandelier trying to grab me a few times, it was a pretty good trip. I had this kinda three-pronged chandelier, and when I first started coming on to it, it seemed like it just grabbing me ... hands reaching forward ...

Michael Erlewine: I had a tiger on the wall; that was my first one too. When did you first have acid?

Chet Helms: 1964.

Michael Erlewine: At what part of the year?

Chet Helms: Probably sometime in ... I would guess it was probably March or April.

Michael Erlewine: Same for me, May of 1964 in Berkeley.

Chet Helms: Yeah it was right about that time. I had been a speed freak. I had been shootin' speed and so on and so forth, so somebody gave me a sugar cube.

Michael Erlewine: Oh yeah.

Chet Helms: And I said I'd heard about LSD, but just very peripherally, you know, and they showed me this sugar cube and I said, "What's that?" and they said, "It's LSD," and I said, "Well what's it like?" They said, "Oh, it's like speed," you know ... "

Michael Erlewine: [Laughs].

Chet Helms: You know, without hesitation, I just unwrapped the thing

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and popped it, you know, and so on. I had a great trip, but had this enormous apocalyptic heaven and hell vision, where I could see my one path going to destruction, if I continued to shoot speed and live this life, and then I saw this whole open horizon.

Michael Erlewine: Isn't that wonderful?

Chet Helms: Right.

Michael Erlewine: Isn't acid wonderful, what it was.

Chet Helms: It was. It was indeed, and I'll always believe that in the long haul in history, it was a very positive thing.

Michael Erlewine: Amen.

Chet Helms: And it's sad to see how it's been demonized.

Michael Erlewine: Sometimes I wonder if it's not the same anymore. I mean first of all, culturally we are not in the same spot, so that it couldn't do the same exact thing, but we were coming out of the '50s.

Chet Helms: Sure.

Michael Erlewine: Pretty repressed kind of.

Chet Helms: Sure, Sure.

Michael Erlewine: Anyway.

Chet Helms: Well I think the LSD's the same; I don't think there's any difference. There is a big difference ... I think where the biggest difference in LSD consumption is in what they call 'disco doses' or 'hippie doses'. Our hippie dose was usually 180-250 micrograms. That's what we were taking on sugar cubes or tabs and things like that.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Chet Helms: The typical dose of LSD that a kid takes these days is about 80 micrograms. And I don't know if they still use those terms, but 10-15 years ago my kids and various people, they made a distinction between disco doses, which was about 80 mics, and hippie doses, which was around 200 mics.

Michael Erlewine: The hippie dose was a stronger dose.

Chet Helms: Oh yes.

Michael Erlewine: Certainly was strong when I took it.

Chet Helms: Well see, I think ... I tend to concur with Leary and Alpert, who pointed out early that they thought that 180 micrograms was a threshold dose; that to get the benefit of an LSD experience, you needed to take enough that your body went into a total catharsis. And they suggested, and it was my experience, that if you took less than what they called a threshold dose, which was capable of catapulting you into catharsis, certain things that bothered you, for instance, or perceived fears or dangers or things like that, you would end up just kind of grinding on them, and that was always kind of my experience. And I think a lot of the bad experiences that people have where they say, "Oh, that LSD was with speed." What I experience is that (I haven't taken LSD now in about 25 years), but my experience back then was that if I took a low dose like 70-80 mics, it was very much like speed. It just kind of stimulated me, made me grind on things, but somehow at about 180 mics or above, there was some kind of a full on emotional, physical catharsis that happened.

Michael Erlewine: Right. Definitely

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Chet Helms: That was very much of the level of almost like an electrical discharge. And I still kind of believe that that's an accurate principle.

Michael Erlewine: Certainly the first time I took it was like a total catharsis, I mean I saw all of the heavens raining blood ... I had to die almost.

Chet Helms: Uhh huh.

Michael Erlewine: I didn't take it a ton of times.

Chet Helms: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: I treated it very religiously.

Chet Helms: I probably, over that whole period, up thru the early „70s I would say, I took LSD around 60 times, you know 50-60 times.

Michael Erlewine: That's more than I did.

Chet Helms: 50-60 times. I was never a believer in consciously going where there was going to be a lot of people and a lot of activity. So I pretty much always went to the woods or had a quiet time in an apartment.

Michael Erlewine: I pretty much found a space to myself. It was never a party atmosphere.

Chet Helms: Right, exactly. The times I had LSD in public situations, by and large, with very few exceptions, were times when I got dosed. And it was usually some cute little chickadee, who brought you a nice cold apple juice and you'd been dancin' or smokin' pot anyway, and you'd go "gulp gulp gulp." Then, five minutes later you'd say, "Oh no, not again." [Laughs].

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Chet Helms: Ah, I was never a believer in dosing people.

Michael Erlewine: No, me neither.

Chet Helms: Though I must own that I kind of looked the other way when Kool-Aid was brought in and things like that. I just, you know, I never provided it to people, but on the other hand I didn't look too carefully if it was being provided.

Michael Erlewine: I interviewed Kelley, Was he on the scene before you? Or how did you ...

Chet Helms: Yeah. Well, I don't know if he was on the scene before me, but we were, Ok.

Michael Erlewine: I'm trying to understand how the scene arose ...

Chet Helms: Ok.

Chet Helms: From my viewpoint ... I realize it's my unique viewpoint.

Michael Erlewine: That's right.

Chet Helms: What happened to me was, in early '64, several things happened. One, I took LSD. Two, I met the woman who was to become my wife, and three, Luria Castell, who at a much later date was one of the founders of Family Dog with Alton Kelley, a man named Jack Towle, and a woman name Ellen Harmon. Anyway, her boyfriend at the time was a man named David Gregory, who was my best friend, and we were speed freaks together, basically. She wanted him to get off speed and she wanted me to get off speed. She had a couple of women roommates. They were all state college students, I think, at the time. Terrence Hallinan, our present district attorney, was one of the residents of this house.

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But anyway, Terrence was hardly ever there and I slept in his bed when he wasn't around or on the couch when he was.

And David slept with Luria. But essentially, she and her girlfriends sometime early in '64 brought us into their house at 26 Genoa Place (SP?) in North Beach and basically fed us, fucked us, massaged us, but wouldn't let us out of the house. They wouldn't let us anywhere near speed, for which I am eternally grateful.

During the course of that, at Luria's, there I met the woman who was to be my wife for six years, subsequently, Loraine Helms. So, many aspects ... and around that time, somewhere, I think, I had already moved out of Luria's again, when I took LSD, but it, that was all kind of early in '64.

But the other thing that happened was that The Beatles really hit big time. And Luria, myself, Terrence Hallinan, the present district attorney here, all of us, had been political activists. I had gotten my start in it ... Actually I was a young republican in Texas, because my stepfather was Korean and I was appalled when I got to the University of Texas and there were people... there were black people who, in their freshman western civ classes and freshman English classes, were assigned to attend certain movies and write reviews of them, but could not perform that part of the requirement because the only two theatres in Austin that were playing these movies were both owned by ABC Paramount. They were both right across the street from the campus and they didn't allow Negroes.

Michael Erlewine: Wow. I remember that time.

Chet Helms: And so we picketed those theatres for two years straight.

Michael Erlewine: Really.

Chet Helms: I pretty much began in my first year in college there. I actually worked on the John Tower and on the Goldwater campaign, as a young republican. But I was on the steering committee of Students for Direct Action, which later became S.D.S.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Chet Helms: I was on the steering committee, and it was kind of like they always said, "Oh yeah, you know, we're really bipartisan and here is our republican, you know. Talk to him," you know.

So, needless to say, over that kind of two-year span, my politics shifted, fairly radically, leftward. Probably by the time I dropped out of the university, I was Young People's Socialist League, if not worse. But [laughs] kind of Norman Thomas socialist at the time. That's kind of where I was at, though I was very familiar with tract literature of the socialist workers party, C.P. stuff and all that, as well. But I was a little closer, I think, to the Norman Thomas variety of socialists, kind of social democrats at that point.

My step dad, as I said, was Korean and so I had experienced, not a huge amount, but a minimal amount of racism, kind of first hand, because of the way people treated my dad and little kids on the street going, "Ack-ack-ak-ack ... Get the dirty Jap." You know, stuff like that.

Michael Erlewine: God.

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Chet Helms: So it was something I was conscious about, and I was a line captain on the steering Committee and so on. And then I became ... Before I left Texas, I became part of the peace movement and the Vietnam movement, and the Vietnam War movement. In Texas they had just passed a treason and sedition law. We all knew that the first time it hit a federal court, it would get tossed out, but nevertheless they could arrest you in Texas for advocating against the Vietnam War. It was considered sedition or treason by law there. And there were other things: people would throw full beer bottles at you or lit cigarettes, you know, just people passing by in cars and sometimes they'd get out of cars and try to bully you and, you know, stuff like that. And that was much more incendiary, actually, even then trying to integrate the theatres. We did integrate the theatres, by the way.

Michael Erlewine: Really.

Chet Helms: But how we did it was by getting to Leonard Goldenson's rabbi. Leonard Goldenson was the head of ABC Paramount. It was after two years of picketing and all kind of political pressure. What finally turned the trick was his rabbi [laughs] got him by the short hairs and told him you know that this wasn't right and so on. Anyway, the big frustration at that time was the getting any kind of socially progressive messages into any kind of mainstream media. The only real viable route of doing that at the time was some kind of confrontational demonstration, which was always kind of presented in a sense in a negative context.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Chet Helms: A clash, you know. So when The Beatles came along, you know, and there was this kind of level of double and triple entendre in the songs, and suddenly, "Oh!, that's the way you do it." So a lot of people here in San Francisco, politicos primarily, were scrambling to put together message bands. I participated in two or three of those projects, but by and large they were more motivation than musicianship, you know? By and large, they fell apart because there weren't enough real musicians in the construct.

Chet Helms: So, after one of these attempts that kind of dissolved, a friend of mine came to me and said, "Look. Over at 1090 Page Street there's a bunch of musicians that live in that building, but there's also an old ballroom in the basement there, and the building's managed by Rodney Albin, Peter Albin's brother." Peter later went on to become the bass player in Big Brother. So I went to Rodney and ended up, for I think it was 20 bucks or 25 bucks a week, we rented this ballroom, which could hold about maybe 250-300. I mean really crowded. It wasn't that huge, but we started these open jam sessions every Tuesday night, and with the idea of putting together a message band out of it, you know. And also think that I thought that, if I surrounded myself with musicians, it would rub off, you know. And so we ran open jam sessions there for several months and it started from being about 30 musicians and about maybe ten family members and pals and hangers on. That equation radically shifted, literally over four or five weeks, to where we had about, I don't know, maybe 12 musicians and 75 people that were friends and family and hangers on or something. And it kind of

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started, in our opinion, getting away from its original purpose. We weren't really trying to open a club, we were trying to, you know, find a group of people who could all play together, so we could create this band and spread the word to the world or whatever.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Chet Helms: Kind of on that note. I was raised to be an evangelist and I probably still am, in my own way; I have the technique and the craft of evangelism. I just don't have the same content that I was given as a child to promulgate, you know? So, out of that, out of those jam sessions, came the band Big Brother and the Holding Company and I became their manager.

Family Dog

One of the other things that happened in the meantime was that Luria Castell and Jack Towle, Ellen Harmon, and Alton Kelley ... They all lived in a run down house, euphemistically referred to as the "Dog House" over on Pine Street. And we had all been kind of grass dealers, basically, but not a lot of people were trying to legitimize their lives trying to do something on the straight side of things.

And so these folks ... Bill Ham who later went on to be one of the primary light show performers, and, in many ways, largely invented that whole technique. He wasn't the only one, or necessarily even the first one, but he was the guy I think that really brought it up to being a real masterful thing. Anyway, he was into all these Japanese marital arts. He was highly trained in Kendo, in particular, and wore long black robes and had a long black beard and long black hair, at the time. He always had

those practice swords, the wooden practice swords, and so on. But through that connection, he had become the ... He worked for a Japanese property management company that owned four Victorian houses in that same block on Pine Street, and he actually still lives in one of them, all these many years later. But he maintained four houses. He had big dogs himself and didn't mind dogs and these were very run down properties that he was managing for offshore owners, and so on. And so he would allow dogs, which, in an urban environment, a hard thing to find is a place where you can rent an apartment where dogs are welcome. So that's why there were so many dogs in the Dog House. That's because he would allow them as a landlord and so we kind of aggregated - all these people who had dogs. And there were a lot of dogs in that house, and so many dogs that that's kind of how it came to be referred to is the "Dog House." The dogs kind of [laughs] ran as a pack and kind of ran the show in a lot of ways with everybody.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Chet Helms: They had accumulated a certain amount of capital. They didn't want to be dealing grass anymore; they wanted to do something different, I realize you may wish to edit some of this.

Michael Erlewine: Well you'll get to see it all.

Chet Helms: Yeah.

Chet Helms: And they were thrashing around for an idea of something to do with their capital, some way to legitimize what they were doing, to be in a

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legitimate business as opposed to contraband.

And one of the first ideas, according to a friend of mine, Philip Hammond, who did live in that house and who had dogs and was part of that crowd. He claims that at the kitchen table, there, the name Family Dog came from (according to him) the fact that they had come up with this idea at one point of doing a pet cemetery to essentially get money from the idle rich, the people who could afford to indulge their deceased animals in a formal burial, you know, ceremony and all that stuff.

Chet Helms: Somewhere in that period of time, they heard about and decided to attend the jam sessions I was doing at 1090 Page Street. They came over there and there were about 300 people there and it was wall to wall, at a time when pot was extremely illegal, and they did put people in jail for one joint and that sort of thing. People were smoking pot pretty freely and underage people were drinking red wine and you know it was quite a scene. And they came there and they saw this thing and that was where ... I read an interview and I've been trying to find it since. It may be in Derek Taylor's book. I am not sure, but anyway, I saw an interview once with Luria Castell in which she said: "Yeah, we went to this jam session at 1090 Page Street and we saw what was happening there, and we said, 'Yeah, this is what we want to do.'"

So, the thing was beginning to get kind of unwieldy, with the number of non-performers attending it and so on. So at a point, I decided that I would discourage people from coming by charging money. So, we charged fifty cents, which you know doesn't sound

like a lot now, but it was a fair amount then. There were several places where you could get a meal for fifty cents. So that was kind of the context of it then.

Anyway, I started charging fifty cents and, foolishly, the initial idea was to get people to stop coming in such large numbers, but it kind of had the opposite effect. All of the sudden, it was kind of "the place to be." And frankly, it generated a lot of problems for us, because suddenly they felt they had paid, they had rights -- that sort of thing. It created kind of some liabilities for us by taking their money.

And so eventually it started attracting a wider and wider circle, and then, kind of toward the end there, it was just kind of a bunch of drunk and unrelated-to-that-scene kids, you know, that would show up. I showed up at the door one day and because I had long hair, these guys were giving me a hard time, you know, and so I just said, "Look, you know, I bet you come here for the jam sessions?" "Yeah what's it to ya?" you know? I said, "Well what it is to me is, you know, I do this for free, for love, and you're a bunch of drunken assholes, you know, and I'm not doin' it for you, so there won't be a jam session tonight, or ever again, you know. You finished it." [Laughs].

And so that was kind of the end of it, but out of that came Big Brother and the Holding Company, and I became their manager. And part of the context that somehow gets lost, mainly because, at an advanced age, I find most of us, including myself, never used to drink. But now, partially because of heart problems, I drink a couple glasses of red wine a day. I never really cared for the

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sensation of being drunk, you know, I always liked things that woke me up, or, consequently, the speedy things I took like coke or speed or pot or psychedelics, something like that -- something that caused your mind to be more active, rather than less active. I never liked downers, never liked barbiturates or heroin or smack or any of those things.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Chet Helms: Never liked things that took you in that depressing sort of way. Something that people don't understand very often anymore about the Avalon Ballroom and the Fillmore Auditorium is that neither the Avalon nor the Fillmore served alcohol, during that whole period.

Michael Erlewine: And you didn't let people bring it in.

Chet Helms: Well, people did sneak it in, but we confiscated it, if they were too open about it. And frankly, we were pretty militantly anti-alcohol; most of us were, at the time. We kind of were against alcohol, you know, because of what we'd seen it do to the parental generation.

Michael Erlewine: You bet.

Chet Helms: Here you've got a generation of young bands, with long hair, that are disavowing alcohol and disallowing tobacco, to some degree, but alcohol was a large part of our focus at that time. So the main venues for bands to play were places that sold alcohol, so they didn't want us there, „cause we're telling people "Don't drink."

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Chet Helms: So, it kind of in the end, fell on people like myself and my

partner, John Carpenter, who managed the Great Society featuring Grace Slick, and I had Big Brother at the time. We were partners and it kind of fell on people like us, or in that kind of role, to create the venues that would showcase our bands. Because there was a limited number of prom parties and bar mitzvahs and birthday parties and stuff that you could play, you know. And we couldn't get in to the conventional club or lounge circuit because of the anti-alcohol stand. And the four people who started the Family Dog ...

Chet Helms: This was in 1965 and this also came out of all of Luria's, but of all of our political connections, probably the strongest and most left-oriented union here was the longshoreman union. And so, the first three Family Dog dances were done in the Longshoreman's Hall, in North Beach, in the Fisherman's Wharf area. It's the only domed building up there -- a geodesic dome. The acoustics were horrible, have always been horrible, still are horrible, mainly because „cause it is a dome. And not only that, it's like a sheet-metal dome, the resonance of all the panels and stuff.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Chet Helms: Out of the inspiration they got out of the jam sessions, they started doing rock n' roll shows, although I don't think they thought of it as doing rock n' roll shows, I think they literally thought of it as doing a rent party, more than anything else. It was more of that nature. And so they did it in Longshoreman's Hall and they had the Jefferson Airplane, and the Great Society and the Loading Zone, and I'm trying to think whether it was ... I think the Lovin' Spoonful might have been on

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that. I think it was at a time when the Lovin' Spoonful had just had a big hit. Anyway, they had one major out-of-town band as kind of the headliner.

And I brought the first strobe, I would say, ever, to rock n' roll. Actually that was the first to a formal rock n' roll thing. The strobe that I brought was built by a man named Don Buchla, who invented some of the first music synthesizers, the Buchla Synthesizer, and he had recreated these strobes based on military strobes that had been used on planes to distract pilots in dog fights, you know. That's where the strobe came from. It was invented originally as a weapon. It would produce intense bursts of light when you were in a dogfight in the air. They would set off these blasts of light in the opposing pilot's eyes, essentially blinding him. And that was what it was invented for originally, but Buchla somewhere or another found them.

Also, sometime in that same year, I think it was the Limelighters (or one of those kind of theatrical groups) had done the play "Pantacles," by Michele De Gelderoff (SP?), and they had done a little Chaplin-esque bit with the strobe. That was the first time I ever saw a strobe used in a theatrical thing, to get that kind of movie-like stop action. But anyway, Ramone Sindair (SP?) worked at the San Francisco Tape Music Center and was a good friend of mine and he had shown me this strobe. So I had asked him if I could borrow it and take it to this first Family Dog dance, which I did. I had also borrowed it from him and taken it to the Open Theatre in Berkley previously to that, for a Big Brother and the Holding Company gig that we did at the Open Theatre and it's interesting to

me because one of the women who... Two brothers and their wives kind of opened the Open Theatre originally, the Jacquopette Family (SP?). And one of them, I can't remember her first name, I've heard, I've seen in print ... I've been told by a couple of people that she now claims that she brought the first strobe too... but she is talking about the strobe that I had asked Ramone Sindair (SP) to bring to this event, you know, which he did, and so on. But at any event, it's not a big deal, but I think I was probably the first person who brought a strobe light to one of those events, and I brought one at that first Family Dog dance. But I think what was really significant and important about that first Family Dog dance at the Longshoreman's was pure recognition. There were about twelve hundred people there, and you walked in there and everyone, for lack of a better term, was in their hippie drag. You know, they were in their thrift-shop clothes or their hair was long or they were dressed like a cowboy or they were dressed like a river-boat gambler or they were dressed like a gypsy, or, you know, that sort of thing. By and large, cowboys and Indians was the kind of motif that most American hippies were into. European hippies were gypsies. That was the romantic free spirit iconography or whatever. But anyway, I remember walkin' into that first Family Dog dance and seeing twelve hundred people that I recognized instantly were just like me. They were my kind.

And as opposed to feeling isolated, suddenly I felt part of a much larger community and I remember a sense of sanctuary and a sense of relief, like, "there's twelve hundred people, there's not a facility large enough for us, for

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them to arrest us all," you know. And that was a real threat at the time. There was somehow strength in numbers and in this pure recognition, you know.

They did three shows in the Longshoreman's Hall in the fall of '65. And then Luria, with other partners, did two subsequent Family Dog shows in the "California Hall"; in the spring of '66 I guess it was. No, actually it couldn't have been in the spring, because we did our... John and I did our first show in the Fillmore on February 19th, so it must have been... I guess the California Hall events must have been in the fall and winter, also. Anyway, all together they did five shows, which I would describe as critical successes and financial disasters, basically. At that juncture, three of them, besides Luria, decided to take off to Mexico; they had a lot of bills, were under a lot of financial stress, and so and so forth. John Carpenter and I, begin again dealing with this whole issue of "Where do our bands play?" We went to Luria and said, "Look if you do another Family Dog dance, our bands would, you know, like to play and will play for reasonable money," and so and so forth. "

And even if we don't do something with you, we're gonna promote shows because we've arrived at the conclusion that that's the only way our band are going to get over the... You know, we can't seem to get, um, jobs in the clubs or in the lounges, that sort of thing." And so she said, "Well, you know, there really isn't a Family Dog right now. The other guys have gone to Mexico. It's just me and there's no money. We owe money." She said, "I have talked to the German American Association in California Hall and I have put some

tentative holds on dates with them, but I haven't been able to pay the deposits on the dates, and so they may or may not be held."

And one of the things that John and I had is that we had a committed date from the Jefferson Airplane, and they were the only local band at that point that was, in any sense, bankable. They had the image and the reputation that their gigs paid for themselves. It was something that was bankable enough that you could go to a banker or a money person, and people would have a fair assurance that they were gonna get their money and so and so forth.

Essentially, what we were bringing to the table was our two bands, our contribution to the labor, and this date that we had with the Jefferson Airplane. So, the bottom line was that we agreed to do some shows as Family Dog with Luria, utilizing our bands, utilizing the Charlatans, who were associated with the Family Dog people at that point, although they were very close friends with ours as well. At least, at the outside, utilizing our one committed date from the Jefferson Airplane to kind of launch the thing. And I had about two hundred and fifty dollars, which was my escape money and my life savings really at that point. So I gave that to Luria to tie down these dates at the California Hall.

A couple weeks went by and I hadn't heard from Luria. Then I get a call one day from one of her roommates saying that, "Well, Luria asked me to call you and tell you that she took off for Mexico today, and that she knows she owes you money but and she doesn't have the money, but left you some antique furniture. Come get it," you know. So I

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went over and it was a nice antique bed and stuff, but that wasn't what I needed or wanted. I didn't need to buy a bed for two hundred and fifty bucks, even if it was beautiful antique carved wood and all that.

So I did get the bed, so and so forth, but John and I are just sort of in a quandary. "What do we do now?" And I called the German American Association and she had not put up the deposit and so on, and so we really didn't quite know what to do. So my partner John Carpenter happened to know Bill Graham. Now Bill Graham was nominally producer of the S.F. Mime Troop and essentially what he was a fundraiser. He was an arm twister, had good relations with William C??? (SP), the attorney that remained his attorney through most of his career. He had very close association with this other Zellerbach family, who had patronized the S.F. Mime Troup, but kind of patronized things that Bill did, subsequently also.

In this capacity, as producer of the mime troop, he had kind of engineered them, a confrontation between them and the... They were kind of going down the tubes and Graham kind of engineered a confrontation between the mime troop and the police in the park. And a lot of the objective of it, quite frankly, had to do with stirring up a lot of controversy and therefore getting contributions, you know, support contributions, to the mime troop. He did this big benefit, and John Handy was about as big a jazz star as you can imagine at the time. And so he did this benefit in which John Handy was his headliner and he had way too much stuff on it. Frankly, I didn't think he knew a whole lot about organizing it at that point. He put way too many acts on

the bill and that sort of thing. And he did it in a big warehouse south of Market Street on Menn Street (SP?). He raised a bunch of money for them. And I give Graham credit for learning the lessons, as it were, but what was clear to him, I'm sure, at that event, was that his head liner was the Jefferson Airplane and not John Handy. That's who people came there to see.

And he had them in some minor billing, scrawled on the thing and also it's interesting because this was such a small scene. This whole scene was really built out of a kind of roving party circuit, which had a lot to do with students at San Francisco State College, students at the San Francisco Art Institute, students at City College and the model's guild, which was affiliated with the art institute. At the time all this came up, there was a real dearth of any kind of live music in the Bay Area, including jazz. I guess the Matador was still kind of limping along ... the Jazz Workshop was, but the big hot menu here had been the Blackhawk, and when it closed that was kind of the death along that particular little epic of jazz, at the time.

And so, you find in San Francisco at that time, there was just no place. Other than a movie, there was really no place to go or see or do anything pretty much on a weekend. So there was kind of a party circuit and it was not unusual to go to maybe 10-12 parties over the course of one weekend. You'd go to this party and they'd say, "Oh well we just came from over there. It was pretty cool, and the food over there is like this, and they've got booze at this one." And it was pretty much all recorded music. It wasn't live music, but that was kind of the

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happenings. That's what people did on the weekend.

And this whole scene kind of came out of, what I would say, kind of an extended party circuit of probably fifteen hundred, two thousand people, that kind of knew each other.

And there were people that you'd regularly see in that party circuit on the weekend. You'd go to three or four parties a night. Just go from one place to another, and sometimes all night, you know. Friday, Saturday, Sunday, that kind of thing.

So the Family Dog people understood that this whole thing was kind of a very nascent, a very beginning, a very embryonic thing and this community was very connected. Before Graham did this benefit, they learned that he was planning on doing something and they realized that his date, though he had no bookings done at that point, they realized that the date he had chosen fell on the date when they had the Mothers of Invention at the Longshoreman's Hall, which was I think the second of the first three Family Dog dances there. So Luria Castell and Alton Kelley went to Bill Graham in his capacity as the producer of the mime troop, and said, "Look, you know we love the mime troop. We would love to help in any way we can. We would even produce a benefit for them. We want no money for it, but we would put in all the labor, do all the organization of it, just for lovin' the mime troop. And the only thing we would want out of it was credit for having produced it," you know. The first thing they asked him was to differ his date by at least a week, so that in this very embryonic scene they didn't dilute the market on a

given weekend such that neither one of them made it.

Well Graham was not... In that regard, his first thought was not co-operation. It was always competition. So it was kind of like, "Oh no. I'm not movin' my date," and so on.

And probably had he moved his date, they probably would have made money on the Mother's show, and it would have been a more viable entity and he probably would have done just as well the following week, because he didn't have his acts set at that point. But he dug in his heels, "No, I'm not movin'," you know. Kind of a "Fuck you, I was here first!" kind of thing.

But in the course of them offering to do a benefit for the mime troop, he asked Kelley and Luria, "you know, well, where would you do this thing?" And they, being the gullible [laughs] innocents that they were, they said, "Oh well, over at the Fillmore Auditorium. You know. It's like \$65 bucks a night or \$500 a month to get the lease on it." So at the juncture where John and I had just learned that Luria had taken off to Mexico and that she had not firmed up the date at the California Hall, we had already begun to make some commitments to people like the Paul Buttefield Blues Band and different other people.

And suddenly, we didn't have a venue. Well, one night Bill Graham was doing his second mime troop benefit, but this time, it was, "Oh... wonder of wonders," of all places, in the Fillmore Auditorium! [Laughs]. So, John Carpenter knew Graham. I didn't, but we went over to that mime troop benefit, paid to get in, I'm pretty sure, and I met Bill Graham for

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the first time at the coke bar in the old Fillmore.

John and I, as we had an interest in exposing our bands, went to Graham and basically said, "If you do another mime troop benefit, you know, our bands would volunteer their services. We'd like to be on the bill." And just in the course of talking to him about that, we ended up kind of telling him what we had been doing with Luria, that we had intended to do a series of shows with Luria as Family Dog, and that we had this date on the Jefferson Airplane confirmed. Not us specifically, but we had them and their manager had agreed to have them play a date for us. I had a set figure.

He, having succeeded with Jefferson Airplane almost immediately before that, that was a big calling card I would say for us. Plus, we had two bands that were beginning to get a little bit of a name, at least in the underground, and could be added to the bill for no charge, as it were. And just a lot of kind of thinking out loud you know that went on, and Bill was saying, "Well, the lease on this place is only \$500 a month, but I don't know. It would take so many shows a month. I don't know if I can do more than one or two a month," you know and so and so forth.

But anyway, the long and short of it is John and I ended up making a handshake deal with him to do shows in there on alternate weekends with him and that we would do it under the Family Dog name. He said, "What name would you do it under?" "Family Dog, I guess. That's what we were just doin'." I really honestly didn't give it a lot of thought. We had planned to do these Family Dog shows with Luria, so we just said, "Well,

Family Dog, I guess," you know. So anyway, he said, "Fine," and our initial deal with Bill was that he would put up all the money; he would put up the hall, the security, and all that, and, essentially, that we would give him 50%, after we paid the bands and paid the rude expenses. And so that show was successful.

We did that show and, after the show we realized that Bill had not lifted a finger, had not put up a dime, and so on. Essentially we had taken all the risks, done all the work, you know ... provided the Jefferson Airplane, the date we had with the Airplane for the deal and everything, and then we paid certain of his basic expenses and then he took half, you know.

Michael Erlewine: Wow!

Chet Helms: So we had an old-fashioned conference call like, "Here, you talk to him for awhile," you know, [laughs] between John and I and Bill Graham. And so, the three subsequent shows we did in there, we paid certain flat fees and then Bill Graham got 7% of net, you know. And altogether, we did four shows. It never worked out to be exactly on alternate weekends, because he would kind of call us at the last minute and say, "Oh, well, I've got this or that or the other happening, and I'm sorry but you can't have that date. You'll have to move over to this date." So, you know, in about three months time we did four shows, or in two and a half months time, we did four shows, or something like that. We did four shows.

Michael Erlewine: Now what about the history of the advertising - was it handbills, fliers?

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Chet Helms: Ok, Wes Wilson was my best friend at the time.

Michael Erlewine: Really, are you still friends with him?

Chet Helms: Yeah, after a fashion.

Chet Helms: But anyway, he was my best friend at the time. He was not an artist; he was a printer.

Michael Erlewine: That's what I understand.

Chet Helms: And that was our connection. I came out of the print trades; he was a printer. His wife and my wife were best friends.

Michael Erlewine: Really.

Chet Helms: They both went to state college. His wife was Alva Bessie's daughter, who was one of the ***** (not sure if black bulb should be capitalized and/or how the screenwriter fits in IE) ***** black bulb, and Hollywood screenwriters.

And he was a C.P. member, and so and so forth. She had grown up here locally; Alva Bessie lived and died here. And the first poster that Wes had done, and this was done... Have you seen the 'Be Aware' poster that Wes did?

Michael Erlewine: Yes

Chet Helms: Ok, that was the first poster, to my knowledge, that he ever did.

Michael Erlewine: I think it was his first poster.

Chet Helms: And that was totally graphic arts; there was no drawing in it.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Chet Helms: It's all graphic technique.

Michael Erlewine: Posters, right.

Chet Helms: Right. Coming from someone out of the printing trade, you know, essentially. And I always liked that poster a great deal.

Michael Erlewine: It was beautiful.

Chet Helms: And it's interesting, because he's gone pretty right wing, in terms of politics, very homophobic. Very anti feminism, although that may be because he had three very strong daughters, but I don't know, [Laughs] from a previous marriage he had. He's got children by his present wife. Three very strong adult daughters. Let's see... The first rock n' roll thing he did was my wedding announcement. I've been trying forever to remember who took the photograph that he used. Someone took this beautiful ... I actually ... now that I think about it, I think I do know who took that photograph. I think a photographer named Tony Rosenwall took that photograph.

But anyway, there's just a funny photograph of myself and my, soon-to-be wife in an apartment I had on Pierce Street. I mean we had no money, so there was like essentially a double mattress there with some covering on it and a crate with a lamp, you know.

Michael Erlewine: We all did that, right?

Chet Helms: And a bare bulb with one of those Japanese paper lanterns around it, but it's an interesting kind of surreal photograph on there.

Michael Erlewine: I'd love to see it.

Chet Helms: In fact, I think there may even be two photographs on there, now that I think about it. It's hard to remember.

Michael Erlewine: So Wes did that.

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Chet Helms: So Wes did that. And again it was pretty much straight, graphic technique...

Michael Erlewine: No drawing in it.

Chet Helms: Set type and he had a... There was kind of a little starburst cut that he had put in and so on. And when we got married, which was December of '65 ... actually Peter Albin got married in some other part of the city on the same day. Peter Albin from Big Brother. But anyway, the Charlatans played and J.C. Borroughs, who was this black harmonica player that used to hang out in North Beach, who wrote 'Ballin' the Jack', which was the biggest hit of 1946. And he had been kind of reduced to... Well, he was an alcoholic, and he was on the street a lot in North Beach, and he still played the harp real fine and played the bones.

And essentially, he was a guy that for a bottle of Ripple or something of that order, you could get him goin', you know, and rev his engine up, so to speak, and he'd play. And so, on my wedding, I actually paid him to come do this thing and play. And I don't think I paid the Charlatans. I think they just came and played.

Michael Erlewine: And Wes did the paper for that.

Chet Helms: And Wes did the announcement for it. But it was of all of that era. I would say other than the Family Dog shows, it was probably the biggest rock n' roll event to that point. We had about 800 people.

Michael Erlewine: Wow, really.

Chet Helms: And it was in a studio that had been an old meeting hall of some kind, some kind of Order of the Eastern

Star or something like that. But it was a place called File Building out on Fulsom and 24th Street, I think it is, and Bob Levine was a painter here, a beatnik painter. Bob Levine's lover and live-in boyfriend was the poet Peter Orlovsky.

Michael Erlewine: Oh really.

Chet Helms: And at, right about the same time as my wedding, right in that little window of time there, Allen Ginsburg came to Bob Levine's studio. Bob was gay also. Bob had been my friend and had provided the studio space for me to do my wedding in. But anyway, I had met Peter Orlovsky there a couple of times. Very striking looking. I guess what you would say, a 'beautiful guy', just really strikingly handsome.

I mean, I had extremely long hair, but Peter Orlovsky literally had hair, blonde hair, down to his knees. I mean, he had let it grow and it was beautiful. But anyway, he met Ginsburg right in that period of time. Ginsburg, I think, stayed there for three weeks and then left with Peter Orlovsky, breaking Bob Levine's heart, so and so forth. But then that's how Peter Orlovsky and Ginsburg got together, right around that time.

And then, the next kind of big event, I would say, was the Trips Festival, which started... One of the local events that had affected everything, including posters, for that matter, really, was the American Needs Indians Sensorium. It was created by an architect named Zack Stewart and then Stuart Brand, who went on to create the Whole Earth Magazine, and so forth. There's a wonderful article by Brand published in 1995 in Time Magazine called "How the Hippies Invented the Internet." And it's a

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brilliant article and it makes a very good case, you know.

[Spring 1995 Special Issue, "We Owe It All to the Hippies," by Stewart Brand]

Michael Erlewine: Did someone do a poster for the 'America Needs Indians' thing?

Chet Helms: Yes they did.

Michael Erlewine: Who did it?

Chet Helms: Quite honestly, I don't know, but it was a big... on brown, almost a brown construction paper and it was almost full human size.

Michael Erlewine: Oh really.

Chet Helms: And it was flour-pasted up, you know. It was posted in that way.

Michael Erlewine: Hmm, I don't think I've seen it.

Chet Helms: I always kind of confuse it and the one percent free thing, cause they were similar, the big ones anyway, were similar in size and applied with wheat paste, you know, in the traditional kind of thing.

'American Needs Indians' -- We talked at that time about happenings and we talked about an environmental theatre, a term that would be misunderstood these days, but the idea of environmental theatre was that by tailoring or customizing an environment, that you could have a desired emotional output.

Michael Erlewine: Like the 'Living Theatre'? That kind of thing?

Chet Helms: No, not precisely. It was having more to do... I guess the paradigm of it, the local paradigm of it was this 'American Needs Indians Sensorium.' The attempt, there, was they'd have two or three big teepees in a

space. They'd have a 360 degree slide projection of Indian life on the reservation in the Southwest. They'd sometimes have an actual, depending on where they did it, an actual campfire, but there were certainly always odors of mesquite burning. There was always a constant drum track and you go in.

Michael Erlewine: Sage...

Chet Helms: Sage, and you could go in these teepees and it was essentially, precisely what it described itself - it was a sensory. We talked in terms of synesthesia. All theatrical experiences, the ultimate objective was synesthesia, was the wedding of the senses, so that you had this total experience. And the idea of environmental theatre was that you... and I still use a lot of the things I learned while I was thinking in that framework... the difference between high stages and low stages. They all have an impact on what people's experience is.

Michael Erlewine: Do you remember, in the Midwest, I mean this was happening all across the country, the whole idea of 'events' and 'happenings' and remember 'Once Music' John Cage and crew.

Chet Helms: Yeah, John Cage was a big deal here. And we went to all of his things. And we read all of his books, and he was...

Michael Erlewine: Right, Bob Ashley. Do you know Bob Ashley or George Cacioppo?

These were modern avant-garde electronic composers. Yeah, they'd have a piano piece where you played one note for hours. Things like that. And I lived in a house with some of them,

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except that I was more into regular music -- blues and jazz. I really liked a little bit of it, but that was about it.

Chet Helms: Yeah, right, right, exactly.

Chet Helms: John Cage was kind of the best of that genre, I think. And I went to several of his events, and so on. But a very important institution here in San Francisco, with respect to all of this movement, was the Tape Music Center at 321 Divisadero. It was really out of that place that your strobes came, the Buchla synthesizer came, the liquid-light projections in the form of Bill Ham, Tony Martin, and Elias Romero. Those were the three first guys doing them and that kind of all came out of that.

Michael Erlewine: Oh, that sounds like a whole thing needs to be done on the light shows. Has anything been written much about that?

Chet Helms: Not to any great extent. There probably has... I can't remember what her last name was, Pauline... there's an electronic composer, Pauline something or other, and then Mort Subotnick and Ramone Sindare (SP?). These were all electronic composers and they were the core of... and Bucla was kind of their tech guy. He was the guy who created all of the machines and the strobes and so on. The Bucla synthesizer was before Moog. And the Moog device, I think, was considerably more sophisticated, but Bucla, I think, really invented the first synthesizer.

Michael Erlewine: I know that there are, before the regular Family Dog posters there, what there's five or so handbills for events.

Chet Helms: Well, there are five handbills, and then there were I think

three or four... actually I guess just three big silk screens that Amy Magill did. That were to advertise the Longshoreman's Hall dances.

Chet Helms: I would say the Trips Festival handbill was fairly significant, but again, strictly graphic technique that Wes did.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Chet Helms: And then there were two... Let's see, there was a Loading Zone one that he did for the Open Theatre and then there was one for Big Brother that he did for the Open Theatre, which was a photograph that I chose of a guy sitting on a bed of nails. Wes did this, but again, strictly graphic technique.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Chet Helms: And it was at that show I brought them, in my opinion, I brought the first strobe to a rock n' roll event. [Laughs].

Michael Erlewine: Right. So how did Wes take off into his... He really did pioneer the psychedelic style at some point. How did that really happen?

Chet Helms: So, essentially, Wes Wilson came to... He was my poster artist and Bill saw and liked what he did, so Bill started using him.

Michael Erlewine: Was that a problem for you?

Chet Helms: Actually, I didn't really give it a lot of thought, initially, that Bill Graham was using him. I mean, he was my best friend and it was more work for Wes, you know. What did upset me though, was when, though actually in my opinion it was a very germinal event and very good thing in the long haul of things, was when Bill basically said,

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"You can't do posters for Chet anymore. I'm booking your time exclusively." And gave him an advance and a commitment to, you know, do posters exclusively for him into the extended future.

Michael Erlewine: Well sounds like him.

Chet Helms: And that was kind of the way Bill handled things.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Chet Helms: And it kind of happened to me with the light shows too. What really... Bill's tendency was to get the same person and work them to death, you know. And when I lost the exclusivity of, or not even exclusivity, but just the availability of Wes, that threw me to opening it up to other people.

Michael Erlewine: Who came in to fill that spot?

Chet Helms: Yeah, the first were Stanley Mouse and Alton Kelley.

Michael Erlewine: Kelley had been part of this, all this...

Chet Helms: And Kelley had been part of it, from before.

Michael Erlewine: Before you guys even.

Chet Helms: Well, before I got involved directly with Family Dog. I was a friend and volunteer on those shows. I just wasn't a principle in it; I wasn't one of the four who had actual cash money out of pocket into it.

Michael Erlewine: I see.

Chet Helms: There was essentially a large community of people who put

those things on, but they were the four guys who put up the money.

Michael Erlewine: Just an interjection again. Have you been working with people to create a book of this kind of stuff? I mean, your knowledge is so encyclopedic about this scene. How has it been reported? What have you done to document this?

Chet Helms: I haven't, aside from just kind of thousands of interviews. Well, I'm hoping to do that. I mean, I had, actually. What's been on my mind really is... I *** (visited a friend?) ***** have a friend visited for my 40th high school reunion in Texas last year. He's got a little in-law apartment above a garage there and he's a fairly well off guy. He's a musician, and more than most musicians who've ever asked me about this period, this guy has great questions, really insightful questions. And he's hammered me...

Michael Erlewine: Have you recorded it?

Chet Helms: No, we didn't, but while I was there we spent three or four nights. I was killing him because he works during the day, but we were stayin' up 'till four or five o'clock in the morning and he's asking me all this stuff, he wanted to know, you know. My problem in terms of book things, though I have done what I'm doing right now, kind of pretty freely allowed myself to be interviewed over years.

Michael Erlewine: But I don't see this kind of detail written, maybe it exists, but I haven't seen it.

Chet Helms: The people record everything I say and then they kind of pick and choose and they use this little

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element of it or that little element of it, but you're right it would be ... I think, I in a sense, tell the most complete story of it from a fairly central point of view. Well, in my own sort of way I like to put all the little pieces together.

Michael Erlewine: You do. It's amazing.

Chet. And I never had any training in it, but my dad was a sociologist and I think that what's interesting is ... did you ever see the movie 'Feed Your Head?'

Michael Erlewine: No.

Chet Helms: It was a twenty-minute piece made by a local guy here, Bob Sarles. He made it for the "Let Me Take You Higher" show that was at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. And what happened in that is, by default, I became the narrator of it because I was the only person there that did not talk exclusively about myself.

Michael Erlewine: This is a good sign, right?

Chet Helms: Actually, I think essentially what we were saying was that it was a boon to me in a way when Graham did indeed book Wes' future output...

Michael Erlewine: Cause it made you spread out.

Chet Helms: Yeah. It opened me up to other possibilities. Stanley Mouse and then Alton Kelley were collaborating, and, frankly, I have to say Kelley couldn't draw for shit, at that time. And frankly, Wes Wilson couldn't draw for shit at the beginning. I watched both of these guys become artists. Just as I watched a lot of musicians who couldn't really play become musicians.

Michael Erlewine: Huh! Mouse had a long history of...

Chet Helms: Yeah, Mouse was fairly accomplished at air brush and that sort of thing, although compositionally I always thought that, you know, Kelley had a lot going.

Michael Erlewine: Still does.

Chet Helms: And that also Kelley was a master collagist. In fact, that's all of the early stuff that he did was all collages.

Michael Erlewine: Like David Singer is now.

Chet Helms: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Have you seen any of Singer's recent collages?

Chet Helms: Quite honestly, I'm not as keen on his collages right now. To me, that's him going back to an older time. That's what he did, and, actually, my first familiarity with his stuff was all different colleges

Michael Erlewine: What have you seen? Have you been to his house? I mean recently? It would be hard to move the things I'm talking about.

Chet Helms: Oh, it's probably been 6 to 8 months since I've been over there.

Michael Erlewine: Oh, that's pretty recent, then he's shown you what he's doing.

Chet Helms: I actually probably haven't seen too much. The last time I was up there he was working, kind of reworking a lot of older collages ... scanning them.

Michael Erlewine: Like the Gaugain collage?

Chet Helms: I don't remember that one specifically.

Michael Erlewine: Well, he's got many of them right? Probably dozens of them.

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Chet Helms: Yeah, yeah I'm sure he does.

Michael Erlewine: Some of them are really something.

Chet Helms: Yeah, but I love his poster output. I mean, with typography he's the best.

Michael Erlewine: I'm having him do something for our poster site.

Chet Helms: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: He's one of the best. The 'Summer of Love' was exquisite.

Chet Helms: Yeah. That's a process too. I mean, that started with an idea that I had that I gave to Jim Philips. Jim Philips started working on it and then he fell off a ladder and broke his hip. So then the project went to David Singer.

Michael Erlewine: So is that how that happened.

Chet Helms: That's how that went.

Michael Erlewine: Singer did a good job.

Chet Helms: He did a wonderful job. Yeah, I think that's a spectacular logo for what it is.

Michael Erlewine: I can't believe how good it is.

Chet Helms: And he did one for a friend of mine. You know the flying monkey one?

Chet Helms: About the only negative feedback I have from that period is like the Mystery Trend; they never miss the opportunity to say I wouldn't hire them and this and that and the other. He told us this and he told us that. I have a lot of respect for Ron Nagle and, particularly, for things he did after Mystery Trend. In

Mystery Trend, they initially didn't do a lot of their own material and that was a kind of criteria for me. I wasn't interested in booking cover bands and they did a lot of cover material initially. But I liked a lot of the stuff that Ron did after that, like the "Do Wops.". Did you ever see that video, the 'Doo-Wop Diner'? That is ... I mean it is almost a prescient, visionary kind of thing of the way VH1 and all those things were handled.

Michael Erlewine: No. Cool, I'd like to see that. Now it's clear to me that I'm not going to be able to cover all the stuff I want to, you know more than I imagined. And I've been interviewing all these other guys and believe me it's quite different. So I'm going to ask you just some things off the wall.

Chet Helms: Sure.

Michael Erlewine: What do you know, if anything ... can you remember about Bob Fried? I'm trying to build a biography and he did some beautiful posters. Some of my very favorite posters.

Chet Helms: He did. You know, I loved Bob and Penelope a lot. Bob was a highly trained, both as a fine and a commercial artist, who had a fairly extensive and recognized career on the East Coast before he came west. He had done some shows of his paintings in fairly major galleries back there. He had a portfolio of stuff that he brought to show me.

Michael Erlewine: That's how you hooked up?

Chet Helms: Yeah, he came to me. I think he may have ... he knew, I think, Victor Moscoso, I believe.

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Michael Erlewine: Yeah, Victor kind of chaperoned him a little bit.

Chet Helms: Yeah, I think so.

Michael Erlewine: Did he have some paintings by that time?

Chet Helms: Yeah, he did.

Michael Erlewine: What did you think of that?

Chet Helms: I liked his paintings. I used one of them, you know, as a Billboard. The Family Dog is coming down to earth. It was a big one. It started as a painting,

Michael Erlewine: You mean the one that's called Billboard? I mean the abstract one with the circle? Are we talking about the same piece?

Chet Helms: There's one that I literally used.

Michael Erlewine: I thought a smaller print was made of it. Right?

Chet Helms: At the start it was a painting, I believe. And then he made a smaller silk screen print of it and then I was at his studio one day.

Michael Erlewine: OK. That's the same one I'm talking about. Isn't that a beautiful painting?

Chet Helms: Early '69 or so. It's like you were entering the earth's atmosphere from outer space and there was all these kind of, kind of clouds and...

Michael Erlewine: Isn't it beautiful, I mean, I think that's a wonderful piece.

Chet Helms: It is. It is and at the time I had just lost my permit at the Avalon Ballroom and I was kind of in transition, trying to get this new venue out at the beach, but I needed and I was doin'... I

did four shows that year in '69 in Winterland. Cause I didn't have a venue, but I did four one-off shows in there. And I wanted to keep the name Family Dog alive, because I knew I was going to open another venue somewhere, you know, as soon as I found the place.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Chet Helms: So that was one of the ways of keeping that name alive, particularly as we were in negotiations on this place at the beach. The political set up ... I knew I was going to get the permits. They screwed over me so righteously on the Avalon permits, that the city fathers here knew that I was owed one, and I'd been pretty well assured by the L.A. outa (SP?) administration that I would get a permit. Period. That they would see to it. And they were good to their word in that way, although I had to go out to the boonies [laughs] in a sense. But, anyway, I wanted to keep the name alive, so I did twenty-four billboards.

Michael Erlewine: Wow!

Chet Helms: One image.

Michael Erlewine: Oh! It was that same image?

Chet Helms: That same image. We posted for three months in eight rotating locations.

Michael Erlewine: And, I'm just curious, did Bob get paid especially for that?

Chet Helms: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: That's an outstanding image.

Chet Helms: Yeah, yeah. He was paid for that.

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Chet Helms: Ok. We produced these beautiful, marvelous, partially transparent, partially translucent, partially opaque, marbled, and intense saturated color, and we had a whole scheme in mind for designing a turntable that would put a beam of light through it so as you played the record, you'd get a light show on the walls or ceiling, you know?

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Chet Helms: But, also, they were just beautiful things. You could hang one on a thread of catgut or something on your window and just the light coming through made this beautiful marble thing.

Michael Erlewine: I never saw one.

Chet Helms: At the time, my patent attorney was a man named Robert Slick, who was Grace Slick's father-in-law, father of Darby Slick and Jerry Slick. He's now deceased. May he rest in peace. He was a good man and a good friend, and he had taken it to a certain point and I just ran out of money and couldn't pursue it any further, because at that point I was battling the city over my permits. I just needed all my resources to fight that and sort of had to pull back on a lot a R&D things -- research and development things -- that I was doing. But he could have gotten me a patent on that stylization of records based on an earlier button patent that used the term variegated zoning. Anyway, the first time I saw an I-Mac, that minute, I wanted to do the limited hippie addition of the I-Mac. Well, I've been talking about this for two years. I don't know anybody at Apple, but I know a lot of people who know people at Apple, and I've been putting

this idea out and I said all I want is the, you know, a G-4 tower... Well, actually at the time it was a G-3 tower and a video-cinema display play, you know. That's all I want. I'm not askin' for a lot, but here's a great idea. And what would really make it very marketable, is if they could affiliate it some way with the Grateful Dead and make it a 'The Grateful Dead Limited Edition I-Mac', you know.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Chet Helms: So, I was very disappointed to see this new rip-mix-burn, flower-power I-Mac, because it's kind of like one of the most offensive, and I'm not generally down on Walter Landor, but one of the most offensive things to me in terms of '60s iconography was that stupid daisy that Walter Landor designed. And to me when they put out this I-Mac, that was the return to this flower power design by some big commercial design firm rather than something wild and cutting edge.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Chet Helms: I mean, to me, when I see that ad, it's such a pussy rendition of that compared to their rip-mix-burn slogan, you know. Somehow the two are not consonant.

Michael Erlewine: The white guy doin' rap.

Chet Helms: Right. [Laughs]. Exactly. So, anyway. It's just been a kind of... Right now, I don't want anything out of it other than to see them do it right. I would like to see them... I mean I'd if I had the money ... if I were multimillionaire, I'd just produce some skins, is what they call them now, just some modular things where you could

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pop that sucker out of there and pop one in.

If they'd just simply used saturated colors, you know, and marbled it, truly marbled it, which would have been pretty easy to do.

Chet Helms: Tom Donahue). Do you remember who he was? He's generally given credit, I think to some degree, I think undue credit, for starting underground radio. I think underground radio really was FM radio that was started by a guy named Larry Miller, who's on a station in Boston. It was after he had kind of made somewhat of a success of it, then Tom Donahue saw the potential in it and really organized it in a more traditional, marketable kind of thing. And in fairness to Tom, Tom was a brilliant man in marketing and merchandising and so on, and he really made it the grand phenomenon that it became. But, Larry Miller was on this little contract station KMTX.

On the weekends, he had the midnight to 6 or 7 in the morning thing. And, literally, we would plan a party and refreshments and our weekends sitting up all night and listening to Larry Miller's radio show. Because he was the first guy who played album cuts. He was the first guy who would play an entire album in one sitting. He was the first guy who would play Bob Dylan, followed up with Ravi Shankar and then you know, Flatt and Scruggs or something, you know. He had an eclectic play list and things like that. Literally, a lot of social life at that point really, very often on the weekends, was organized around Larry Miller's show. Anyway I digress about Donahue,,,

But one of the things that I always remember about Tom Donahue was John Carpenter and I were the young turks. We were the ... and he was probably at least 15 years, maybe 20 years, our senior... And so we'd come barreling into Autumn Records, his office you know and everything, and we'd just be full of some vigor and vitality and piss and vinegar, you know. Just, you know, full of ideas and rarin' to go and he'd say, "Stop right there." He said, "Don't tell me any of your ideas. I have plenty of my own, if you tell me your ideas, you'll be back here tomorrow telling me I stole your ideas."

Michael Erlewine: [Laughs].

Chet Helms: That's the way he would preface every time we'd come barreling' in there like, "Ahhhh! Let's do this! Lets do that!" You know [laughs], and I never forgot that.

Chet Helms: What happened later was there was... Lee Crosby is a guy who owned that station KMTX, at a point. It was a contract station, where mostly minority programming would hire blocks of time and that sort of thing, although I don't think that Larry Miller had hired that time. But anyway, Larry Miller then... I guess Donahue initially... all these guys climbed on board at KMTX. Then there came a point where Crosby was either selling the station or in some way he was going through a real radical programming change there. I think he was broke and having to sell the station. But, anyway, it ended up in a big strike where everybody but Larry Miller walked off. And so Lee Crosby became the 'evil one', you know. I don't think he was that evil a character.

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He became the evil one, and then Larry Miller just became that scab, you know, which is kind of sad, because he started it all -- he really and truthfully did. And I think I probably offend some people, but every time I'm sitting in a situation where I'm being interviewed with a group of people and somebody says, "Oh yeah and then Tom Donahue started underground radio," I just have to interject and say, "Sorry, but, you know, Tom's a great man and he really did make it a very commercially buyable thing, but he was not the guy who started underground radio." And I try to set the record straight that it was Larry Miller who did.

Michael Erlewine: Well that's cool, I was going to ask you what was your relationship with Victor Moscoso?

Chet Helms: Pretty good over the years, until the artists sued me. He was kind of the ringleader of that.

Michael Erlewine: He's very brilliant.

Chet Helms: He's very brilliant I know and...

Michael Erlewine: I spoke to many of them about that suit and they all seem to have accepted, from what I can understand, whatever that outcome was.

Michael Erlewine: We get a bum rap I mean the „60s to me is so important.

Chet Helms: Yeah, it's been so heavily demonized that...

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, it's been demonized and, you know, I was out here in 1960. And then I lived here in '64 for a year, dropped acid, etc., so I was around for all this Sproul Hall student free-speech thing. In fact, I even saw myself in a movie they made. I had the

CPO jacket, Ray-Bans, the works. [Laughs].

Chet Helms: (Laughs)

Michael Erlewine: So anyway, I don't want to see this whole era just tokenized in some way that doesn't have an edge to it, that doesn't have some beauty to it. It was really something.

Chet Helms: Yeah, oh it was.

Michael Erlewine: You didn't just have to be here. I was in Michigan, and it was still very...

Chet Helms: It was all over. And to me, it still like dropping a pebble in a pond, you know. There was a ripple that went out that hasn't stopped yet, and, in my personal opinion, I know that it's not entirely shared by the world; it's what brought down the iron curtain and what brought down the Berlin wall.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, maybe so.

Chet Helms: I believe it was precisely that huge culture that started here and in London, primarily in the „60s that has so affected. Part of it's been technological -- the cassette recorder, the fax machine... now the Internet.

Michael Erlewine: The Internet is the biggest thing of all.

Chet Helms: Right, but I don't think you can ... in a way right now it's overshadowed, but I don't think you can really discount the Walkman. The Walkman and the transistor radio. I mean, those things, like when I was in Mexico as a kid, 19 or so, hitchhiking around down there, the thing that was transforming the little village I lived in, where no one spoke English... What was transforming it more rapidly than

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any single other thing was the little \$10 nine-transistor radios.

Michael Erlewine: But when you talk about the ripple effect, the ripple from... The thing about the Internet that is the great equalizer, really, hasn't had a chance to work yet and that is the ability to find information -- search. That is an equalizer. I have some experience in library science, a little bit. Very few people can use a library properly. When I would get an enthusiasm, I would spend weeks documenting, tracing through books, gathering books buying books, in order to answer a few simple questions. I can do that in a minute now, I mean that, when that gets to third world countries, that is going to have an even greater effect than the Walkman. Just my opinion.

Chet Helms: Sure.

Michael Erlewine: And the „60s to me is like a threshold of change. It's not going to be reproduced.

Chet Helms: Well, I just think that those social values, those aspirations, went out in the form of this music and they were transmitted onto cassette recordings, which were fundamentally smuggled into Russia and Eastern Europe.

Michael Erlewine: And something that's in your favor that needs to be brought out in more articles is the whole idea that bands like the Grateful Dead would not have existed the way they did without the posters. The posters were being sold across the country, way before the band traveled at all.

Chet Helms: There's another area that I think has been egregiously overlooked and reduced to the quote "electric

wallpaper" or whatever and that's the light shows.

Michael Erlewine: I think it's starting to be a trend to look into those.

Chet Helms: I think you're right. I really resent what the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame did with light shows, which was essentially: they created an installation there that seems to suggest and imply that this was just a stage effect that the Grateful Dead invented for their touring shows.

Michael Erlewine: Hmm, perhaps they don't know any better.

Chet Helms: Well they knew better, „cause I told them and a lot of other people did, but that's how it got presented. Partially, it was because of who they hired to present it. The person they hired had never done a light show, but they hired little elements of other light shows to provide them. I tried to get them to get someone like Bill Ham or Ben Van Meter or Robert Elliott or one of these guys that was a master practitioner of it to... I mean for one thing, the thing about light shows that's totally misunderstood at this point is that light shows at that point were a performance art.

Michael Erlewine: Well, that's right. I mean we had them in Michigan.

Chet Helms: Right now, it's presented like it's something that could be canned and automated and just sort of plugged in, with little ancillary units there, that provide some little flashing lights while the band plays.

Michael Erlewine: I know. It took a staff to do it, right?

Chet Helms: Right.

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Michael Erlewine: Even we had strobe lights. We had big opaque projectors, with gels, concave lenses, and so forth. And that was in Michigan.

Chet Helms: Right. I'm so hungry for a light show that would be a large element...

When, I talk to a lot of the younger people, and I've been to a few raves, they all talk about, "Oh, we're doing the same thing." But you go there and it's not the same thing. It's highly mechanized rhythms, by and large, or computer generated. It's kind of like trying... Sure, you can get a synthesizer to produce the sound track, but there's something essentially lifeless about it, because, you know, humans are inherently human and fallible, and it's precisely those little dissonant, off-beat things that put the 'funk' in funk music, you know? If you over digitalized everything and clean everything up and make rhythms that are based on an atomic clock...

Michael Erlewine: You're missing the point. You're not accomplishing anything.

Chet Helms: Right. And a computer doesn't know intuitively when counterpoint is called for. It's like there are many effects in human music that come out of human intuition that says... Well, somebody was tellin' me the other night about trying to jam with someone and they were constantly having to tell them, "Look, don't play what I play. Play against what I play."

Michael Erlewine: That's why Bach was so great.

Chet Helms: Right. I forgot who it was. I was talking to some musician the other

night and they were talking about jam ... we were talking about them jamming with some particular person and they said the problem was that this person would play what they played. They'd play this and then, you know, they'd come back with the same thing or they would play over them, playing the same thing. He'd say, "No don't play with me. Play against me, so that it shows what you're playing and it shows what I'm playing, but they work together.

Chet Helms: When I do a biography, it needs to be something separate from the poster book. And the reason for that....

Chet Helms: I'm talking about "The Chet Helms Book," the Family Dog book.

Michael Erlewine: Of course.

Chet Helms: Needs to be a separate book,

Michael Erlewine: I agree.

Chet Helms: Than the ... I don't even know why I'm telling you this, except that you're a person out there, you know, confronted with all kinds of opportunities and maybe a second on some of these dove tails at a future point.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, what are you looking for?

Chet Helms: But all I'm saying is that people say, "Oh, do your biography and, and do all the posters with it." Well, if I do all the posters with it then I have to share that 50-50 with the artists. So the poster book needs to be a book about posters, and I don't have a problem sharing that with the artists. But if I do

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the grand complete Family Dog and or Chet Helms book, then that needs, or memoir or whatever, then that needs to...

Michael Erlewine: Well, you know, some books, I mean the book that appears in my mind to this conversation is something like a, you know, place holder. You know, the „60s scene according to Chet, basically, and most of the time you wouldn't want anything according to someone. I mean, that wouldn't be the title but you really have it is like an encyclopedia knowledge that

Interview with Eddie Wilson of Armadillo World Headquarters

[Eddie Wilson was responsible for the Armadillo World Headquarters, where for some ten years some of the finest and most varied music acts were presented. For my money the Armadillo posters are best best deal in Posterdom and the artists among my favorites, and on many days perhaps my very favorites.]

by Michael Erlewine

Finding the Armadillo

Eddie Wilson: I've got a lot of practice telling the story about taking a leek, the story about finding the Armadillo.

Michael Erlewine: Oh no, tell that story again, that's just so great.

Eddie Wilson: Yeah. The purpose of the Armadillo was to have a place to play, because I had been hired to manage Shiva's Head Band. And there wasn't a place in town that was hiring hippy bands playing their own material.

Michael Erlewine: Yep.

Eddie Wilson: And we went to Houston a lot and Dallas occasionally, but we were basically without a place to play at, because the Vulcan Gas Company had closed just before they had hired me. An old guy had a country joint, beer-joint, next to the Vulcan for years, called George's and George had another place called the Cactus Club sitting between two other little beer-joints on the south side of the river, and he started letting hippy bands, because of his experience at the Vulcan, he knew that hippy's would drink beer. So he invited... somehow or another a relationship came together where the Hub City Mover's were playing there every

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Thursday night. Spencer went one night to play fiddle with them and sit down. I went to Joe, the new manager of Shiva's Head Band. We had a contract and a record coming out on Capitol Records.

Michael Erlewine: Wow.

Eddie Wilson: All of the hippies of course were very suspicious of me.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah [laughs].

Eddie Wilson: I didn't have long hair yet, and for their money, I was from the straight world.

Michael Erlewine: Yep.

Eddie Wilson: So, went to the Cactus Club and during the intermission, I went to pee and the bathroom was backed out and floating out into the little room. Didn't know it for 20-something years later, but Jimmy Dale Gilmore and John Reed told me that they were standing on either side of me, while we were out in the parking lot taking a leak. I looked up into the dark over some trees and saw some broken windows real high up over a cinder block wall and realized (somehow or another) just snapped that there had to be a giant empty room on the other side of a wall that high with windows broken, way up at the top.

Michael Erlewine: Wow.

Eddie Wilson: They went back in to play and I went around this old dark building and found a garage door and a residential door and picked the residential door lock and went in and it was just pitch black, like walking into Carlsbad Cavern, except for the windows, the same broken windows I could see across the room way up high. So I raised the garage door and pulled my 1968 Dodge Charger into the garage door and shut it behind, and then got

into the car and turned on the lights. One of the most shocking visual experiences of my life was to find myself sitting in a room that big.

Michael Erlewine: Wow.

Eddie Wilson: I got pretty excited, pretty quick. I've always been kind of excitable. I searched out the landlord, who turned out to be a school board member, terribly worried about his reputation. Made a deal to move into the place, rent the place and part of a compromise was that I wouldn't sell beer and maybe that would protect him. Of course the Vulcan hadn't sold beer and it had the worst reputation in town.

Michael Erlewine: [laughs].

Eddie Wilson: I'd been working for the brewer's association, so getting away from beer for awhile wasn't that scary for me, and I was taking LSD almost every day by then.

Michael Erlewine: [laughs].

Eddie Wilson: We pursued a lot of visual fantasies and a lot of cultural fantasies. We had a record deal with Capitol Records, which meant to everybody in town that we were rich.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Eddie Wilson: Well you know we had been given 15 grand... maybe ... for the record and 10 grand in order to call ourselves Armadillo Productions and find other groups to produce and what now. You know, with no place to play on a very regular basis, it turned into minimum wage pretty quick.

Michael Erlewine: Yep.

Eddie Wilson: Dividing it all among a band, you know, like every band buying a bunch of Peavey speakers [laughs].

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Michael Erlewine: Yep.

Eddie Wilson: I didn't know what we were doing and now I'm working on a book and still trying to figure it out.

Michael Erlewine: [laughs]

Eddie Wilson: Pretty obviously, we wanted to be an alternative to what we thought the world offered. We wanted... community was the big word. We were going to be of the community. We were going to be very community-minded. During my research, digging up the bibliography, it's pretty interesting to look back now and see even *The Rag*, the alternative newspaper of the time, very political, very shrill... was running editorials admonishing the community to support the Armadillo. The Armadillo was more community minded than the community itself seems to be.

Michael Erlewine: Whoa.

The Armadillo Image

Eddie Wilson: There was a lot of vain glory. There was a lot of humorous... you know [laughs]... We were trying to figure out how to do something different and we had a couple of really good things going for us. Of course the band was a Whole Earth Catalog kind of perfect hippy band in some ways. The fact that Jim Franklin, the artist, had already been doing Armadillos in covers of *The Rag*... For a couple of years Jim had been the major visual influence in the friggin' city. He was an incredible artist and here's this ugly little newspaper with these gorgeous covers.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Eddie Wilson: Jim had the alternative community eating out of his hand and, as I see it now, we have a genius artist who made a genius decision about

adopting a symbol. And the quality of that symbol was so perfect that it made all that weirdness possible. And the fact that the Armadillo was so much like the hippies, maligned though it was... though it was a benign creature. I think it's because people can't cuddle an armadillo.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Eddie Wilson: They have a hard time accepting the symbol. It still puts people off, and I think it's because you have to make an intellectual decision to associate with the symbol.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Eddie Wilson: And most people in the world of animals are thinking cuddly.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Eddie Wilson: Something that can appreciate our attention.

Michael Erlewine: And you don't want to hit them on the road.

Eddie Wilson: Well [laughs]. There's all kind of aversions to them.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Eddie Wilson: They're hard to peel . You wouldn't want to have to try to eat one.

Michael Erlewine: No.

Eddie Wilson: The Armadillo has the perfect symbol, coupled with Jim's interest in art of all sorts. He's a multi-talented artist of performing arts as well as visual arts, coupled with the fact that we were adopted by a lawyer about my age, out of SMU, and he had done all of the blues people, you know Jimmy Vaughn and Tinsley Ellis, people in Dallas. And he was already a big fan of their scene and he had been... He had

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spent a year at Oxford working on an economics book for a rich Mexican and had come back with visions of and stories of something that I've still never seen called an "art laboratory". Sounded great.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Eddie Wilson: You know, let's, by golly, have one of those [laughs].

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Art Laboratory

Eddie Wilson: The Armadillo has the perfect symbol, coupled with Jim's interest in art of all sorts. He's a multi-talented artist of performing arts as well as visual arts, coupled with the fact that we were adopted by a lawyer about my age, out of SMU, and he had done all of the blues people, you know Jimmy Vaughn and Tinsley Ellis, people in Dallas. And he was already a big fan of their scene and he had been... He had spent a year at Oxford working on an economics book for a rich Mexican and had come back with visions of and stories of something that I've still never seen called an "art laboratory". Sounded great.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Eddie Wilson: You know, let's, by golly, have one of those [laughs].

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Eddie Wilson: We didn't have any money, but we had this huge space and we had this wide-ranging vision of inclusiveness... What is an art's laboratory, but it means that if you call your thing art, I ain't going to make fun of you.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Eddie Wilson: I'm willing to take seriously anything that you put your energy into. So right off the bat, we had a little store selling crafts. We had a bakery. At the time, it was really another age. You couldn't find wheat bread, fresh made wheat bread in bakeries all over town.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Eddie Wilson: There was very little demand for it. So here we were in this big huge ugly cavern of a place with a bakery, and we called it a field kitchen at first, then it became the Daily Bread Bakery.

Michael Erlewine: And the actually cooked it right there?

Eddie Wilson: In the poster collection, do you have that label?

Michael Erlewine: I think I do somewhere. I have an image of it. I don't know if I actually have it, but I've seen the image of it.

Eddie Wilson: The Daily Bread Bakery label that Jim made. It's a little cartoon.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Eddie Wilson: Of people making bread and turning into armadillos.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, I do have that.

Eddie Wilson: It's a great illustration.

Michael Erlewine: So it was baked right there?

Eddie Wilson: Yeah, we had some rooms around the place.

Michael Erlewine: And you had some ovens.

Eddie Wilson: And so we scuffled around pizza ovens. Pizza ovens are

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probably the cheapest thing in the world per pound.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, [laughs] I've got two of them in storage.

Eddie Wilson: [laughs]. We set up the little bakery and used organic products before anybody knew what that meant, and made whole-wheat bread. And all of a sudden, in the mornings, we started having Cadillac's and rich elderly women tiptoe in the rubble just to get fresh whole wheat bread from the bakery.

Michael Erlewine: Wow.

Eddie Wilson: It was quite. It opened my eyes, I didn't know that there was such a market out there. Well being all inclusive about matters of art and community and what not it certainly led us down a different booking path than a lot of places. Rather than just being a little smokey venue that was closed all day until it was time to open up at night we were open all day every day with some sort of activity going on. We spent an awful lot of energy during the first six years improving the space for our concerts.

Michael Erlewine: Wow, that's interesting.

Eddie Wilson: We started off and within the first year we tore out all of the rooms that we had all the way around the hall, in order to double the size of the hall. Then we built a big huge wonderful stage that may have been the secret to a lot of the magic that happened.

Michael Erlewine: How many people could come in?

Eddie Wilson: Well we expanded the hall from about a 750 to a 1500 capacity.

Michael Erlewine: Big.

Eddie Wilson: Didn't even know at the time that we were moving from this one stage that was built on end of the big old armory (just kind of a raised concrete section of the building, oh probably three or so feet high)... We didn't even know until years later the place had been called in the mid-50's, "The Sport's Center." Elvis had played there in 1955, the summer of 1955, August 25th.

Michael Erlewine: That's neat.

Eddie Wilson: I have in my collection a copy of a little four-page brochure that was put out and sold there that night about Elvis playing there. It was Elvis's own piece. He was starring in a loose-end hayride promotion. A little piece I'm going to guess 800 words or more about Elvis referred to him as, "The Big Blond Guy."

Michael Erlewine: Your kidding.

Eddie Wilson: No.

Michael Erlewine: That's interesting.

Eddie Wilson: That was the summer he started dying his hair. Sammy Alran??? in Austin was there at that show and got his autograph that night and asked him, "Elvis what color is your hair?" And Elvis said, "purple."

Michael Erlewine: [laughs].

Eddie Wilson: So Prince didn't even make that up. The variety in the music was just... It was kind of a godsend. There were two big questions about audiences and venues both, always is: Number one how big are they? What size audience was there in Austin when we started and how did we have a hand in increasing the size of that audience, that's one of the big parts of this study.

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And of course in the history of the city they had been always nagging me for a bigger and better venue.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Eddie Wilson: So we had a place that was a whole lot bigger, that we could hope to fill seven nights a week.

Michael Erlewine: Yep.

Eddie Wilson: And so we had to try to do as many different things as possible. Pretty early on we got the ballet to perform once a month.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, I see all those posters for Austin City Ballet or whatever it is.

Eddie Wilson: Yeah, Austin Ballet Theater Company. Stanley Hall got fired by the city for being a bit of a rebel, so he came and brought his whole ballet troupe to Armadillo. He asked if they could perform one Sunday a month and it just thrilled me to death.

Michael Erlewine: That's great.

Eddie Wilson: At first, we were born in a rock and roll era, but our first sell-out was Ravi Shankar.

Michael Erlewine: Oh wow, he was great.

Eddie Wilson: And so we had, I think Marcia Ball might have led the pack in a local discovery, and that was that she could get a better reaction performing country music than she could any other kind.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Eddie Wilson: And so Marsha became, "Freda and the Firedogs." And about the same time that, "Greezy Wheels" started up and it. Too much credit is given to folks that came in and played country

music. The fact of the matter is that it was bubbling right there the whole time.

Michael Erlewine: Well, you're in Texas, for god sake.

Eddie Wilson: Yeah, right [laughs]. It was pretty southern.

Michael Erlewine: [laughs].

Eddie Wilson: I've read some stuff that are just absolutely wrong with regard to... even the quote I found recently when Mike Tread says, "Until Willie came along. You never saw cowboy hats and long hairs and..." That was horse-shit. It was that way all along.

Greezy Wheels and Shiva's Head Band

Michael Erlewine: I see it. Greezy Wheels appear a lot; they were like the house band?

Eddie Wilson: Well, they appeared an awful lot, yeah. They had a lot of south Austin kids in the band. There was a huge family following of Greezy Wheels, very south Austin sort of thing.

Michael Erlewine: So how do we compare Greezy Wheels and Shiva's Head Band? They both seemed to be there a lot.

Eddie Wilson: Well, Shiva's Head Band was the house band. It was the reason that we started the place.

Michael Erlewine: Okay.

Eddie Wilson: Shiva's was so anti-commercial, Spencer was... I'm not going to talk real bad about very many folks.

Michael Erlewine: No, no and I'm not asking for that...

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Eddie Wilson: There was a venture. There was a work ethic situation. Spencer couldn't get along with his band members and so by the time, before the record was recorded for Capitol, the band was already a mere shadow of it's former self.

Michael Erlewine: Really?

Eddie Wilson: The record was shitty compared to what the band had been. The record on Capitol was such a disappointment. Shiva's started turning people off and becoming a real problem at the same time that other folks were coming along and working hard and becoming a draw. It changed over a 10-year period, but there's a work on the book, there's a list of local folks I'm trying to deal with. We busted our ass trying to help a bunch of local acts. In some cases it helped a little bit, some cases it didn't.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Eddie Wilson: There's always a 1000 tombstones for every monument.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Eddie Wilson: There's a lot of tombstones in our past at this point.

Michael Erlewine: Right. So Greezy Wheels were just kind of more a people's thing or something? They were more friendly?

Eddie Wilson: Yeah, it was not a... There were some bands that affiliated more or less with the Dillo, but honestly our job was to try to put people in the joint.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Eddie Wilson: So we worked with Storm and Jimmy Vaughn and all the blues guys, until we were blue in the

face, but the fact of the matter is we had to put in stuff that drew, when we could figure out how and tentatively that meant mixing it up. On my wall here is the Armadillo World Headquarters October 1972 Calendar that Micael Priest did. It's one of my very, very favorite graphics from the place, because it shows how early on we were really up and running with the remarkable diversity of talent. That October 1972 calendar begins on Sunday the 1st with the Austin Ballet and it ends on Halloween with a Pumpkin Stomp.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Eddie Wilson: Joey Ramone with the Four Daddio's. Jim Franklin's invention turned Halloween from just a ho-hum deal into such a celebration in Austin that the friggin' cops have to make people walk in a counter-clockwise direction on Sixth Street to control it. It all started with Jim.

Michael Erlewine: Wow.

Eddie Wilson: That month we had Shawn Phillips and Lowell Fulson and Etta James, Peter Frampton, Freda and the Firedogs, Jerry Lee Lewis, Michael Murphy...From Dallas, Goose Creek Symphony, High Country, all of those early progressive country acts.

Michael Erlewine: Who did the booking?

Eddie Wilson: Well, I was doing it then with Bobby Hederman's help and then Bobby did, and several different people. Bobby and I both kept out hands in it. It was less drudgery that way, and we did some things that were unusual and that we were proud of. We opened a one-dollar show for Bruce Springsteen with

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Alvin Crow. We opened, oh lord, we had the Moose of Country Music open for Boz Scaggs when Boz was really odd.

Michael Erlewine: Because it's very eclectic and I think we talked about this before, that you had a mix of jazz and blues and country and rock.

Eddie Wilson: Yeah, we could mix stuff, even on the same night pretty well. You know we opened the Frank Zappa show with Blind George McClain and blew Zappa's mind.

Those Wild Texas Posters

Michael Erlewine: You also have some pretty wild posters. I don't know whether you can remember, one of the wildest ones that I have was in August of 1972 for, "Danny Hicks and his Hot Licks with Uncle Vinty," and it's a big...



A Wild Texas Poster

Eddie Wilson: That's a Micael Priest poster.

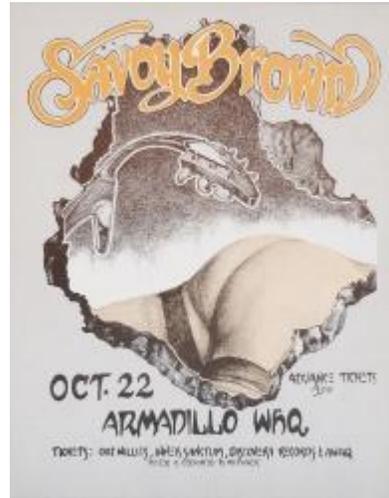
Michael Erlewine: Let's see. I'm not sure who did it. It has a heart with a tongue.

Eddie Wilson: Oh no, no, no, that's not it. That's a different poster.

Michael Erlewine: Do you know the one I'm talking about?

Eddie Wilson: Yeah, but I can't remember...

Michael Erlewine: It's pretty suggestive, right?



A Wild Texas Poster

Eddie Wilson: Yeah, well there was this Armadillo World, this October calendar that I'm describing to you. Talk about suggestive. I got busted at Love Field in September, and I had this poster in my briefcase, and when they busted us at Love Field, I had just left Willie and I was going to come home. I didn't know they had started checking carry-on bags and sure enough I had a couple or really nasty lids in my carry on. But it was so bad, we couldn't even smoke it, I don't know why I had it.



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The Watermelon Poster

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Eddie Wilson: But in my bag I also had some big old caps of mescaline.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Eddie Wilson: To keep them from finding the mescaline, I rolled it all around in the little custom's room and then I ended up having to take one. I started to hallucinate like crazy.

Michael Erlewine: [laughs].

Eddie Wilson: They took me into Dallas City Jail and when the guy was checking my briefcase, he found this poster. I had two. I also had the Jerry Lee Lewis killer poster, that Jim Franklin...

Michael Erlewine: So did you say you had this poster, this one I just mentioned.

Eddie Wilson: It was a Jerry Lee Lewis and this Armadillo calendar and so this cop asked me if he could have this poster to put it on the wall. And I said, "Sure." And their putting in on the wall and then for the first time (I'm hallucinating, keep in mind), I realize that the guy, the cartoon character standing and talking to the right of the calendar has his britches down past his ass and he's holding a watermelon in front of himself... obviously fucking the watermelon.

Michael Erlewine: [laughs].

Eddie Wilson: And so I'm looking at it and seeing that for the first time and, since I'm hallucinating, the guy's hips are jerking back and forth.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Eddie Wilson: I'm thinking I'm probably going to get in a lot more trouble when they look up and see what I'm seeing.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Eddie Wilson: Of course they never did.

Michael Erlewine: Right, that's funny.

Eddie Wilson: Yeah the artists pushed the edge. I'm right now trying to work with a wonderful guy at the Country Music Hall of Fame, Jay Orr. They're putting out a country music pop-up book.

Michael Erlewine: Oh cool.

Eddie Wilson: They wanted to use a Micael Priest in the book and they've got an essay from Ray Vincent they're going to have an Asleep at the Wheel pop-up and so this guy is trying to use one of the Armadillo Posters. I understand his predicament. He doesn't want to censor any artists, but he's really looking for a couple of them that would just be perfect, except there's big huge joints in [laughs] everybody's hands.

Michael Erlewine: [laughs] Right.

Eddie Wilson: And with his crowd he doesn't really need anybody smoking pot in his pop-up book.

Michael Erlewine: Right. That's funny.

Eddie Wilson: Artists can always push the edge. For crying out loud it's their job to make folks uneasy.

Michael Erlewine: Well, that's right.

Eddie Wilson: That's the only way you can expand people's consciousness is to make them a little bit uneasy.

Michael Erlewine: I have a question for you too? Why is it that in the Texas

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posters, because very often, if not quite frequently, there are faces in the sky. There are things in the sky. Is it because its big sky country?

Eddie Wilson: You know every...

Michael Erlewine: You know what I'm talking about?

Eddie Wilson: I don't know that I've noticed how many posters have some faces and all in the sky, but...

Michael Erlewine: A lot.

Eddie Wilson: We talk a lot about the sky and every time we leave town, Sandra says, "You know these people just don't have Jim Franklin clouds."

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Eddie Wilson: There's probably a whole lot of sky on the mind of people in Texas that might not be there from big industrial centers, where the sky has been covered up for a little longer.

Michael Erlewine: That's right or it's not flat, right?

Eddie Wilson: Yeah, well we probably lost a lot of our pretty sky since those posters were done.

Michael Erlewine: Oh, that' too bad. Is it flat there or do you have hills and stuff?

Eddie Wilson: Well Austin is unique in that the Balcony's Fault runs right straight through Austin. for about 1500-1800 miles.

Michael Erlewine: Wow.

Eddie Wilson: And everything to the west of that fault line is West Texas.

Michael Erlewine: Okay.

Eddie Wilson: Everything to the east of that fault is East Texas.

Michael Erlewine: Wow.

Eddie Wilson: The slip face, I think the geologists call it.

Michael Erlewine: Yep.

Eddie Wilson: And so everything to the west is rocky and undulating, and everything is lower to the east and is lots more fertile and farmland.

Michael Erlewine: And is flat?

Eddie Wilson: Yeah, well rolling, yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Rolling.

Eddie Wilson: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: I'll have to come out there.

Eddie Wilson: Yeah, you need to come visit.

Michael Erlewine: You didn't go to Flatstock?

Eddie Wilson: No, I didn't go home for South-by-Southwest this year.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, so I just was curious about it.

Armadillo Tales

Eddie Wilson: You asked me about the people and the artists. In a nutshell, its the diversity of the music were trying to document and it's pretty easy to document.

Michael Erlewine: Yep.

Eddie Wilson: The diversity in the people that came there. It was staffed by hard-core hippies, but I got lots of good pieces written by straight folks who came there and just fell in love with the atmosphere.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

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Eddie Wilson: The way they were treated, the visuals they got to see. The art on the walls. One of my favorite stories is about a group of journalists from Pravda, the Russian newspaper who came to the Armadillo not long before it closed, and were taken on a tour there by Kay Northcott, who was The Texas Observer's editor at the time. She had taken them to the legislature to watch us make laws and then she brought them to the Armadillo, where everybody just got snookered. And they walked round and round the place, talking among themselves and making notes of what they were seeing on the walls and the one who spoke a little bit of English came up and said just almost with tears in his eyes, "This must be the freest place in the world."

Michael Erlewine: [laughs].

Eddie Wilson: God knows we wanted to be.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Eddie Wilson: The artist of the posters, kind of like the people run the gamut. Jim Franklin was the lead, the lead guy, the genius artist who tried to get help from other artists, when he couldn't put out enough posters for us, finally went off to Europe emceeing Freddie King shows, came back and opened a competitive place in town, the Ritz.

Michael Erlewine: Really?

Eddie Wilson: Yeah, but not because he felt bad about the Armadillo, because he was that kind of total artist. He really wanted to be in charge.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Eddie Wilson: Of course, after he gave it a good try and got beat up real bad, and he lost it, and he came back, he

hugged me and said, "Thanks for not being mad, I've been paid." I never thought of Jim as competition, when he started the Ritz. I just thought of my artist going off to try to get a few new moves together.

Michael Erlewine: How did the Armadillo ever come to not be? What made it kind of decline?

Eddie Wilson: Well, the Armadillo was always on the brink and in financial trouble. The Armadillo survived eight years longer than it would have because of a man named Hank Corseh.

Michael Erlewine: Oh really?

Eddie Wilson: Yeah. Hank...

Michael Erlewine: How do you spell the last name?

Eddie Wilson: Huh?

Michael Erlewine: How's the last...

Eddie Wilson: C O R S E H???

Michael Erlewine: Okay.

Eddie Wilson: Hank gave me \$50,000 in 1971 to keep it going.

Michael Erlewine: Wow.

Eddie Wilson: I was in serious trouble from the day we opened. When I left November 1st of 1976, I left it with Hank in order that he could try to get his money back out of it.

Michael Erlewine: Okay.

Eddie Wilson: He ran it for another four years, put it in Chapter 11, and got it out of Chapter 11.

Michael Erlewine: Wow. That's hard...

Eddie Wilson: And then the landlord pulled the plug.

Michael Erlewine: Oh.

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Eddie Wilson: And family estate came together and sold the real estate, and they never gave me that call. I was told I was to get the right of first refusal, but I was already gone and it didn't make me that much difference at the time.

Michael Erlewine: What about all the posters that were produced there? How were they stored or kept? What became of them? Did you try to keep some of each one or did they just all...?

Eddie Wilson: I didn't. I guess probably some of the touchier feelings that existed after the place was gone were because of the posters. Hank, evidently in the last hours of the existence of the place, gave them to Bruce Willenzik, who had run the kitchen.

Michael Erlewine: Oh, so that's how he has them all.

Eddie Wilson: Yeah. And it broke both the heart of both Micael Priest and Henry Gonzalez. But both Micael Priest and Henry Gonzalez should be the ones asked about that.

Michael Erlewine: Okay I will.

Eddie Wilson: Hank was under an awful lot of pressure and six weeks before the place closed, and of course it was scheduled for closing, and it was booked very heavily, and there were a lot of things going on, trying to get a video done and what not. Hank's younger brother died on my birthday, November the 15th six weeks before the place closed.

But Hank had said a number of times, from that moment on to through the end he should have put someone else in charge, but he just plowed right on through. He would have never, ever done anything at all to hurt Henry or

Micael Priest, if there had been a discussion about it.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Eddie Wilson: But I think Bruce was in an opportune position at just the right moment and I don't... I'm not the one to judge.

Michael Erlewine: Whas this Bruce person done with the posters? Do you have any idea?

Eddie Wilson: Well he's been selling them for years and years and running the Armadillo Christmas Bazaar.

Michael Erlewine: Oh okay.

Eddie Wilson: It's at the bazaar that he sells a lot of posters every year.

Michael Erlewine: I see. That makes sense.

Eddie Wilson: He's done right well with it. I heard Guy Juke talking the other day about how much money the artist could have made if they had gotten their posters. I don't know how to feel about any of those relationships, but there are a couple of other people that have really galled my ass, because they were paid to put the posters out and then after the place closed, lo and behold they turned up with these huge stashes of posters, some of which they've sold for incredible amount of money.

Michael Erlewine: So what they did was keep back some?

Eddie Wilson: Well, yeah, evidently most of them. I think John Bennett sold 100 Bruce Springsteen posters for a \$100 a piece. Tipped Michael Priest a hundred dollars [laughs].

Michael Erlewine: Wow.

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Eddie Wilson: Anyway, there's been some real touchy feelings about all that and that's probably one of the reasons that the Austin Armadillo artists never ended up coming together into any kind of cohesive group and then they all ended up out there at that high tech thing. Argen's.

Michael Erlewine: Right. Who holds the copyrights to the posters, the artists themselves, or do you still have them?

Eddie Wilson: The way the law reads, it changed in 1978. Armadillo owned the copyrights of everything up until then.

Michael Erlewine: Okay.

Eddie Wilson: In 1978, the law changed so you had to make your deal.

Michael Erlewine: Okay.

Eddie Wilson: But up until then, whoever commissioned the work, owned the work. So by buying the stock back from Hank I got the rights to all those videotapes that we produced and the posters. Right now working full speed for getting that poster art book ready with UT press.

Michael Erlewine: How's it coming?

Eddie Wilson: Coming really good.

Michael Erlewine: And how's Bill Narum doing with it?

Eddie Wilson: Narum and Richard Zelade on working on it just doing great.

Michael Erlewine: I'm still ready to help whenever they ask for anything they want.

Eddie Wilson: Well, he's just thrilled to death of your offer for those 400 photos that you've got shot.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, whenever he wants them, or did I send them to him? I don't think I did.

Eddie Wilson: I think there's some problem with the size of them.

Michael Erlewine: Or did I send them to him. Maybe I did.

Eddie Wilson: You sent him something I think, but I think that the size is so big...anyway...

Michael Erlewine: I mean he can shrink them to whatever he wants. Either that or ask me I'll do it for him.

Eddie Wilson: He needs to be in touch with you about them, but they're working on everything and Abe, my partner, is going to be back from South America and finish the deal with UT Press here sometime before the end of May.

Michael Erlewine: Because you might want to bring some of those posters, reprint them and work a deal where the artists get something and have like a portfolio of them.

Eddie Wilson: Yeah, I'm hoping that we can do a series of reprints and try to set up a website for all that sort of stuff.

Michael Erlewine: That's great.

Eddie Wilson: And the long and the short of it all, the variety in the music, the variety in the people, and the variety of the art style pretty much are our legacy now for having been an arts laboratory.

Michael Erlewine: That's cool. Did Jim Franklin ever come back to the country?

Eddie Wilson: He's in the country right now.

Michael Erlewine: I wonder how long he's going to be there.

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Eddie Wilson: A couple of months.

Michael Erlewine: I'd love to do an interview of him but I don't even know how to reach him.

Eddie Wilson: Well, here's the best way, call Mike Tolleson in Austin and let me see I've got Tolleson's telephone number here. Tolleson was the arts laboratory guy.

Michael Erlewine: Oh really?

Eddie Wilson: He was my lawyer, partner in the Armadillo and he's still in the music business legal end. Well he's helping...he's trying to help Jim with his finances and his publishing. Jim's written a lot of songs.

Give him a call and tell him I'm really happy about how you're helping us with the poster art book...

Michael Erlewine: Do my best.

Interview with Emek by Michael Erlewine

[Emek is IMO among the tip of top of the younger posters artists, both as an artist and a human being.]

Beginnings

Interview: 19 February 2003, sound recording.

BEGINNINGS

Emek. March 27, 1972. Israel.

Michael Erlewine: And what was the given name?

Emek: First name is Emek. E M E K

Michael Erlewine: But to start out with what I'd like know is how you got into art, what kind of training you had, and as a kid did you do stuff?

Emek: Sure. Well I guess the umbrella answer is that my mom and my dad were both artists. They both had art studios.

Michael Erlewine: Really.

Emek: ...and I grew up in their studio. I have one brother and one sister; they're younger than me and they're both artists as well.

Michael Erlewine: What type of art do they do?

Emek: My brother has done everything from large public murals to... he was an art director for a couple of dot-coms. And he's done like... he worked in Oakland doing public development of turning public... abandoned public space into like community centers, where people could do gardening or learn art themselves. Now he is at M.I.T. and he's a student there, but he's also working on some very interesting

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programs, but I'm not really allowed to discuss them.

Yeah, and my sister she... I mean everyone in my family draws, paints, sculpts, does photography.

Michael Erlewine: Cool.

Emek: My training was growing up in my parent's art studio, but I also went to college and got a BFA.

Michael Erlewine: In what?

Emek: Mostly illustration. I guess, that was the main focus.

Michael Erlewine: Wow. And as a kid, I mean like through high school and grade school, were you doing...?

Emek: Oh yeah. I mean I was always getting into trouble, because instead of taking notes I would doodle on all my pages. Now, the fact that my parents were artists kind of made me want to do something else in my life.

Michael Erlewine: [laughs].

Emek: I was always trying to take other classes and, for awhile, I was an English major in college and just doing other things, but I just found it's in the blood. It's in my calling and I couldn't fight it anymore, so about halfway through college, I changed my major and just decided to go for it.

Michael Erlewine: That's cool. And how are you doing? I mean... I've talked to a lot of artists, right? **Michael Erlewine:** A lot of the older artists are having a terrible time making a living. Hopefully you're doing better. Younger guys. I mean Jermaine seems to be doing okay.

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Talked to him and Kozik of course is cool. He's really got the money trip together.

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: What are your thoughts on that?

Emek: Well you know, my girlfriend criticizes me for not thinking too far ahead, but I just think of it as the work is coming in. It keeps me busy. Every year is better than the previous year. Every year, I get more high-profile jobs and more people find out about me and more people hire me. So, I don't know what that will mean when I become the age of a lot of the older people that are struggling now.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Emek: But, I know for me right now, things are good.

Michael Erlewine: Good.

Emek: I feel very fortunate that way.

Michael Erlewine: Oh, that's good.

Emek: I'm getting a lot of work and it's a lot of diverse types of work, like all things that are interesting to me, which is the most important thing.

Michael Erlewine: Yep, sounds right. So through school, were you doing pictorial art or cartoony art or?

Emek: It was mostly like, editorial stuff, geared towards... like 60's political cartoony.

Michael Erlewine: I see.

Emek: I mean that was my passion, having grown up in my parent's studio. They were both like very socially active and always supporting different political causes. I mean social causes.

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Michael Erlewine: Right.

Emek: I want to say political, but...

Michael Erlewine: No, I hear...I know exactly what you mean.

Emek: So, you know I always had that kind of slant toward my work, where art should make some kind of statement. I never was really into music related artwork at all, until...

Michael Erlewine: So like fine art?

Emek: Yeah, I did a lot of fine art and I did a lot of political cartoon stuff. I did a lot of paintings and sculptures.

Michael Erlewine: What about when you finally decided to go into art. How did that morph into gig posters and stuff like that?

Emek: I always had friends in bands and I was always interested in music. I just never thought of it as kind of anything more than...you know... I have friends in bands that have no money and they asked me to do artwork for free, so it was just a hobby, but... I found out about Kozik and a lot of the 60's artists and I just started showing my portfolio to different promoter's and record companies.

Michael Erlewine: That's cool. So... I was trying to get at how you transitioned into... So you started doing stuff you liked for bands that you knew.

Emek: Yeah, I mean I'd always done that since junior high school. And then I just built up, just through doing, just for fun. I kind of had a portfolio of flyers and, you know, just artwork I had done in general, which could have lent itself to music without me knowing it. I was kind of doing that style and just started showing it to promoters and companies

and getting work. And every job was just word of mouth and kind of would lead to another job. It was slow going at first, because I felt like every poster has to, you know, make a statement, so I put all my fine arts sensibilities and all my ideas into each particular poster. It was all hand done, hand drawn, hand color-separated, hand printed. It was very labor intensive and my output was slow, but I was hoping that my quality at least would eventually speak for itself.

Michael Erlewine: So you did your own silk screening?

Emek: In the beginning. In fact I didn't really know anything about silk screening and I didn't know how to do overlays or printing. It was one of the few things that I'd never really studied growing up. My brother and I would make our own t-shirts to wear to school and stuff but it was very...you know one, two, colors -- homemade silkscreen prints on a t-shirt.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Emek: I actually went to a Zap Comic Book show and I saw Moscoso's...

Michael Erlewine: Oh really?

Emek: Originals. He had his original pen and inks framed on the wall, but next to them he also had the Rubyliths, like because...

Michael Erlewine: Yeah.

Emek: Rubiyith was all hand cut and very intricate.

Michael Erlewine: I know.

Emek: And I said that's: what I want to use, from seeing Moscoso's stuff framed on a wall. I said I kind of figured out how to do better quality silk screens.

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Michael Erlewine: So you had all those little swivel knives, to cut Rubylith...

Emek: Yeah, yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Me too, I've done a bunch of that.

Emek: Yeah it is, especially when your just working in red and black and white, and trying to imagine what color goes on top of what, and try to make other colors and blends and overlays.

Michael Erlewine: That's cool.

Emek: Yeah, but Moscoso...

Michael Erlewine: Did you meet him?

Emek: Yeah, I've met... I mean now...

Michael Erlewine: Everyone probably.

Emek: I've met everybody. But I remember at that time I met R. Crumb, Victor Moscoso, Robert Williams, Wes Wilson. It was great.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, well Moscoso is quite a guy. He's very sharp.

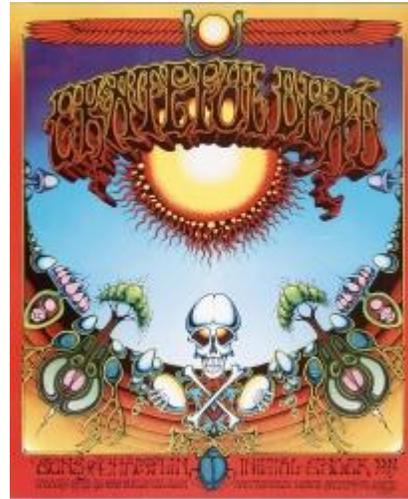
Emek: Yes he is.

Rick Griffin's Influence

Michael Erlewine: I did a nice interview with him and he's a character. Okay, so... trying to think where I am at. When you were coming up, what artists, poster artists were you aware of, or who influenced you? I mean who did you think was beautiful?

Emek: Well, I mean, without really knowing it, Rick Griffin. My parent's friends, when I was really young, had all the Grateful Dead album covers, like 12 x 12" size, great artwork, and I would stare at these things for hours and never really played any of the music. I just would look at the artwork for years, and I remember feeling one day, like...I

finally got my own record player and I put on a Grateful Dead record, I think it was Aoxomoxoa. The music to me was not at all what I expected. This is like some mellow hippie's music and I was expecting skulls and I was expecting something totally different.



Rick Griffin's Aoxomoxoa

Michael Erlewine: That would go with like the artwork, like no relation, right?

Emek: I mean, now I can see a relation, but at that time I was expecting... The artwork to me was so fantastic and the music was... and I've heard this stuff before.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Emek: Yeah, I didn't even know what to expect. I didn't think that it would going to be this... slow old-time type music stuff.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, well that's Grateful Dead, right?

Emek: Yeah. No, and I have nothing against the Dead, they're cool.

Michael Erlewine: No, I don't either, but it's not my personal favorite music. I like blues and jazz.

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Emek: But I just remembered a shock. I first felt when I... after years of staring at these album covers. So yeah, Rick Griffin was a big influence on me as far as poster art. But you know growing up in my dad's studio, my dad has had shows all over the place and I've met all kinds of artists and been influenced by art history since as far back as I can remember. I remember it was very important to my parents that we have that kind of upbringing.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, sounds cool.

Emek: So, there were so many different influences. My dad himself was a major influence of me.

Michael Erlewine: I would bet. I would hope so.

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: With Rick Griffin, what particular pieces did you like? You mentioned Aoxomoxoa. Any other particular ones? Of course that's a classic thing, right? That's like the essence of him.

Emek: You know a lot of the surf comics that he did, he would have a main story, but then he would have all kinds of other things in the borders and little small details. To me that was... and also Robert Williams and the whole Zap Comics. There was a main story line, but then there were all kinds of other small detail that corresponded to the main story line or was it's own separate story line. I was never really a huge fan of comic books. I liked just kind of more the paintings, where it's just one panel. You can look at it and get your story out of one panel, as opposed to telling a whole story. Because I felt like comic books are more like books, and I wanted

to create something that could be hung on a wall.

Michael Erlewine: Right, and of artists, more modern artists which ones do you feel a kinship to or do you particularly appreciate or feel effect you?

Emek: Well...

Michael Erlewine: I mean, not... up to the current ones.

Emek: Yeah. Robert Williams, definitely. Mobius, French kind of a comic book artist.

Michael Erlewine: Oh, yeah my kids have that.

Emek: But I love the bold Russian constructivist styles and some of the Bauhaus elements, I love Japanese wood-block-prints. I love German expressionist art, that rough woodcut look, such powerful expression, you know in only a few lines. It's just... there's Bernie Wrightson. I guess a lot of my influences are comic books, even though I never wanted to be a comic book artist, but there are a lot of artists.

Talking about the Posters

Michael Erlewine: I'm just curious. You just seem to have tried many styles you can... I think there's one that kind of looks like a Coop.

Emek: Right.

Michael Erlewine: Things that stand out for me, because I'm an old-fashioned guy, you know. The Mirror Ball one you did.

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Mirror Ball

Emek: Yeah, I did that job in like a day and a half.

Michael Erlewine: Well, I think that's really beautiful and one of my favorites is the Mercury Rev thing... the skeleton.



HUM Mercury Rev

Emek: Oh yeah, yeah.

Michael Erlewine: I think that's just an incredible nice piece. I have a daughter who loves your stuff, too. She's actually going to work on the site. And she's a singer/songwriter, about 21. But she thinks your stuff is cool and she loves Jermaine as well... She's introduced me and I haven't collected this stuff heavily, the new stuff, just because I'm 61 years old, right? I played at the Fillmore and played at the Matrix and played at all those places. I am an old hippie.

Emek: Cool.

Michael Erlewine: That was the art that I grew out of...

Emek: Right.

Michael Erlewine: But there must some younger artists that you'd recommend that you think are...

Emek: Sure.

Michael Erlewine: They're not just doing a few, but they're going the route you went, which is... their putting their blood and life into it.

Emek: Right.

Michael Erlewine: Their determined.

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: These guys ought to be given a break. And Kozik's new organization I think is a wonderful idea that will help... but what you need is some kind of community and some kind of way of...and what hopefully I can bring to it is you have to catalogue this stuff. These posters have to be documented. Nothing is collectible before it's really been documented. It's been true in the history of collectibles.

Emek: Right.

Michael Erlewine: You don't get collector's going after stuff that they don't know the beginning, middle and end of, or at least the beginning and the middle, right?

Emek: Right.

Michael Erlewine: We have to figure out... You have to help me update... Is there anyplace that all of your images are available anymore? Like on a website.

Emek: Well, there's my website.

Michael Erlewine: And how much stuff's on it. I haven't looked at it recently.

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Emek: I don't know. I think I've done over a hundred posters and there's probably 80 something on the website.

Michael Erlewine: And what size are the images?

Emek: They vary, but, you know, I can always send you another disc as well.

Michael Erlewine: I think you should because I'm going to show images at 250 pixels, the long side.

Emek: Okay.

Michael Erlewine: Which is not too big anymore, as they get bigger screens, and they start to look like postage stamps again. But to begin with, I need an image big enough that I can go in and get the details of there...you know. I have to be able to read the fine print.

Emek: What I can do is I can just send you master scans and then, from that you can make them smaller.

Michael Erlewine: Okay, yeah. I know how to do that. I'm a programmer; I don't know whether you know that, a systems programmer. So I know how to do all that stuff. I've got about maybe 30,000 posters that we're going to put up on the site.

Emek: Wow.

Michael Erlewine: Which is quite... going all the way back to the mid 1960s.

Emek: Right.

Michael Erlewine: And boxing style too. Also I'm really working on Texas stuff, because I feel the Texas guys have really been given a, short-shrift and they deserve some attention. Because I love that Texas art.

Emek: Micael Priest was really good.

Michael Erlewine: Oh, all those guys, like you know who Ken Featherston is?

Emek: No.

Michael Erlewine: He's one of the best of them.



Ken Featherston Poster for the Armadillo

Emek: I know Jim Franklin.

Michael Erlewine: Right. I just interviewed Danny Garrett, who is one of the...

Emek: Oh yeah Garrett was great.

Michael Erlewine: And you know Nels of course.

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: All these guys are sending me their stuff. Kerry Awn is sending me 400 pieces, his entire work.

Emek: Wow.

Michael Erlewine: What I do is photo-document them.

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: So we have a big vacuum table that just sucks them up and I have a 6 megapixel camera that

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does a pretty good job. It's just a lot of work.

Emek: Yeah, it is.

Michael Erlewine: But I've done almost all of those. Anyways, I'd love it. If you have large enough images, I'm sure it's fine, you know...

Emek: Yeah, I do, because I mean that it's the same disc I send to magazines, when they want to do articles.

Michael Erlewine: Okay, and that's good enough for them.

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Because I just shot all the Fire House stuff. They sent me all their posters, and I'd sent them back of course.

Emek: Wow. Thing about Firehouse and my work, and some of the other guys is to see it in person. It is amazing and when it's shrunk down to a postage stamp, well...

Michael Erlewine: I know.

Emek: ...Can't see the hand done quality of it.

Michael Erlewine: It's the truth, but, what would you suggest? I mean...

Emek: There's nothing else. What your doing is a good thing, so there's no other way to present it.

Michael Erlewine: Anyway, enough of me talking, let's go back to you talking. I apologize for that.

Emek: No, that's all right. I want to know about you too.

Michael Erlewine: I want to fill you in. I just want you to know what I'm doing. Okay, so what about collaborative work?

Have you ever worked with other artists to produce posters?

Emek: I work with my brother. My brother's really a good artist. He does all kind of work, I mean.

Michael Erlewine: What's an example of one you might have worked with him on that I might know or possibly have in the database?

Emek: We did the Henry Rollins spoken word, the very first one, where it's Henry Rollins with his arms crossed.

Michael Erlewine: I don't know if I have it.

Emek: And he's spitting lyrics out of his ears.



Henry Rollings, Spoken Word

Michael Erlewine: What year was it?

Emek: 1998.

Michael Erlewine: Although, for you, for some reason, I have very few years so we need to clear that up.

Emek: Sure.

Michael Erlewine: Hopefully we can just do that, I find a Beastie Boys from 1998, a wonderful one.

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Emek: Thanks.

Michael Erlewine: With the Madonna.

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: That's very cool.

Emek: That's a funny story behind that poster too.

Michael Erlewine: What is it?

Emek: The Beastie Boys were doing these 'Free Tibet' festivals, fundraisers.

Michael Erlewine: Oh well yeah, I remember them.

Emek: Yeah, and they are also very much into the Tibetan cause.

Michael Erlewine: Well, so am I. Do you know that?

Emek: I didn't, but that....

Michael Erlewine: I've been to Tibet and so forth, for sure I'm totally...

Emek: Well, I've been to Dharamsala and I've been to Nepal and...

Michael Erlewine: Oh really?

Emek: Yeah. And my mom. My mom has been to Tibet.

Michael Erlewine: So have you met the Dalai Lama?

Emek: We were going to meet him and he was sick.

Michael Erlewine: I belong to another group that's like the Dali Lama. Our leader is called the Karmapa, and I've been doing it for 25 years. I'm deep into it, so...

Emek: So is my mom. She's good friends with Pema Chodron.

Michael Erlewine: Oh yeah? Well, Pema Chodron is more in my lineage.

She comes from Chogyam Trungpa, Rinpoche, whom I met in 1974.

Emek: Wow.

Michael Erlewine: And, anyways, we have a whole center that I've run for years, with a big shrine room and you know what a stupa is? I am sure you do if you have been to Nepal.

Emek: Of course.

Michael Erlewine: We built a good-sized one in our back yard.

Emek: My mom was (I think) in Colorado and Sting, the musician. He has like a private helicopter drop him in the middle of one of their... I guess it's like some monastery. And so Sting landed on this helicopter and donated a bunch of money and wrote a song.

Michael Erlewine: Oh really.

Emek: To help raise a stupa.

Michael Erlewine: Probably yeah, the Rocky Mountain...

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, that's probably the Great Stupa, a big stupa.

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: My group built one in Crestone, Colorado, which is maybe 40-foot high. It is at about 7,000 feet elevation or something. Anyway, we're getting side-tracked here, but yeah that's cool.

Emek: Yeah, no I think it's all very cool. Well, my original idea for the Beastie Boys was to take some kind of Tibetan Deity and do a very Tantric modern.

Michael Erlewine: Like a thanka?

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Emek: Yeah, but like a psychedelic, a little bit more of a psychedelic rock and roll version of that.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Emek: Then they objected to that. They said "oh that's making of religion, that's not cool."

Michael Erlewine: Who objected?

Emek: The Beastie Boys. I don't remember exactly who...

Michael Erlewine: Oh no, no, okay, I'm with you. I didn't know... thought maybe the Buddhists might object.

Emek: Well, I think that was one of their concerns.

Michael Erlewine: Okay.

Emek: I just heard from them that it was making fun of Buddhism. So then I just changed it to Judeo-Christian motif and ...

Michael Erlewine: [laughs].

Emek: they go "Oh, that's fine."

Michael Erlewine: Everyone makes fun of that [laughs], right?

Emek: Yeah, exactly. So you can make fun of that, that's no problem.

Michael Erlewine: Not minorities though, right? Can't make fun of minorities, right?

Emek: Well, I wasn't really making fun of...

Michael Erlewine: No, I know. That's a joke.

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Well, I think you have a wonderful ability with skeletons, like I think your Everclear thing is like incredible. Like I've never seen this

poster in person, but I would like to see the real thing sometime, because I think that's a...



Everclear

Emek: That one to me was a little bit of a disappointment, because it was an early piece and I work in black and white, and I'm trying to envision how it's going to look in color. But because of the deadlines and because your cutting Rubylith and your... I'm thinking to myself mentally, like this layer of Rubylith I want to come out yellow, and this layer I want to come out red, but when it all comes together, you don't really see how it's going to look until it's finished.

Michael Erlewine: Well, I'm only seeing a postage stamp, but to me it looks very cool. You also did a Balzac thing?

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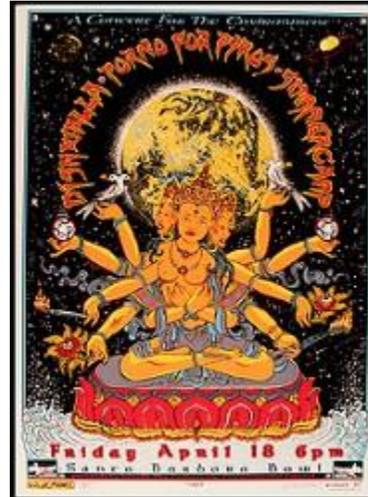
Balzac

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: That's very cool.

Emek: Thank you. That again: I was working with a band and they're very like punk rock, so they wanted something very punk-rock. So, within the confines of what they wanted, I was trying to make it something that is a little bit different. There are certain limitations, because your working silk screen, so your limited to the amount of colors. Everything you do almost has a certain flat or comic book feel to it, just because of the nature of silk screening. I'm always trying to, within the confines of what the band wants, to try to bring a sense of my own concept.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, no you did, Porno for Pyros I mean that's a Tibetan type, or Tantric type deity of some type.



Porno for Pyros

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: I'm not sure what your model...look likes a Chenrezik (Avalokiteshvara) or something. But, you know, many armed...

Emek: Right.

Michael Erlewine: There's an 11-armed Chenresik that is a famous one and a four armed one, and a thousand armed one. I don't know. How many have you got? One, two, three, four...

Emek: I got a lot [laughs], I don't know.

Michael Erlewine: Eight, nine, ten.

Emek: See, my mom is always criticizing me, ike that's not right.

Michael Erlewine: Well, she's correct, it isn't right, but...

Emek: But its just art.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, no I hear you. That's very cool. Anyway, you did one for The Weapon of Choice with...

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Primus, Weapon of Choice

Emek: Primus.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, Primus. Now that's not typical of you for me, for my understanding of you.

Emek: Right.

Michael Erlewine: But there's the skeleton again too, right?

Emek: Yeah, you know it's basically for me. I mean, and this is how it's been since early childhood, it's always about the concept first. So I get an idea in my head and then I figure, or I try to play with how am I going to present this idea. What's the best way to get across the concept?

Michael Erlewine: That's right.

Emek: So sometimes its more of a clip-art or manipulated Xerox art and other times its hand-drawn. It's just to me, the important thing is to start with the idea and then, by the time I'm finished, it might not necessarily be what I started with.

Michael Erlewine: I see. I hear you.

Emek: But that's my motivation and for that image. It's like it's the Coppertone girl.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah.

Emek: But on the one hand, it's kind of a sexist image.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Emek: So this is my way of saying she finally gets her revenge on the dog. So the dogs pulling down her shorts, but she's got her little laser gun and she's blasting him and electrocuting him.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Emek: So for that image, I didn't want to hand draw it as much as I wanted to give it kind of the feel of like an old postcard.

Michael Erlewine: Oh you did, but then you put a skeleton in there, which is like shocking kind of.

Emek: Yeah, because that's what it is. It's shocking. You see the cute little girl and then, but you see she's finally getting her revenge.

Michael Erlewine: So, in some ways you have an affinity with Griffin, in the sense of religion, which was very important to him. Because everyone I've talked to says he converted, re-converted, to Christianity when he was older, but he was still deep into trying to puzzle out the universe. Like the Prodigy thing you did, I think is very cool. The one with...

Emek: Yeah the samurai's and...

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, they're getting the multiple arms, right?

Emek: Yeah, well... that's kind of like Prodigy... My original concept, because I always come up with a concept really fast, just...

Michael Erlewine: First thought best thought is what Trungpa, Rinpoche used to say.

Emek: Yeah, I don't know if that always applies to me, but my first thought was

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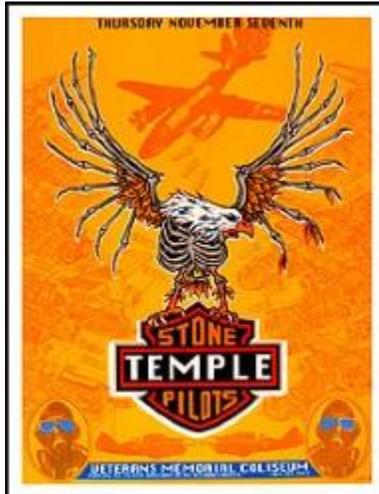
Prodigy's a very... at the time they were one of the largest techno bands, and I was just thinking what represents technology and I thought you know: Japanese.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Emek: So then I wanted to do something that was very old and traditional, but also very modern, so it's a samurai and he's commanding all the elements. He's got fire and water...

Michael Erlewine: I know, it's beautiful.

Emek: ...Music and he's got.



Michael Erlewine: Well the Stone Temple Pilots is another skeleton. There you have another.

Emek: Yeah, the skeleton kind of like showing the dark side of a corporate logo or just...

Michael Erlewine: That Stone Temple Pilots thing is very cool and the wings especially, right?

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Very, very neat. I think that's kind of like a theme in your... at least for me just a look.

Emek: Oh yeah, in my other art too I was always interested from an early age in the structure of things, what's beneath the surface. A skeleton always amazed me as a kid to think that that's inside of every person, that behind the skin it's like blood and guts and a skeletal structure.

Michael Erlewine: Right, I know.

Emek: But it was never to me about the gore, it's not like...

Michael Erlewine: No, no, no and I understand, right?

Emek: It's just about the beauty, in the way that Stanley Mouse and Rick Griffin would do skeletons and the Grateful Dead.

Michael Erlewine: Amen, that was...

Emek: There's beauty in it.

Michael Erlewine: It's LSD right?

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: You're probably too young for that, but back in those days that were... and then the Verve poster that you did?

Emek: Which? I've done two.

Michael Erlewine: The Japanese one.

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Verve

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: I think that's just beautiful.

Emek: Well, again it was a struggle for me, because I have this idea, the name of the album was Urban Hymns.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Emek: The song was Bittersweet Symphony's, so I wanted to do something that to me was urban and bittersweet.

Michael Erlewine: So you have those smoke chimneys in the background and then you have this classic Kabuki-like, whatever it is, I don't know.

Emek: Yeah, it's supposed to be like some kind of a robot and what she's doing, she's touching some greenery.

Michael Erlewine: That's right.

Emek: And the greenery is turning her back into a human, like everything that she's touched is becoming flesh, and she's in shock, because she's this cold robot.

Michael Erlewine: Oh, so I didn't see all that.

Emek: It's very hard to see, but that was my original concept, and then it was really hard to render it in only a couple of days because of the deadline, so...

Michael Erlewine: Cool and the smokestacks are just really something back there, I mean to bring that whole other element, you know, of whatever.

Emek: Yeah. The modern world.

Michael Erlewine: Modern world, pollution...

Emek: Pollution.

Michael Erlewine: Like the film "Koyaanisqatsi," which I imagine you've seen.

Emek: Oh yeah, I love that film.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, and "Pawaqqatsi," the sequel to that film. You've seen that too? Yeah, those are very cool.

Emek: I've seen Anima Mundi and then there's the new one that just came out last month or, but I haven't seen that one.

Michael Erlewine: It's in theaters or something?

Emek: It's was in limited theaters, and then it'll be the video soon.

Michael Erlewine: Oh I'd like to see it. I saw Phillip Glass perform "Pawaqqatsi" live... It was great?

Emek: With Phil Glass?

Michael Erlewine: Yeah.

Emek: Wow. Cool.

Michael Erlewine: It was cool. He hangs out in Ann Arbor in a lot, which is where I grew out. There's a Tibetan center that he's connected too. Okay, well cool. I'm trying to think of some of

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these stories we'll put in, and we'll show a little image so people can follow it, because I think that's one of the best ways is to look at art right?

Emek: Sure.

Michael Erlewine: And to talk to the guys who did it.

Emek: Yeah.

API: The American Poster Institute

Michael Erlewine: Find out about it. Let's talk just about this thing that Kozik and Nels are doing. Are you connected to that at all? This new group, the API, American Poster Institute or whatever it is?

Emek: A little bit because of, through Jermaine.

Michael Erlewine: Oh, so your friends with Jermaine. He's very nice.

Emek: He's not very nice?

Emek: No, he's very cool.

Michael Erlewine: And he's very good at emulating Kozik in the sense of trying to be out front and a businessman and selling himself. I think that's a good element. More people need to learn how to do it.

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: I'd think they'd make more money that way.

Emek: Yeah, that's true. Art and commerce.

Michael Erlewine: Yep.

Emek: You have to do it.

Michael Erlewine: This whole artist group I think is a probably good idea.

Emek: Well, we're having a meeting. I mean I they already had a lot of

meetings, but I'm going to be participating in a meeting with them in a couple of weeks.

Michael Erlewine: Cool.

Emek: So I'm going to find out more about it then, because I'm just here in LA and I'm just swamped in my work.

Michael Erlewine: So you're busy? You have a lot of work?

Post Neo-Explosionists

Emek: Yeah, yeah, actually Jermaine Rogers and I and another friend of ours, Justin Hampton.

Michael Erlewine: Oh yeah, I know Hampton's work.

Emek: We kind of formed our own design team.

Michael Erlewine: I didn't know that.

Emek: And we're called the post-neo-explosionists.

Michael Erlewine: [laughs].

Emek: We've just came up with a name tongue-in-cheek because people try to label things, so we labeled ourselves before anyone else could.

Michael Erlewine: That's cool.

Emek: So we just got hired by a band that's pretty big right now as far as like new bands go.

Michael Erlewine: What's the name of it?

Emek: Queens of the Stone Age.

Michael Erlewine: Oh yeah, I know them.

Emek: They're going to be headlining Lollapalooza This summer and their getting a lot of good press and major...

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Michael Erlewine: Well, they've been coming up, yeah, for sure.

Emek: So we got hired by them to design their entire US tour.

Michael Erlewine: Cool.

Emek: Which means a different poster for every stop of their tour.

Michael Erlewine: How many? Oh, wow, how many stops?

Emek: I think it's over 30.

Michael Erlewine: Whoa.

Emek: So we've just been super, super busy doing all these different posters for them.

Michael Erlewine: What will you get sets of all of them.

Emek: There will be sets available.

Michael Erlewine: I might be interested in one.

Emek: Yeah. I think Jermaine will be getting some sets, I'll be getting some sets and Justin will be getting some sets.

Michael Erlewine: You might want to put me in touch with Justin, if he's interested. I should probably look into cataloguing his work.

Emek: Oh yeah, he's done some classic pieces as far as the modern, the whole 90's posters go. He's done some very good ones.

Michael Erlewine: Oh absolutely. Would he be up for an interview do you think?

Emek: I'm sure he would be. I think he just gave two different interviews last week.

Michael Erlewine: Cool.

Emek: So I think, I can't imagine an artist saying no.

Gigposters.com

Michael Erlewine: I think that the time is now. I mean places like Gigposters.com, the fact that Grushkin is going to do another book. All this points to, hopefully, an increase in interest in posters for everyone. And we all co-operate and I interviewed the guy who run gigposters, his name is Clay.

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: And he's really nice. Oh so I'm going to do an article on him and try to get as much traffic over to him as we can do. Because, we're all in the same boat. Hopefully I can provide a catalogue for folks who want to go and look at every Emek, right? They want to go see your development and not just the current things, but look at the history of what you did. I think that's useful.

Emek: Yeah.

Flatstock

Michael Erlewine: Are you going to Flatstock?

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: And is he going to that? All you guys. God, I don't think I can make it.

Emek: We're all going to be together.

Michael Erlewine: Oh I think that's cool. I'd like to go, but I think I'm trying to get this site up and I think it's going to just take all my time just now to do it and if I'm there, I'm not really an artist, but I could go and meet people that would be nice.

Emek: Yeah, I think that Grushkin makes the rounds.

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Michael Erlewine: Oh yeah.

Emek: A lot of people go that are just into....

Michael Erlewine: Oh yeah, he's got a new book coming. I'm supposed to do an interview with him this afternoon.

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: I'm just an archivist. I'm trying to think of what other questions I have. I think I have enough for a good beginning. I want to try to write a little something about you and your work and then have sections of this interview with little images and stuff so people can read about. Read and then look at what you've done.

Emek: Sure.

Michael Erlewine: For each artist, I'm going to pick out a main image. if you have any special poster. you can think about which one you might like. But there will be one large one. Not large, I mean 250 the long side, and then there will be five small ones that they can click through.

Emek: Sure.

Michael Erlewine: And show users something instantly, so they can find what they like and then they can go deeper.

Emek: Yeah, I mean I'll have to think about it, because all our posters look really nice in person...but when they're shrunk down...

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Emek: ...they don't have the same amount of pop.

Michael Erlewine: Well ,I'm willing to also show some larger if you wanted, you pick the ones.

Emek: Well, yeah.

Michael Erlewine: So you could send me a new ROM with images.

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: I think that's really important and I will go through and put them all in again. I have most of them in, but I see a lot of information is missing, so I never finished it or something.

Emek: Sure.

Michael Erlewine: Do you have any, are there any things you want to tell me that?

Emek: Well, you had asked me earlier if I had ever done any collaborations and I had mentioned I have worked with my brother.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah.

Emek: But now, I've started this design team with Justin and Jermaine. So we're sort of working together. We're all exchanging ideas, but we haven't actually shared one piece of artwork that all three of us have...

Michael Erlewine: Is that what it will be? Is it a consortium or is it like you'll actually work together on a piece?

Emek: Well, it's more of a consortium, only because of the deadline.

Michael Erlewine: Okay.

Emek: We definitely want to work together on a piece. But as soon as we got this job from Queens of the Stone Age, we all just, three of us, broke up the dates as for who's doing which venues.

Michael Erlewine: I think that's great.

Emek: And then we've just gotten to work and we've just been so busy.

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Michael Erlewine: You must be working like a crazy person.

Emek: Yeah, yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Because that's a lot.

Emek: That's in addition to doing illustrations for a bunch of different magazines and CD covers, and the normal work that comes in as well.

Michael Erlewine: That's great. I'm glad you have the work.

Emek: Yeah. But we defiantly do want to do a collaborative piece. We actually had a big show in Seattle, the three of us, an art exhibition. And for that we collaborated on a poster and we printed it as a 40 x 60 silk screen.

Michael Erlewine: No kidding.

Emek: Which was very cool.

Michael Erlewine: Oh, send me an image.

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: And also a list of any shows that you've been in. One of the things that I'm interested in documenting is art shows, because I think that's a good sign of people's interest. So if you have a list of the shows that you've had stuff in, or poster images from those shows, you know the main ones, that would be cool. That's something that I'm interested in: art shows.

Emek: Yeah, well I've done like 30 shows.

Michael Erlewine: Oh really?

Emek: But a lot of them are group shows, you know.

Michael Erlewine: Oh that's okay. Group shows are fine. Do you a handy list of them or did you never do that?

Emek: I kind of just made a piece of paper that I wrote. As I have a show, I just write them on a piece of paper, but I have to organize it a little better.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, well you could organize it or Xerox it and send it along or something. I'll organize it, then you'll have it. It will be in one place finally, where people could look at it, because I think that's an important index of... to see how people are doing. Anything else that you can think of and we can do this again sometime? I think I needed to adjust what I've got and I'm sure I'll have some questions. I'll realize I didn't ask you this or that.

Emek: I don't know...a lot of the other things I would add are just salesman techniques, like what's my passion and what drives and I don't know if that's...

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, what is your passion? No, I'm totally interested in that.

Emek: I've been always drawn to art, but the fact that my dad was an artist when we were growing up, my parents made a consensus to throw the TV out of the house, and they said no television, but we'll buy you any book you want. We'll read to you and get you any art-supplies you want, anything you want to learn. We'll teach you the etching press; we'll teach to paint with oils.

Michael Erlewine: Really.

Emek: We'll work with fiberglass, Plexiglas, whatever you guys want to learn. It was always very famil-oriented.

Michael Erlewine: Oh, this is cool.

Emek: I didn't know that it was different than the...

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Michael Erlewine: Regular people.

Emek: Yeah, we were poor, but we were not creatively poor and we didn't even realize we were poor, because we felt like we had so much.

Michael Erlewine: Well, that's right.

Emek: But then there were times when my dad didn't sell any art and things were tough. I mean my parents did their best to keep it from us, but I do remember going through some rough spots. Growing up, I always wanted to figure out a way where I could do my art, because I realized that it was my passion. But, figure out a way to make money.

Michael Erlewine: Where did you grow up?

Emek: Just in Los Angeles.

Michael Erlewine: Oh, in LA. Your parents still living?

Emek: Yeah, yeah. They are both living in LA. They are not together, but they see each other all the time. They might as well be together. It's very strange.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Emek: Because one of the things that attracted them to each other was such similar values and interests, so their always doing things together.

Michael Erlewine: And are you single or married?

Emek: I'm actually getting married this summer, so I'm...

Michael Erlewine: Oh cool.

Emek: I'm single for... Well, I'm not really single now.

Michael Erlewine: Well, congratulations.

Emek: Thank you.

Michael Erlewine: I've been married what, 32 years.

Emek: Yeah, wow.

Michael Erlewine: That's a long time. I've got four kids.

Emek: My fiancé, she's a sculptor.

Michael Erlewine: Oh, cool.

Emek: My brother's girlfriend, she a sculptor and painter.

Michael Erlewine: What kind of philosophy are you interested in? What kind of spiritual things? Obviously you have some spiritual element, because you can see it in your art, just of all the different things you, you know, the skeletons and stuff like that. It's a sign of some kind of, something like that. Is there any particular direction your going?

Emek: Umm...I would say that a lot of different religions interest me, but it's not like I adhere to any particular religion myself. It's just the mechanics of religion and what they set out to do and how different people respond and react to them. More like what are the universal tenets and truths that all religions preach and yet how they've become so...

Michael Erlewine: Well-organized religion is tough, right?

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: It's hard to organize something like that.

Emek: Yeah. You know it's the opiate of the masses.

Michael Erlewine: Oh, that's what they say.

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Emek: And modern religion is television and there's a certain time of the day when it's all soap operas and there's another time of the day when it's all people suing each other on TV.

Michael Erlewine: [laughs].

Emek: And talk shows and it's like, if you just watch TV and the whole dynamics of what's being advertised and what's being shown. And at night it's just all teenagers dating each other and getting upse;, it's just the whole consumer culture.

Michael Erlewine: Well, it's kind of like a modern form of meditation believe it or not, that people sit still for...

Emek: It's kind of like the Hindu version, where it's not about transcendence, it's just about a blessing out. You get so numbed, that it's it the absence of meditation...

Michael Erlewine: That's right.

Emek: It's meditating on instant gratification, it's umm...

Michael Erlewine: Relaxation therapy.

Emek: Yeah. But it's also based on fear, you know. It's like: be afraid and the only thing that will make you to get over your fears is to go out and shop and consume.

Michael Erlewine: [laughs] That's true.

Emek: So it's the two-fold.

Michael Erlewine: Well I live in a little tiny town. There's not many distractions here, I'll tell you that. We have a Wal-Mart, that's about it.

Emek: That's scary because you can just see the people.

Michael Erlewine: The what?

Emek: At least in L.A., when I go to a Wal-Mart, because my friend and I we go there just to do our little cultural anthropology analysis.

Michael Erlewine: Sure.

Emek: The lowest common denominator, the status quo, very interesting.

Michael Erlewine: Well, you'll find it everywhere, right? I mean you've been to...

Emek: Oh yeah, and that's the whole other thing, it's like...

Michael Erlewine: You've been to Katmandu, right?

Emek: Every little town looks like every other little town, because they have their McDonalds and their Wal-Mart.

Michael Erlewine: You say, you went to Katmandu, right?

Emek: Yes.

Michael Erlewine: Isn't that a trip?

Emek: Oh yeah.

Michael Erlewine: [laughs].

Emek: I mean I see everyone on bicycles and their wearing their little air filters.

Michael Erlewine: They have to.

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, the garbage is just in the streets.

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: They don't [laughs] have garbage collection.

Emek: And big trucks and...

Michael Erlewine: I know it.

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Emek: Yeah, but I've been all over India.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, India is different. I mean Tibet is very different; it's very clean.

Emek: Sure.

Michael Erlewine: Because it's high up and nothing rots, right?

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Everything is well preserved; it's very beautiful.

Emek: No, I mean Katmandu is beautiful too.

Michael Erlewine: Oh, totally. Totally too.

Emek: I wish I could go back.

Michael Erlewine: Well you can, but it is dangerous right now.

Emek: Yeah, well, that's what I mean these emergencies...

Michael Erlewine: Well, Tibet is really nice. I went on a pilgrimage there and went to all the shrines, all the temples, not all I mean, all the ones from my lineage that I could get to.

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: And climbed up to the caves and all that kind of stuff.

Emek: Wow.

Michael Erlewine: Just about died. They had to carry me out at one point, I was too high and I couldn't breath.

Emek: Yeah. I mean, I saw a lot of altitude sickness when I was there. When we were like, going on treks and stuff near the Everest region in Nepal.

Michael Erlewine: Exactly. So you've been up in the mountains, then?

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: That's very neat.

Emek: You have to acclimate, but a lot of tourists they come and they land right at the higher airport, and as soon as they get off the plane they think...

Michael Erlewine: Oh no, I know. I took my whole family there, which was a trip, right?

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: I home schooled my kids and we had home birth, and I'm an old hippy, right?

Emek: Cool.

Michael Erlewine: So we were all into alternative communities ever since... Anyway, it was fun to take the whole family there and try to keep them alive and get through all that.

Emek: Yeah, but at the same time because it's just such a different world, one of the things I thought was amazing, was when we would take a taxi or a rickshaw or whatever we would take.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Emek: Sometimes we didn't have... we would always negotiate the price first.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Emek: But, we sometimes they didn't have change and then the driver would speed away, and but then he would come back five minutes later with our change. Like he could have just left us there stranded, and say, "Ah stupid American."

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Emek: But, so many times they would leave and then come back. Or you'd rent an all day taxi and you'd say pick me up

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in an hour, and theoretically if we wanted to...

Michael Erlewine: I hear you.

Emek: We could use the guy for ten hours and then disappear and not pay him.

Michael Erlewine: Oh no, it's a different world.

Emek: There's a certain level of trust that in America people would just take advantage of it, and there it's just part of the cultural institution.

Michael Erlewine: Oh I agree. I can still remember in India the funniest thing is that you'd be paying somebody a bribe, right?

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Baksheesh

Emek: [laughs] Baksheesh.

Michael Erlewine: While your doing that, your slipping him the money under the table and your talking about the loftiest philosophy at the same time.

Emek: Yeah, yeah.

Michael Erlewine: It's just incredibly...

Emek: My brother was really good at that.

Michael Erlewine: [laughs] That's funny. Well, I've also had a guest house here for years, where I've had swami's and Sanskrit scholars and Buddhist scholars, so you know eight people at a time, so I've just had an enormous amount of... We ran a Tibetan... translation center for a long time. I have learned to read Tibetan script, but I'm not a good translator or anything. I have to use a dictionary.

Emek: Wow.

Michael Erlewine: I'm very into Eastern philosophy, right? Or, religion, basically, but not organized, you know, just the psychology basically.

Emek: Sure.

Michael Erlewine: From acid, that's where I came out of acid trips and trying to figure out well: what is that? And then, Buddhism seemed to know what it was.

Emek: Right.

Michael Erlewine: Anyways, I'm wandering. Okay, I think we've got a start. I will send you my address in case you don't have it.

Emek: Yeah, you can e-mail it to me.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, I'll just e-mail it to you and I'll look forward to getting those imaes and I'll process them right away. We'll bring your section right up to date. Which I really always meant to do before, because you were one of the few people that really responded well at the beginning, right?

Emek: Cool.

Michael Erlewine: Your always gung-ho right? Which I think is cool, because that's the way I am. Any other questions for me?

Emek: You know I probably will have some, but I just.

Michael Erlewine: If you want me to talk about that I can, I can write a little thing about that.

Emek: Yeah, I mean I think all three of us are very proud of it.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah.

Emek: Because we all feel like we're at a certain point in our careers. You know,

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that's the thing with a lot of the... I don't know what you want to call them, subcultures or movements or whatever, where there's a lot of people doing what we're doing, but there's so much competition to get the work and everyone's feeling like desperate, or I need to get this job, so there's always some backstabbing and....

Michael Erlewine: Is there? See I'm totally not connected to that. How is the community of... I mean are there lots of young artists now?

Emek: Yeah, you know it just seems like...

Michael Erlewine: But you're not a young one. I mean you've been there for quite awhile.

Emek: Yeah, I've been doing it for a while, I still feel it's young and everything and I'm considered young to some people.

Michael Erlewine: Oh yeah, but, not in the poster community. So you know, the people I talk to, you've arrived, right?

Emek: Yeah, I mean, that's kind of like Justin and Jermaine and I decided to start this little thing. It's because we all three of us feel like we've kind of been working our butts off for a long time, and this is a way for us to get a little bit more recognition, kind of like to announce our arrival, to create, this thing.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah.

Emek: Because, on the one hand, a lot more young people are familiar with rock posters. It's something that's kind of infiltrated youth culture in a sense. So every small town, anytime some local band is playing at a bar, some local artist is making a flyer for it.

Michael Erlewine: Well, we hope so.

Emek: I think that's a great thing. Some people feel that because they've done a few flyers and sometimes there are like exact duplicates or rip-offs of work that has been previously done. There's not as much consideration for the artistic integrity; it's more about just getting out some quantity.

Michael Erlewine: Well, some people just don't know how.

Emek: Yeah. But in their minds they consider themselves to be on par with...

Michael Erlewine: You realize that the pyramid of posters we've only seen is only the tip of the pyramid, because the gigs happened everywhere in all major cities, but you realize that the posters from those smaller or other cities have never been documented.

Emek: Right.

Michael Erlewine: And there must be just hundreds of thousands of them.

Emek: Oh yeah.

Michael Erlewine: There have to be.

Emek: Yeah. But you know, there is also that line, like what is commercially made just so that the venue can make money and what has artistic value?

Michael Erlewine: Of course, boxing style or whatever. No, no, but there are the people that love and collect them.

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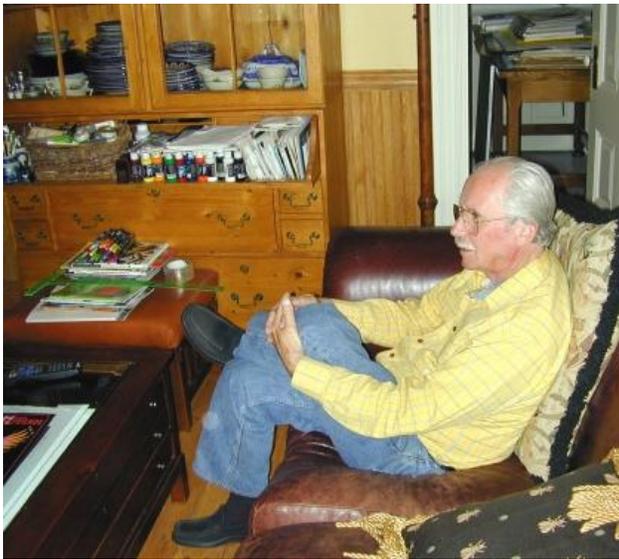
Interview with Alton Kelley by Michael Erlewine

[Alton Kelley was one of the original San Francisco artists and (with and without) Stanley Mouse) produced some of the finest S.F. posters. We will miss him.]

Friday May 11, 2001
Petaluma California, Kelley's home.

Beginnings

Alton Curtis Kelley
June 17, 1940
Houghton, Maine



Alton Kelley in his Studio

Michael Erlewine: What was your given name?

Kelley: Alton Curtis Kelly. My middle name was after the doctor who delivered me, because he delivered my father.

Michael Erlewine: Wow. And how long did you live in Maine?

Kelley: Until I was six. And we left Maine and went to Connecticut. My father was working in the shipyards in Maine during the War World II, and then we moved down to Connecticut and he

went to work for Chance Vought, building the Corsair, the navy fighter.

And then Vought moved out of Connecticut, moved to Texas, and they said we could move to Texas or stay in Connecticut. We stayed in Connecticut. We didn't want to move to Texas. And I grew up in new England.

Michael Erlewine: How did art come into your life?

Kelley: I always drew pictures as a kid.

Michael Erlewine: Cartoons or real life or ...?

Kelley: Just everything, anything and everything. My mother has got paintings from when I was ten years old, oil paintings and stuff... portraits and so on.

Michael Erlewine: And how did that carry through middle school or high school?

Kelley: In high school I did cars and I ...

Michael Erlewine: You mean similar to Mouse, pin stripping ...

Kelley: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Flame jobs?

Kelley: Yeah, flame jobs and that kind of stuff yeah. I really got involved in the hot-rod world.

Michael Erlewine: Oh right, I remember that.

Kelley: And I had hot rods and all that stuff, motorcycles or hot rods. I had a chop Merc in high school and a motorcycle.

Michael Erlewine: I had a '51 Ford Victoria hardtop.

Kelley: Wow . That's great.

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Michael Erlewine: It was a beautiful car.

Kelley: Mine was a 47 Merc coop with a chop on it and a hopped up flathead in it.

Michael Erlewine: I was part of a club called the 'Tachs', with a plate hanging off the back bumper, and so on. You knew Stanley Mouse. He had his father managing him; He was really making money.

Kelley: Ooh God! Stanley was famous, yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Did you make money doing car stuff?

Kelley: No, I just did it. I did it for friends and stuff like that.

Michael Erlewine: And did you ever do formal art training?

Kelley: Oh yeah, I did. I took art lessons, when I was a kid. My mother sent me to some teachers, a number of teachers, who were very good. And I went to art school in Philadelphia Museum and College of Art. And I went there in New York City.

Michael Erlewine: And what were you interested in?

Kelley: Industrial design.

Michael Erlewine: Do you do a lot of freehand drawing or were you doing structural drawings and that kind of stuff?

Kelley: All kinds of stuff.

Traveling to California and the Beat Scene

Michael Erlewine: And how long that go on?

Kelley: I did a year in Philadelphia and... I was partying too much. It was too good. And so I came out, I hitchhiked out to California in 1959, to San Francisco, North Beach.

Michael Erlewine: The Beat scene?

Kelley: Yes, the Beat scene.

Michael Erlewine: I hitchhiked there in 1960.

Kelley: I was there in 1959, the Co-existence Bagel Shop, and City Lights Bookshop and Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and Gregory Corso, and Alan Ginsberg and so on.

Michael Erlewine: We used to wait and get the bread they threw out from the bakery, at about three o'clock in the morning.

Kelley: Yeah, yeah, and the milk deliveries.

Michael Erlewine: Did you ever go down to L.A.?

Kelley: Yeah, Eric North and Venice West.

Michael Erlewine: I knew Eric North. Do you remember the Gas House?

Kelley: Yeah, sure.

Michael Erlewine: I lived in the basement of the Gas House on Venice Beach, in an abandoned walk-in freezer. I was trying to be an oil painter at that time.. Did you know Tamboo and Mad Marge? Do you remember who that is?

Kelley: Yeah, sure.

Michael Erlewine: I wanted very much to be a beat, but it I was just too young.

Kelley: Yeah, then like the hip scene came on.

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Michael Erlewine: Did you stay on the West Coast from that point on?

Kelley: No, I stayed there for a while, you know, for a summer. Then I went down to Mexico. And I stayed there a little while. Then I went back East and I went to school in New York, at the Art Students League. And that was OK. It was a looser school, but then again, it was the wrong time, because they were teaching abstract painting and all that kind of thing, and that's kind of hard to comprehend, especially for a young person. Give me a break! (laughs)

Michael Erlewine: Right! Yeah.

Kelley: So I lived there and that was fun. And then I got married in 1961. And I had a kid and stuff. And I went to work at Sikorsky aircraft as a helicopter mechanic.

Michael; You were good with your hands?

Kelley: Yeah, I could fix stuff, which was always fun. And I worked there for a while, I guess a year... two years ... two and a half years or something like that, and I got laid off.

Michael Erlewine: Hmm, even then back in those days.

Kelley: Yeah, there were the layoffs. But it kept me out of the military, because with the whole draft-age thing. I was valuable, so they didn't draft me. Yeah, cause I had the right kind of job. And then I went to work a motorcycle shop, Honda shop... Honda, BSA, Triumph...

Michael Erlewine: Remember the old Nortons?

Kelley: Oh, yeah .

Michael Erlewine: Those were great bikes.

Kelley: I had Indians. Yeah, I've had monster bikes. Yeah, but I've never in my whole life, ever owned a Harley.

Michael Erlewine: Did you ever go to Laconia in New Hampshire?

Kelley: Oh yeah, sure. I've raced at Laconia.

Michael Erlewine: oh really. Do you remember the crowds up in Laconia?

Kelley: Oh God! Yeah, party. Get down at night, and the hill climbing through the forest and Jesus ...

Michael Erlewine: And it would go on all night, because there'd be a crowd of people and two guys would wanna' race first gear and the crowd would just open a little bit to let them do that. And when they veered or slipped, their handlebars would tear into the chests of the crowd and people would get hurt. Ambulances ran all night.

Kelley: Yeah ... into crowd, which would part and close behind them.

Michael Erlewine: That's right

Kelley: PPPPLOUGH!

Michael Erlewine: Right. That was a trip.

Kelley: Yeah, drag racing.

Michael Erlewine: That was in 1961. I'm thinking of.

Pine Street and the Family Dog

Kelley: Yeah, I came I worked there and I hated it. And I said. "Well, I'm gonna' go back to California." So I had a little Triumph TR4, sports car, and I drove down to Mexico, and I went to Mantinea, and stayed there for a couple

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of months during the winter, in Mantinea. I had a whole bunch of bikes that I sold, so I had a lot of money.

And I repaired a bunch of antique bikes and restored them, so I made some pretty good money. And then I came back up to San Francisco, and I went to see a friend of mine from back East, who had just moved out here... and he had a little weed, and I said, well where'd you buy the weed? And he said I bought it from this guy Dutch. And I knew Dutch from when I was here first, in 1959.

And he was a real a good character. He was one of the guys I went to Mexico with back in the '50s and so I called Dutch, and when I came back up from Mexico on this trip with my little Triumph, I had 22 lbs. of clean weed.

Michael Erlewine: Wow. But I don't think they were even looking for it then.

Kelley: No. Yeah with sticks, no seed. I cleaned it all before I left. And that's how I met everybody on Pine Street. Bill Ham was my landlord and Dutch lived at 2111, I think, Pine Street. We were at 1836 at the Dog House and ah, Mike Ferguson was living there, and Ellen Harmen and Luria Castile, and that whole thing. And then these folks came down from Virginia City. They got the Charlatans to go up there, so we all went up there and worked on the Red Dog Saloon.

Michael Erlewine: The 'Seed' poster was about that time.

Kelley: Yeah. And so we went up to Virginia City and spent the summer in Virginia City being wild animals. It was just something surely great. Virginia city was really a great thing. I mean

everybody had a good time. Everybody was always stoned.

OK, so we were in Virginia City. Then, when we came back from Virginia City, we figured, you know, we can't just be pot dealers or drug dealers. We were thinking that's stupid and dangerous, so we figured that, because we knew the bands were all playing together the Charlatans and the Great Society and the Jefferson Airplane and Warlocks and so on and so forth. Everybody was forming these little bands all over the place, so we figured we'd just start throwing some dances and ...

Michael Erlewine: Who was involved in this?

Kelley: Myself, Jack Towle, Ellen Harmon and Luria Castell were the first four people in the Family Dog.

Michael Erlewine: Really. That's the beginning of it.

Kelley: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Where'd the name "Family Dog" come from?

Kelley: I thought up the name "Family Dog," because we had a building ... everybody in the building had dogs and the original family dog was a Rhodesian ridgeback named "Animal" and he got hit by a car on California Street and killed. And then after, there was a dog, the ugliest dog in the whole world, that belonged to Tim Cammerman in. And it was just this disgusting little tick hound. It was just, ugh, old. And there was some other dogs... Bill Ham's big German shepherd and stuff, so it just sort of came natural that we picked some kind of dog name, so it was the "Family Dog."

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Michael Erlewine: And where did the logo come from?

Kelley: Ah, the logo came after everybody quit the original dog, and Chet Helms took over ...

Michael Erlewine: How did that happen?

Kelley: Now Chet, I guess, had invested some money with Luria. And made some kind of arrangement that he could use the name, because it was already an established thing, and all that. Wes Wilson put together a logo.

Michael Erlewine: Cool.

Kelley: Yeah, it's a great logo.

Michael Erlewine: And then how did you get in to doing the artwork for it?

Kelley: I had done early handbills, and all that kinda' stuff.

Michael Erlewine: Really. What kind of events?

Kelley: For the first three dances, in fact.

Michael Erlewine: You were doing the handbills and then you were working with Chet to do the posters?

Kelley: Later, yeah.

Alton Kelley and Stanley Mouse

Michael Erlewine: How did you and Stanley Mouse hook up?

Kelley: Stanley came to town to visit some people on Pine Street, in the Pine Street neighborhood... Jim Gurley, who was the lead guitar player for Janis Joplin and Big Brother and the Holding Company and his wife, that were old friends of Stanley's, and we were living in the same building. That's how I met

Stanley and we hit it off and became good friends.

Michael Erlewine: And to me that's one of the most interesting things. Seldom are two people able to work together.

Kelley: Yeah, very unusual.

Michael Erlewine: And what was that like?

Kelley: I was sort of like an art director to Stanley Mouse.

Michael Erlewine: Walk me through how that would go.

Kelley: I generally came up with an idea, and an image, and Stanley would do lettering or design work or whatever we worked together.

Michael Erlewine: And you'd share the money?

Kelley: Yeah, split the money. For our first poster, we got \$37.50 a piece.

Michael Erlewine: Wow! That's not bad!

Kelley: Hey! We were doing good. Yeah pros, you know.

Michael Erlewine: (laughs) Cause I know when I asked Gary Grimshaw, he said that in all the years that he worked for all the Grande posters in Michigan, the most he ever got was \$75 at the very end of the whole tenure.

Kelley: Yeah, yeah.

Michael Erlewine: I think you guys did better out here.

Kelley: We got a hundred, at the end.

Michael Erlewine: Oh really. Is that all?

Kelley: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Wow, incredible.

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Kelley: Yeah

Michael Erlewine: And not even the rights?

Kelley: Yeah. yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Incredible, but you and Mouse worked for many years. Do you still do stuff?

Kelley: Yeah, we still do stuff

Before the Scene Faded, the Scene Faded

Michael Erlewine: I'd like to know what happened when things at dancehall scene started to fade. What did you do? Each of the artists I've asked have done different things, had different ways of surviving and doing, switching careers or ...

Kelley: I got on the road, got out of town, cause it was going to hell.

Michael Erlewine: this would be 19??

Kelley: 1968.

Michael Erlewine: It wasn't long, the whole scene was quick.

Kelley: Oh yeah it was great, good party; it's a long time, long time actually. For something that good to last that long. That was a long time.

Michael Erlewine: And Ann Arbor was good, I can remember one day. In the center of the University of Michigan is a big grassy place, called the Diag, where all the students walk through, can walk diagonally through the campus. And I remember a group of people walking through and saying that everyone was going to this big arboretum to just be together and have a Be-In. But this whole thing was hardly even verbalized. It was like just a wave and everyone was tuned into this one big mind,

everyone just sensed it. And we all just got up and all went. It was an incredible time.

Kelley: Yeah, obviously a different time. I don't think it will ever happen again.

Michael Erlewine: No, not for us any way.

Kelley: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: But we were lucky to have it once.

Kelley: Oh Yeah. God! I mean, as far as I'm concerned, I was born in the best time in all of history.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, I feel that way

Kelley: And I've seen so much happen and stuff. It's been great.

Michael Erlewine: It's still happening.

Kelley: And we did really change everything.

Michael Erlewine: Well yeah, we were riding the crest of that wave.

Kelley: Yeah, and it did change everything. I mean before that it was just such a ...

Michael Erlewine: The '50s were so uptight.

Kelley: I don't think it was uptight as much as it's just kind of naïve and stupid.

Michael Erlewine: The whole Eisenhower years, and living in the fear of the bomb. Remember that?

Kelley: Yeah, but that wasn't that much to me. The idea that we had won the war and we were the hot stuff and all that, you know, and could do no wrong. It was all kinda' naïve.

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Michael Erlewine: So you got out of town and went traveling and then?

Kelley: Oh I went up to Portland Oregon, did some posters up there, and then I headed back East. I drove across the country. Had a VW bus, I painted up and stuff. It was really nice looking bus. I had painted it black and yellow, and I had Elsie, the Bordon's cow, with a daisy on the front of it.

Michael Erlewine: Oh really.

Kelley: Yeah. And so it looked like I was the official Elsie the Bordon's truck or something.

Michael Erlewine: (laughs)

Kelley: And I drove across the country with Elsie and went to Boston, went through New England, went up to Boston. Got a job in Boston, working for a company called Intermedia Systems Corporation. And at the same time, I got a job teaching at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts.

Kelley: And I taught graphics, color and design, and airbrush. Yeah that was fun. And while I was working for Intermediate Systems Corporation, they got a call from the guy who threw Woodstock, and so I went to Woodstock and set up a silk screen shop there, long before the gig. I was there probably about six weeks before the whole thing happened.

Michael Erlewine: Really.

Kelley: ...Set up a silk screen shop, made all the signs for the event, and the areas and where the hospital was, and maps, and big billboards, and parking and no-parking, and security. And I printed all the coat jackets that said "Woodstock" and "security," and you know, and "backstage," and all that stuff.

So that was a knock out thing, to be there for that. And that was real fun.

And I didn't like teaching that much. I felt that the administration was awful and the students were just as bad. Boston is a very strange place. It's so academic. It's all teachers and students, and that's the mentality there. And it's really hard to cope, to deal with that kind of mentality -- student/teachers. I guess 75% of the population in Boston during the winter, is students and teachers.

Cause it's all schools! I mean what are there: 11 major colleges in Boston alone. You know MIT and Boston University, and on and on and on, I mean ... Woah!! (laughs)

Absolut Vodka

Michael Erlewine: How does one get the Absolut Vodka poster that you did? Did they ever make those available or anything?

Kelley: Yeah, you've gotta' look for it, but they did run a bunch off, and they went out to like Absolut distributors and all that kind of stuff, and they flew me and Margaritte to Cleveland, to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame for a big party.

Michael Erlewine: Really!

Michael Erlewine: We were talking about the High Society poster ...

Kelley: Oh!

Michael Erlewine: Looks like it's going to be beautiful.

Kelley: Yeah, it's neat. I'm happy with the painting.

Michael Erlewine: Do you work with computers at all?

Kelley: Nope.

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Michael Erlewine: So do it by hand.

Kelley: Yeah. I can do it much faster. And at the end, I can run a magnet over it and it doesn't even bother it. (laughs)

Michael Erlewine: When did the Absolut Vodka vodka thing happen?

Kelley: 1999

Michael Erlewine: Are you doing much work at this point?

Kelley: Here and there. I've got another new poster.

Michael Erlewine: I'd love to see it.

Kelley: ...Somewhere in here.

Michael Erlewine: Oh wow, that's great.

Eric: That is nice, I like that!

Michael Erlewine: Is this you and mouse or just you?

Kelley: Just me.

Eric: I'm sorry do you know the Maritime Hall?

Michael Erlewine: Oh yeah, I've got most of the posters for it.

Eric: OK, fine.

Michael Erlewine: I'm also a poster collector. So when I look at this, you know, I would say to myself ... Mouse and Kelly, Kelly and Mouse, so each of you can do what you did together, separately. Is that what I'm understand? Cause this could as well be a collaboration, right?

Kelley: Oh yeah. Right.

Michael Erlewine: If one wanted to know, how would you separate ...

Kelley: Later on, you can't really.

Michael Erlewine: Maybe at the beginning, you would direct it. He would like do all the lettering, but you would indicate how?

Kelley: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: And this kind of stuff. Where does that come from? That's just something you guys came up with?

Kelley: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Wow, that's great. And this is a magnificent thing.

Eric: Yeah, that's one of the great ones.

Michael Erlewine: One of the great images of all time.

Kelley: Yeah, they won the Grammy for best album cover.

Michael Erlewine: They did!?

Kelley: Yeah, that year. It went to the art director at the Warner brothers or whomever ... Capitol Records, yeah. And he didn't have a god-damn thing to do with it.

Eric: Really? That is disgusting.

Michael Erlewine: Is that right?

Kelley: Yeah, because he ran the art department at that time.

Eric: So he got the award

Kelley: Yeah he got the award for Stanley and my work.

Michael Erlewine: How long would it take to do something like that? A piece like that would take? I have no clue.

Kelley: Ah, all these, they vary from like a few days to a week or two, depending on the size of it and things. And I generally would like to work at pretty good size. This was like 30x40... the painting for this ...

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Michael Erlewine: The High Society poster?

Kelley: Yeah, the High Society one is a 30x40, also. So, it's good size, you know.

Eric: That's why they're so tight. You shrink them down first.

Kelley: Yeah.

Kelley's Body of Work

Kelley: Well, you know there's a whole period of time. I would like to know myself, how much stuff I've done.

Eric: It's enormous; the body of your work is enormous.

Michael Erlewine: Give us a little time ... I'll keep that in mind and I'll ...

Eric King: Yeah, if you let us dig around, I was unaware that you .. that this was information, you didn't have yourself.

Kelley: I mean I have no clue.

Michael Erlewine: So over the last, well, many years, you've kept doing art, ever since the end of the whole '60s period. You have just kept producing posters, all along? Are there other kinds of commercial art you have done?

Kelley: Well, yeah, album covers and posters and funny stuff like the Absolut Vodka and... That was on the back cover of Rolling Stone magazine and Spin.

Eric King: I just thumbed through one, and it hit me and I said " MY GOD! That's! and there it was, it was you know who it was.

Kelley: Yeah, so it was all youth-oriented magazines, and music-oriented things, because of the Rock and Roll

Hall of Fame. And then they gave me a case of liters of Absolut vodka.

Michael Erlewine: Oh really!

Kelley: Yeah, and it was like all the flavors, orange and currant, regular, and high test and (laughs), you know?

Michael Erlewine: I hope you gave it away.

Kelley: So, I gave some of it away. You know, it's like the guy next door, who is a computer guy. He rents out computers. And so when I was working on this I would go to his house and he would have a little digital camera and take a picture and we'd email it to the art director in New York.

Kelley: So, he got some vodka.

Michael Erlewine: Sure! Were they not gratified when they saw your work?

Kelley: Oh yeah, they were more than happy.

Eric King: I can't imagine they wouldn't jump up and down. They're not going to get something like that out of, you know, anybody that they take out of art school.

Kelley: No, they were real happy.

Michael Erlewine: Well that's cool.

Kelley: And they bought the painting.

Michael Erlewine: Wow, well they should.

Eric King: sure

Michael Erlewine: I hope you socked it to umm.

Kelley: Yeah, yeah. Yeah

Eric King: Yeah, they're rich.

Michael Erlewine: (laughs) that's cool.

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Kelley: And they paid good, really good for the job so, it was a good year.

LSD and Peyote

Michael Erlewine: And there was acid then?

Kelley: Oh God yes! There was acid before that.

Michael Erlewine: When did you first have LSD? I had acid in 1964 for first time.

Kelley: Oh, I guess '65, but before that, back East I had gone through peyote and all that kind of stuff.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, me too.

Kelley: Because I picked up a comic book, right? EC Comics ...

Michael Erlewine: I grew up on them. The Crypt Keeper and all that...

Kelley: ... And in the back was this ad from these cactus gardens, from gardens Royal Town, Texas. \$15 dollars for a thousand peyote buttons,

Michael Erlewine: Whoah!

Kelley: So myself and two friends chipped in \$15 bucks a piece. And I sent away and got three thousand peyote buds for \$45. Right?

Michael Erlewine: Wow.

Kelley: ... and we said, you know, how much do you take? So we figured, you know, ten buttons is a hit, so we were taking ten buttons at a time.

Michael Erlewine: You got really sick, I'll bet.

Kelley: Yeah. Well, we got it down though, so that you could quick take 'um and when it would start to come on, then stick you finger down your throat, throw it up, and you feel fine. Not sick.

It was great. So we were partying like crazy on that, and then they made peyote illegal. Right? And so the feds come to the house and they said we have from the cactus guys here, your address, and it says you bought some peyote buttons. And I said. "Yeah, that's right." Ad they said. "Do you have any left?" and I said "Yeah, and I had a bag of like 20 that I was selling to some guys up at Yale. And I said, "Sure, here, take them," and about a month later, I got a check for 45 bucks from the U.S. government.

Michael Erlewine: Really!

Kelley: Honest to god!

Michael Erlewine: On what grounds? I mean ...

Kelley: Because it wasn't illegal when I bought it, they reimbursed me my money, because they came and got the buttons. And we used to ride around on our motorcycles on peyote and stuff and go... There was this place called Savin Rock, outside of New Jersey, like an amusement park and they had bumper cars. And we'd go in there with our crash helmets and gloves and jackets and everything, and drive these bumper cars, blasted. And we'd freak them out cause what we would do is... we would all line up side by side and we'd run into a wall and the building would go booom! And they said, "You can't do that! You can't do that!" (laughter)

Michael Erlewine: Bad boys! That is funny.

Michael Erlewine: That's great, and you haven't dropped acid lately.

Kelley: Nope.

Michael Erlewine: Me neither.

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Kelley: (laughs)

Michael Erlewine: Long time right?
(laughs)

Eric King: Long time.

Kelley: Yeah, no it's too physically ...

Michael Erlewine: Isn't it? Well, you have to get up for it, right?

Kelley: Yeah, yeah.

Michael Erlewine: It just always puts me through stuff right, and acid really does it.

Kelley: Oh god, I don't even want to think about it.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah.

Eric King: Yeah, I'm too old.

Michael Erlewine: It was good then, I mean it really opened my eyes.

Eric King: It was the greatest.

Kelley: Yeah, I thought it was very interesting.

Michael Erlewine: (laughs) Yeah, same here.

Eric King: Yeah, on the other hand, Alpert said it, "Once you get the message, hang up the phone."

Kelley: Yeah

Michael Erlewine: Yeah. True

Kelley: I always went out and went around.

Michael Erlewine: You mean walked around town or something.

Kelley: Did stuff. Oh yeah.

Michael Erlewine: So did I'd go to see the people I should have talked to all the time.

Kelley: I would go to Golden Gate Park and I watch the people in the park and that was always good. I'd go to Chinatown, Chinatown was a mind blower.

Michael Erlewine: That would scare the hell out of me.

Kelley: Oh, it was great, wasn't it? What are they doing, you know? Everbody's got this bag, (laughs)

Michael Erlewine: Right

Kelley: Chinatown, all these Chinese people, and they were just like perfect. It was too good, and I'd go ride around on the cable car. That was great, yeah. Drive around on a motorcycle.

Michael Erlewine: Now that I wouldn't do.

Eric King: That, yeah, I tried to drive my car once and I said "Nope," pulled it over, and left it,

Kelley: Oh really? Huh.

Eric King: I couldn't drive. I was too confused to.

Kelley: I used to go wheely-ing all over the town.

Eric King: It's, does different things to different people.

Kelley: yeah

Eric King: I could not drive I would've driven right over a cliff.

Kelley: Ahhh hah

Michael Erlewine: I have a funny story. The first time I took it ... the first time you take it, you don't know what it is.

Kelley: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: You hear all the stories. So I had this girlfriend who

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promised... I said "Well, I'm gonna' take it. This was Berkley in May 6th of 1964.

Kelley: I remember that night.

Michael Erlewine: So I said no matter what I do, no matter what I do, don't leave me. Right, so then I came on and, you know, I'm very, in my own way, authoritative, you know, so I said, "No, I'm ok. Go on home." She just left. (laughs) Right? So I'm wandering around Berkley campus and just For me it was, well I had to go through a dying thing. And the skies were dripping blood

Kelley: Oh really.

Michael Erlewine: No, but I got through that, kind of purged myself and I had a great good morning. I ended up in Berkley campus in the morning just celebrating life reading Ovid's "Metamorphoses." Just feeling fantastic.

Kelley: Oh I was thinking of the other man what's his name.

Eric King: Oh, Kafka

Michael Erlewine: Oh well, I've read him, of course. That's another story

Kelley: (laughs) Kafka. That's a great story.

Eric King: You don't wanna' wake up to that one.

Kelley: The cockroach. (laughs)

Michael Erlewine: The greatest Kafka anecdote I know is... Kafka was asked one time, you know, how does he... how can you write this incredible stuff? And he said ... his answer was, "Well no, I don't do anything special, because each line I write, it already has perfection. Which means, you know, he's managed to get himself into a very special space and

whatever he writes, generates perfect words.. So anyway I thought that was funny.

Kelley: Yeah, well Kafka's a great writer.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah he is.

Kelley: Have you read George Ade? He's an American writer. He writes fables.

Michael Erlewine: But, ones that are cool?

Kelley: OH! Really good! I mean they are absolutely fabulous. Each one is probably, maybe two pages. And they blow you away. This guys got a real vision.

Kelley: I think it is called "Fables in Slang," or something like that but, George Ade is a great American writer.

Michael Erlewine: Cool, yeah I don't know.

Kelley: Now I think about, probably the same period as Ambrose Bierce.

Eric King: Oh, it's back awhile.

Kelley: Yeah.

Eric King: Yeah, I had not heard of him either.

Kelley: No, I read him because of Jean Sheperd.

Eric King: Oh, sure.

Kelley: I used to listen to Jean Sheperd on the radio back east all the time. He had his own radio show, and he turned me on to George Ade and the fables.

Michael Erlewine: Any other things like that you love to read. That's something I've never heard of.

Kelley: Ahh, I read constantly,

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Michael Erlewine: Really.

Kelley: Yeah, I love to read. Right now, I just read current magazines, science magazines, and aircraft magazines.

Michael Erlewine: Did you fly? I am not crazy about heights.

Kelley: Yeah, I flew for a little while, when I was working the Sikorsky. One of the guys there was a pilot, and I used to go out with him all the time. All I had to do is pay for some gasoline and I got free flying lessons.

Michael and **Eric King:** Wow.

Kelley: Yeah, so it was fun.

Kelley: I don't like heights. Flying doesn't bother me, but I don't like those elevators on the outside of buildings.,

Michael and **Eric King:** Yeah

Kelley: I face the buildings.

Michael Erlewine: So do I.

Kelley: I don't like that. I don't like looking over the edge of things.

Michael Erlewine: Well, that's what I'm talking about.

Kelley: I get that vertigo thing.

Michael Erlewine: My mind is maybe like yours on that point; I'm right out in there.

Kelley: But whereas flying ...

Michael Erlewine: Well, once you're up there, I don't care.

Kelley: Yeah, it doesn't mean anything.

Michael Erlewine: I like to drive, so I think I drive too fast for you but ...

Eric King: No! I have no trouble.

In the Studio

Michael Erlewine: I'd love to get a photo of you,

Kelley: Sure

Michael Erlewine: And if possible a photo of where you where you work, or something to do with how you draw.

Kelley: Ah! I work right here. [points to the glass-topped worktable we are sitting around].

Michael Erlewine: Oh, Ok.

Kelley: Believe it or not.

Eric King: I was going to ask you that. Is this your work space?

Kelley: Yeah, right here.

Eric King: Ok

Michael Erlewine: Cool.

Eric King: I kinda, I noticed that and it's interesting. It's not studio. It's right in the house, and it's right.

Kelley; It's where I've always worked.

Eric King: Interesting, you worked on the kitchen table. This is the kitchen table.

Kelley: Yeah

Eric King: Interesting, it's a marvelous piece of furniture

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, it's great.

Kelley: Yeah, and it's good, cause it's you know it's got the drawers in it, so that I can keep stuff here.

Eric King: Yeah, it's one of the things you see in artists, all of the artists have, in their house, they have lots of drawers.

Kelley: Yeah

Eric King: Big drawers. Big.

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Kelley: Yeah, well that's an interesting machine, what kind of machine is it?

Compiling Poster Data

Michael Erlewine: This is a Hewlett Packard, just a windows PC Notebook. It's not too heavy. I don't travel much, so I've never used a notebook before. I have always used desktop computers ...

Kelley: Well, good for you, compiling all this stuff. I find it very

Eric King: This is why I'm enchanted with this, because people have been asking me to do this for 10 years and I said...

Kelley: You know I'm familiar with the other books. Oh that's good gosh!

[referring to Erlewine as the founder and developer of AMG, the All-Music Guide, the largest database of music-related material on the Internet, or in the world for that matter.]

Michael Erlewine: If you were to take the All-Music Guide Web site which is big and make them into books like this one, it would be like, well probably by now it would be like 15 feet of books four-inches thick, all in very small type.

Eric King: Wow!

Michael Erlewine: We've gone beyond being able to put this much information in books. There's no way to print them anymore and have more than just a selection, so it's pretty amazing really.

Eric King: Yeah, when Michael first told me what he wanted to do I said "Yeah man, good luck." I didn't believe he could do it, I really didn't.

Michael Erlewine: Well I got waylaid and I sold the All-Music Guide/All-Movie Guide, and due to their going bankrupt, I

never got paid. And I offered to build a concert-music poster site, and even them my personal posters data and they were going to put the site up (and own it of course), and they didn't do it. So they just scuttled it. And I'd written biographies of all you guys, the poster graphic artists. I hadn't personally, but I'd had it done. And now I no longer own those biographies, and they don't even care about them. So I'm writing new ones myself. I'm enjoying it. I'm doing a much better job, since I know the material first hand.

Eric King: I was going to say they're going to get a much better job done on them.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah cause as I read the ones I ordered, it was superficial. They didn't fully understand the art. And this way, I'm going... And I hear what you're saying and I will make a special effort to catalog your stuff Kelley, but you might have to help me some, I might have to send you some things to look at and did you do this and did you do that.

Kelley: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Something like that.

Kelley: Yeah, because you know, I didn't keep much, and I'd go through stuff, and I'd give it away, and people buy things, and then I don't have them.

Michael Erlewine: Almost every artist that we've talked to has said the same thing. They don't have much of their own stuff.

Kelley: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: They sold it. It got stolen...

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Eric King: Well, and they gotta' make a living.

Michael Erlewine: Or somebody capitalized on it and owned it, and that kinda' stuff, so anyway ...

Kelley: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: I photographed yesterday a significant amount of unpublished Grimshaw stuff, that Grimshaw no longer owns, that are now owned by Phil Cushway, done when Gary was working for him. But this is stuff that maybe no one will ever see, because it was never published. Beautiful, beautiful pieces that I'd never seen. I bought one, but I wish I could afford more.

Kelley: Gary's great.

Michael Erlewine: He is great. And he's a special favorite of mine, maybe because he's a Michigan guy.

Kelley: Oh yeah.

Michael Erlewine: As a musician, I played at the Grande Ballroom, but I don't remember him very well from that period. I remember meeting him, but we were all

Kelley: Did you ever go to the Mouse House and all that and meet Stanley's mom and all that?

Michael Erlewine: Nope. No I didn't.

Kelley: Livonia?

John Sinclair

Michael Erlewine: No I was in a band, I was a musician, and, Stanley, I don't think I ever met him back then. Grimshaw, I did, and I knew John Sinclair and all those people. John and I still see each other once in a while. We used to be a little antagonistic, back in

the day, because I was more into just being in the art scene, and he represented kind of a political thing,

Kelley: Yeah, I know.

Michael Erlewine: John is a trip. He was always trying to stir it up, you know.

Kelley: Yeah, I know John Sinclair.

Michael Erlewine: Now we're all the same age, so John and I go out to have dinner, a couple old guys and we enjoy each other and have a good time. So back then, it was a little testy, at least on my part.

Kelley: (laughs)

Michael Erlewine: Jerry Garcia would come into town, and we would all get together at the park to play and jam, just an unscheduled or unadvertised thing. We'd just all be jammin' and bringing different musicians' in. There'd be crowds and the cops would come nicely and just be watching, not causing any problem, and Sinclair would stir the cops up, try to get them to do that thing that we hate for them to do, so that everyone could hate them.

Eric King: Yeah, that was, there were people like that here too.

Michael Erlewine: I didn't like that.

Eric King: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Not my nature. Ok, let's see, can I get a picture of you just like this. We'll try and see, I'm not an expert at this.

Digital Images

Kelley: This the digital?

Michael Erlewine: Yeah this is a little Nikon digital.

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Kelley: Boy, Chet's sure havin' a good time with his digital camera.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah he and I talked, and I'm going to speak with him about. I'm trying to help him get the images for the family dog,... I scanned all of his images at a high resolution, but they're about 50 MGB big, but not big enough. I did it as a favor in order to use small images of the Family Dog a couple years ago, but he still has not been able to get his images out, so that he could do something new with them.

Kelley: Yeah, because Chet talked to me. I was going to do stuff for the book, and all this and, and this has been going on for a really long time. Jacaerber Kastor is involved, you know.

Michael Erlewine: But I may produce some books too, just because I also produce books. But I wouldn't want to offend anyone. But I would like, you know... I want to make sure Grimshaw ... Grimshaw needs some attention. He hasn't gotten much.

Kelley: Yeah, yeah.

Michael Erlewine: And all you guys, yourself included. And Bob Fried has had so little credit given to him. I feel really bad about. it's just I think that he did a lot of good stuff.

Kelley: Yeah he did a lot of good stuff.

Michael Erlewine: He didn't get much credit, so let me try this and see whether this things going to behave in here light wise. Sometimes it does.

Kelley: Does it zoom and do all the stuff?

Michael Erlewine: Yeah. What this does is: it takes little flash cards you

push in. This card that's in there now can shoot 234 high-res images.

Eric King: Wow.

Michael Erlewine: And then you just pull out another card and put it in. I went to an archive yesterday and shot a lot of rare Grimshaw stuff. I think I took 1000 pictures, which is a lot of art work.

Kelley: Wow.

Michael Erlewine: And I just had to keep switching batteries and keep switching cards. And it's not just the best. These are good for thumbnail identifications. You couldn't reproduce anything with it, but it is good enough to be able to identify stuff. So, if you knew people that have good collections of your art work, that might be something that you eventually would make available.

Kelley: I don't know...

Michael Erlewine: Cause I could go there and I'll photo-document the stuff.

Kelley: I mean I dont' know. I did a series for the dinosaurs.

Michael Erlewine: Those 11 posters or so. They are yours, right?

Eric King: Yeah

Kelley: But, you know, those are like, they're just gone. (laughs)

Michael Erlewine: I've got those except for maybe two, and I love them. I saw them and said I've got to have these. And I have nice pictures of those. You could get them from me.

Kelley: Yeah, I did them in the old style, the old way.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, absolutely.

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Kelley: I couldn't find the paper, so I had to take regular paper and turn it over and use the wrong side.

Eric King: (Laughs)

Kelley: Wrong side (laughs)

Eric King: I didn't know (laughs)

Kelley: I couldn't get that paper that was flat, everything was all finished and nice now.

Eric King: Yeah.

More

by Michael Erlewine

Michael Erlewine: Let me get just a picture of this. Maybe I'll stand up a second and get this out of the way.

Kelley: Yeah, it's the studio.

Michael Erlewine: Well, that's what I'm trying to do for each of you artists. And it's fascinating. Each of you is so different.

Eric King: Yeah, there is a tremendous amount of differences. Whatever way works.

Michael Erlewine: It's very cool. Have you been to David Singer's place?

Kelley: Oh yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Everything is like very neat, so incredibly, it looks like a crystal or something.

Kelley: Yeah

Eric King: That's David!

Kelley: Yeah he is very neat. Yeah, he's out there picking leaves off the lawn.

Eric King: YEAH! He was doing that while we were coming out.

Michael Erlewine: And then Victor Moscoso is totally different. His place is like a wild place, right?

Eric King: Yeah, yeah.

Michael Erlewine: With stuff all over. An artist's workshop. He's cool.

Eric King: You gotta' step around and over and ...

Kelley: Yeah.

Wes Wilson

Michael Erlewine: I would like to know how Wes Wilson arrived on the scene, from your point of view. How did he suddenly get into posters?

Kelley: Wes was working for a printer here in the city; I think Chet Helms knew him. And I can remember meeting Wes real early; he stayed in the house on Pine Street, the 'dog house'.

Michael Erlewine: The dog house, that's right (laughs)

Kelley: I had Wes and Eva's wedding invitation. I used to have that some place; gone now, I guess. But way back, it wasn't even.... it was just they got married and all that kind of goodness, and Wes was just a natural. He just hit it right on the head. His wedding invitation was fabulous.

Michael Erlewine: Really

Kelley: Fabulous.

Michael Erlewine: Wow.

Kelley: He designed while he was working for 4-H Press, I think it was called.

Michael Erlewine: What was it called.

Eric King: Double H was a different... I don't remember.

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Michael Erlewine: No it wasn't 4-H. I believe it was Contact Printing. It was in the basement. It was a printer that was in the basement that had been catering to kind of to the jazz and beat scene, a little bit. This is what I remember from trying to do a biography of Wes. And Wes came in and became a partner, an apprentice-printing partner. And then he started doing things for Chet first, and then for Bill Graham.

Kelley: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: And he was in the right place at the right time.

Kelley: And his stuff is good, you know, so fabulous. My god.

Michael Erlewine: Are you still in touch with him?

Kelley: Yeah. And he's such a nice guy

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, he's cool.

Kelley: And his work is awesome, as far as I'm concerned I mean like wheeew!

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, I think so too.

Eric King: He opened the door.

Influences

Michael Erlewine: Which leads me into another question: artistically what are your influences? At the very beginning, who influenced your work, either in the fine arts or psychedelically?

Kelley: Well, you know, in the beginning, like Stanley Mouse and I didn't have a clue. (laughs) So, I went to the library and I just started looking at everything. I was influenced by the Art Nouveau period and influenced by American Indian stuff, Japanese stuff, Chinese stuff, everything, you know --- turn of the century, early 20th century... Rocketship in to the future, science

fiction, I mean it was across the board. I mean it was just everything.

Michael Erlewine: So you just would go through art books and look through illustrations whatever looked interesting.

Kelley: I would use old postcards.

Michael Erlewine: So how would you remember... these would just soak in your brain? you'd borrow the books out or? How would get the images if you needed them?

Kelley: Oh. we'd just go to the copy machine.

Michael Erlewine: Really.

Kelley: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: And then trace them from there or something ...

Kelley: Yeah, cause we went back in the stacks, in the back of the library. It wasn't like in the regular shelves. In the old library downtown San Francisco, there were all these stacks, and there was just all this reference stuff. World War II posters and posters from you know Art Nouveau period, and posters to the 30's, and post war and prewar.

Michael Erlewine: Posters? How were they preserved in there?

Kelley: They were just in books. You know, and you could just take them up, lay it on the copy machine.

Michael Erlewine: And both you and Stanley Mouse would go together?

Kelley: Yeah, yeah both Mouse and I. Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: And you found this out together, or you were doing this first?

Kelley: I was doing it first.

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Michael Erlewine: And what about a fine art?

Kelley: I thought everybody was a fine artist.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, OK.

Kelley: Ah, yeah. I can't put a definition on fine art,

Michael Erlewine: That's cool.

The Joint Show

Kelley: Because, you know when we were ... when we had our show, the Joint Show, right, in 1968 or whenever it was ... That was one of the questions the reporters asked us, the art critiques or whomever they were, and they said "Are you gonna' go on to serious art from here?" (laughs)

Michael Erlewine: Woah.

Eric King: (Laughs)

Kelley: And we went "Gee, I don't know. Should we just stay with the comedy stuff?"

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Kelley: And I don't know. (laughs) It's like "What?"

Eric King: What, yeah, where do you get the nerve to ask that then?

Michael Erlewine: Speaking of the Joint Show, I have a personal question. What, how did you guys respond to the Moscoso piece, cause I think that's an unusual Moscoso piece for that show.

Kelley: What show?

Michael Erlewine: The Joint show.

Eric King: What we were talking about.

Kelley: Yeah, the Joint Show.

Michael Erlewine: For the Joint Show, Moscoso did a piece with a woman.

Kelley: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: That, It was typical. I was wondering whether you guys, whether you remember what people thought of that.

Kelley: No, I don't remember what everybody thought of it. It was fine! Well he was doing collage. He started to do a little bit of collage stuff.

Michael Erlewine: Ok, so that was some of that.

Kelley: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: And those are all pretty big posters, some of them.

Kelley: Well, they're all, I think, pretty much the same size here.

Eric King: Double size

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, double size. Big ones.

Kelley: Yeah.

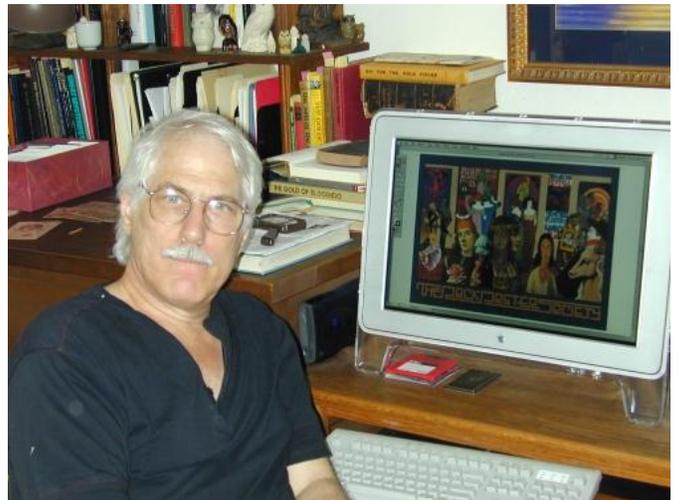
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Interview with David Singer

by Michael Erlewine

[David Singer produced more posters for the Fillmore series than any other artist. An impeccable craftsman, Singer is equally well-known for his montages, many of which were in his concert posters, but others not poster oriented are incredible. These montages deserve more wide acclaim.]

Beginnings and Working at Home



David Singer

David Singer: Oh yeah you wanna know my birthday.

Michael Erlewine: Birth date and year and place of birth.

David Singer: Well I was born in, in a suburb of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, called Fountain Hill.

David Singer: And I grew up in ... let's see the date was March 11, 1941, right at the beginning of World War II. I was born six months before the war started.

Michael Erlewine: So, he's older than we are.

Eric King: Yeah!

Michael Erlewine: But not by much.

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David Singer: I was born six months before the war started. I was born in March, and then you know I think that's nine months or whatever.

My father was an upholsterer. Behind our house he had an upholstery shop and a drapery making shop,

So he had several employees working for him. He had all these sewing machines, long tables of sewing machines, so the draperies would be sewn. I had a great aunt that worked there. She worked up into her 90s at this, and when I was growing up, she was like in her 70s and 80s, and I used to go back there. And she was a real neat lady and really liked me, and I used to sort of hang over the sewing machine (laughs) talking to Aunt Martha. I ended up calling her Aunt Martha, though I think she was my great aunt. And I'd be looking at these sewing machines, and they're always elaborately decorated with 'Singer' on them (laughs). And so Singer always stuck in my mind, because of the Singer Sewing Machines. You know its just 'cause I was raised around them. My father had at least a dozen Singer Sewing machines, and he had a collection of antique Singer sewing machines, some of them were like incredible, you know?

So I used to trip out to the designs on the things. Somehow or another 'Singer' just stuck with me.

Art Beginnings

Michael Erlewine: So at what age were you into art? How did your art develop?

David Singer: Well it started because I was around antiques all the time I grew up. There's a lot of antiques in

Pennsylvania, as you know, especially in the area you grew up.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, Amish stuff,

David Singer: ... in Lancaster and,

Michael Erlewine: I grew up with all the Hex symbols and stuff.

David Singer: Yeah, exactly. And that got me into geometry, which is... you know I teach a class in geometry.

Michael Erlewine: No, I had no idea!

David Singer: Sunday's my first class. I teach in a university... I'm really into geometry; especially what they call sacred geometry or symbolic geometry. But it started with hex signs, when I was growing up, with all the hex signs around and on documents..

Michael Erlewine: On barns.

David Singer: And my mother, my stepmother, Dorothy had the dream of being a painter, at one time. And she married Late. She married my stepfather late, and I think they were in their late thirties or mid-thirties, and she had gone to art school. The house was covered with... I mean there are a lot of paintings in the house that she'd done as an art student.

And it's actually a Santa Fe ad that she had reproduced as a painting. She copied it. And I actually, in my archive, have the Santa Fe ad that she copied. And that was over my bed, all the time I grew up.

And it really kind of hit me that the reason, well various times in my life I've looked at it and thought about it. It's the 'image maker'. It's a guy, Indian sitting in front of the fire making Kachina dolls.

Michael Erlewine: Great face.

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David Singer: And Santa Fe had a... they used to have all these old ads, back in the 20's, 30's, and 40's, where they would have an artist paint the picture of Indians doing something, and then they would reproduce it with the Santa Fe Railroad. "See the magic of New Mexico" or something. And they would even have some that you could send away for a print of it. Well, this is one that you could send away the print.

This guy e-mailed me and said that, you don't know me, but last night or a couple nights ago, I was looking through my photographs, when I was growing up, and I saw this photograph of me in my bed room with my mother, who used to collect your posters. That's how he started out. And she had the last Fillmore poster, BG-287.

And she'd put it next to my bed all the time I was growing up. And I was looking at this photograph, and it kind of (I'm 32 now), you know, surprised me. I hadn't thought about it for a long time. I ran out and got the Art of Rock book, so I could see the print. And there it was. And he says, "When I looked at it in the Art of Rock book, I had a flash of such intensity." (laughs) This is the way he put it in the e-mail. "That it brought back my.. I realized it was one of the earliest images that I can remember."

"And I remember I used lie in bed thinking "What is that cat thinking? What is the dog thinking?" And I thought, God that's amazing, cause that's what, in a way, I had that experience with this image, because I grew up with it, and it was over my bed all the time I was growing up. And I don't know why she picked that one. I guess because I was little boy, and you know it's a boy kind of picture.

But most of the paintings were landscapes or flowers and stuff. Anyway, she had this thing about being an artist, and she painted for a while. Her paintings were not really very imaginative. They were good, technically. And then she got married and all the time I was growing up, she wasn't doing anything with it. I think that later, in the end, she kind of started painting again, but by that time it was a little late. And so when I was growing up, she recognized right away that I had artistic talent or at least I had the flare for design and stuff, and I used to draw all the time, But it was a mixed blessing, because the kind of stuff that I would doodle would be like, you know, Rick Griffin-ish, kind of oddball stuff.

Michael Erlewine: Cartoony or not really?

David Singer: Yeah, cartoony, and weapons and explosions and (laughs) oddball designs and all kind of weird stuff.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

David Singer: And the people that I was around didn't appreciate that kind of stuff. So they kind of like encouraged me on one hand, but discouraged me on the other.

And actually kind of so suppressed the kind of stuff that I would draw, that I stopped drawing. By the time I got out of grade school, it was little drawing I did. But I was around all these antiques. My mother was an antique collector. So she had chests with all the Pennsylvania Dutch design.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, which is wonderful stuff.

Touring the Homes of the Well-To-Do

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David Singer: And my father and they had a little... we lived in a house and the front room of the house was turned into... had a window, was in the main street of Quakertown, and they had turned this one room in the house into a store front window. And one room in the house, which we closed off from the house, was their shop, which during the day my mother would be, in the house, but when someone would come in the door and ring the bell, than she went in and it was for basically draperies.

And then my father worked in the shop behind the house. And here I am in my studio, behind the house that I have my studio in. I developed this thing early on of working at home. That was one thing I inherited from my upbringing. My parents worked at home. My mother eventually got back into school. She had gotten into school teaching, so she became a grade school teacher again and the shop was only open on certain days. I grew up. My father was a craftsman. He used to do a certain amount of woodworking. What he was specialized in was really fine antique furniture; sofas, Art Nouveau sofas and he would have to strip it down to the wood. So he'd have to take all the cloth, all the stuffing, and pull out all the nails, and all the webbing, and all that crap. And that was one of the jobs that I did when I was growing up. There'd be a sofa in front of me, and I had to strip this thing down until there was just wood and no nails and tacks and they maybe it had been upholstered three times already, and so there were tacks everywhere.

And I had to take all the tacks out. And then, after it was done, if it wasn't... I would say half the time my father was

going to take all the wood apart and re-glue it back together. And he'd start out from scratch, and then he would do all the webbing, and build up all the ... and do the cushions and end up with a completely restored piece of like antique... And he was very good at it and the problem was, that like most of those things, with the hours involved, it was very hard to get the amount of money you need.

But he used to get a lot of clients that were like... We were in Bucks County. Bucks County was filled with areas where there were pretty well-to-do people, and we weren't well-to-do. I used to get into a lot of people's homes, and see a lot of stuff. I liked to go around and look at all their paintings. So we used to get into doctors and lawyers, and you know writers, and whatever. We used to end up in their houses. A lot of times they weren't there, but we were delivering or picking up a sofa or chairs or installing draperies. I installed more draperies when I was growing up than... If I never install another drapery, it's fine with me, but I used to wander around these houses and look at everything. That was an eye opener for me. In that way, I saw a lot of arts and crafts and stuff. I always had a sense of design.

Singer the Signmaker

One thing that happened to me in high school was I was always asked to do the signs. Very early on in my life, people realized that I could actually, even if it was just with a piece of crayon or something, I could make things they wanted to say, like "Keep Out of the Lockers" or something. I could letter it, so that it could be readable, and I'd spell it right. And the letters were at least evenly enough spaced that you could

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actually read it a little, and it was on the piece of paper.

Michael Erlewine: I've been hearing that, and I'm asking you the same thing right I'm coming to you and saying do some lettering for Classic Posters, right? Isn't that odd?

David Singer: Yeah, weird, exactly. It always happened to me. And it wasn't anything I ever went after. I was just able to... even if I wasn't trying make it and stuff. And one of my earliest recollections in school... I was thinking about this the other day. I had an experience when I was in grade school. I don't remember what grade it was. It was like 4th grade or something, where we had to do penmanship and we had to do it just exactly the way. And this one particular day, I reached the point in this penmanship exercise we were doing, where I just couldn't stand the rigidity of it any more and I kind of freaked out and I took my pen (laughing) and I did all these... and I kind of freaked out and filled this whole pad with letters that were, you know, with all kinds of different squiggles on them and. And my teacher's going "Geez," you know. I don't know that I got in any trouble for it, 'cause I think it kind of surprised her (laughs). But it was like I had a thing for lettering. It just came naturally. I didn't really ever I don't know... I just knew how to make lettering spaced so you could read it.

And it was that way through.... I spent a year in college. I ended up doing signs for the walls in college.

Going to College

Michael Erlewine: But you didn't study art in college?

David Singer: Well I didn't, but I went to Penn State. I mean, their art school was like you know, Phhh! I took a couple art classes and I didn't know what I was doing in college, but my parents had this whole thing that I was going to be a scientist. My mother always saw me as a scientist. She'd say "Oh your so precise; your so detailed; you're so orderly." I mean I had the most orderly room in my house. Everything was... (laughs) I put things away. I cleaned up my room, had my books over here. I had drawers, and our house was kind of higgely-piggely, but in my house, my room was very organized, so they thought, you know, "Organizer. He's precise. He's gotta', you know, we'll get him into science." Science was the thing. So I was going to become a scientist, engineering and science.

But you know I didn't have any desire for that, and I was in college and not knowing what I was there for, and so after about, not even the second semester, and I thought "I gotta' get out of here." And I knew I couldn't get out, without really disappointing my parents. I could just run off, but I didn't really want to disappoint them that way. So I just joined the Navy, and of course, once I joined Navy, I was joined. (laughs) There's nothing you could do about it. Kind of freaked them out

Michael Erlewine: I bet.

David Singer: But, it was kind of a way for me to kind of make sure that they couldn't undo it, or talk me out of it, or change it, or, you know, because I was already signed up and also it resolved the problem of what was I going to do to make any money if I left college. And I signed up so I could go to California too. They'd send me to San Diego.

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Michael Erlewine: That's right.

David Singer: So, I'm going back to San Diego. Are you going to San Diego? [to a poster show there, "High Society"]

Eric King: No, but it seems like a fascinating thing to do.

David Singer: I'm going down to this show they're having at this museum, but anyway, I ended up in San Diego, and went through the Navy there. Also I was there in San Francisco, was here in the Navy. I came here in the Navy.

Michael Erlewine: And what kind of art were you doing? Any art in the navy?

David Singer: Well, the same thing happened in the navy.

Michael Erlewine: Ah hah.

David Singer: I started doing signs everywhere, for everybody. First time, I ended up doing a sign. A lot of times I'd volunteer. Someone would say "Oh we need a sign over here." So I'd go. I'll do a sign, you know, and then someone would see that and say "Give it to Singer. He does good signs." So that's how I ended up being the sign maker (laughs) on these various duty stations, and I was on a ship for a year and a half that went in and out under the Golden Gate Bridge and the station was at Treasure Island.

Michael Erlewine: What years are these roughly?

David Singer: Well, I got out in 1964, mid 1964, so I would say 1963 and part of 1964, and even part of 1962, I was on the ship. I was stationed in Treasure Island. This is when they still had ships that would leave the dock on Treasure Island, go under the Bay Bridge on one

side, go around, and under the Bay Bridge on the other side, cause it was too shallow to just go out, and then go under the Golden Gate Bridge. So we were going to go under three bridges. We'd go out 500 miles, and then we'd go around in a twenty-mile circle for thirty days and then come back. And they had six stations off the west coast, and you had to relieve a ship and come back. So we were like the floating radar station. These six ships were plugged in the Norad system, which is part of the air force, so we actually worked for the air force. It was like the navy had loaned these ships some how, I don't know. I was actually in the air force for a couple years. I mean I was not in the air force, but I was working for the air force.

How I Got to San Francisco

Michael Erlewine: How did you get plugged into the whole psychedelic scene or the 60's scene?

David Singer: Well, it sort of all happened, bit by bit. I got out of the Navy, and then I went home for awhile. And I didn't like it back there anymore, and I'd seen California. And it was kinda' like "Gee that was cool. I'll go back," so I went back to California. And I arrived in California and all I had was this car. I didn't have any money. I spent it all getting there. In fact the car blew up half way across the country.

There's a place called Big Springs Junction, Nebraska. A few miles from Big Springs Junction, the car blew up (laughs) and BLAHHHHEEWWW! (laughs) in the middle of the night, And so I walked into Big Springs Junction and, you know, all that was there was a diner, a truck stop, a garage, and a few houses. And I ended up in the diner,

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and I asked everybody about who runs the repair truck, and they said "Oh, he comes in every morning," and so pretty soon, the guy came in and I sat down and talked to him and he went and towed the car, and then I was there for like 2 weeks.

I didn't have any money, so I had to work for the guy at his truck stop (laughs) to get him to repair the car. He had to send away for parts to what was some big city in Nebraska. So I was there over two weeks. I was there so long, that actually he asked... he wanted me to stay and he wanted to hire me (laughs) permanently. But I wanted to get to California, so I ended up in California with this car and I was literally out of the car and I didn't have any money left, but you know, I just had enough to get there and ended up in this like old folks home basically. It wasn't a bed and breakfast. It was like an old folks home.

And they'd hire people, and they didn't... they wouldn't give you any money, but you could eat and sleep there. So we had a room with six other guys (laughs) or something in fact, just like in the navy. And so I worked there for like, oh god, I think I worked there for 3 or 4 months, and was just walking around town wondering what I was doing. I went through a period of like real confusion about what it is I was.

Michael Erlewine: Curious, did you read a lot? Did you do read poetry?

David Singer: Oh yeah. I was a very heavy reader especially

Michael Erlewine: What did you read? What did you like?

David Singer: Well, I read lots of novels, and like lots of science fiction. I was seeking in my head and stuff, so I used to read a lot of serious books, you know, the meaning of religion (laughs), all kinds of stuff.

But it wasn't with any kind of plan. I just used to go to the library and scan all kinds of stuff until I'd find something that seemed interesting. I was always kind of a loner, so I was kind of alone and I didn't have any guidance. I didn't know what I really wanted to do in life. And when I was in the navy for instance, before I was on the ship, I was in Okinawa for a year and a half and I was in san Diego. I was on the radio, so I was a Morse code operator, dot-dash-dot-dot. I was really good at it, and I'm still good at Morse code. In fact, I got into being the Morse-code operator, because of the first test at boot camp.

Singer and the U.S. Navy

David Singer: Have you ever been in the service?

Michael Erlewine: Nope.

David Singer: Well, we got to boot camp. I had to come across country. We had been up at odd hours traveling. We ended up in boot camp, and of course the first thing they do in boot camp is they herd you into some sort of area, and then they wait until they get some other guys, before they form a company, and then they go up, but it takes three or four days for people.

And you're just there. You sleep on the benches. You eat out of the canteen machines they have. I mean it's like, by the time everybody assembles in the company, everybody's sick, everybody's got colds, everybody's like just a semi-

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basket case and then of course they immediately herd you in some where and shave your hair off, take every stitch of clothes off, put everything you own in a box, and you have to ship it somewhere.

You're kind of like reborn into this reality and then they herd you around and do all these things, and one of the things they did the very first week I was there, when I'm totally spaced out, don't know these guys that I'm with...I'm sick. I'm tired. You know, my hairs shaved off. I'm in these starchy weird uniforms that smell of moth balls and, you know, getting odd hours of sleep and weird food. They herded me one day into this auditorium and there was maybe 20 companies.

They herd, so it was like thousands of guys in this auditorium. Some guy comes out on the stage and gets everybody's attention and says you'll notice there's a piece of paper and a pencil on the desk before you. We're gonna' give you a Morse- code test and they said, ok, now listen up. This is "A" dit-dah ...does it a few times, this is an "N" da-dit. Ok. "A" is dit-dah, "N" is dah-dit, and this is an "E" dit, and this is a "T" da.

You get the four easiest letters, you know and he does them each a couple times. Ok, now write down what you hear. And then they just threw this Morse code, so I wrote down what I heard, and then about a week later, I was called into this room, when we were going through trying to determine what rate we were going to be in the navy. Are you going to be a fireman? Are you going to be a whatever? Are you going to be a navigator, bosens mate, whatever. I went into the room and the

guy says "Well, you're a radio operator," and I said "Well, couldn't I... ahh what do you mean?" And he says, "Well, you aced the score in the radio test. And so that means you're a radio operator." You don't have a choice in the matter, you know.

Michael Erlewine: Right

David Singer: So I said, "Oh," and I ended up in radio school, and I was very good at it, so I got to be a good Morse code operator. I could do Morse code in my sleep.

So I got to Okinawa, after I was out of radio school. I went over with about 20 guys that ended up in this big troop ship and went to Okinawa. The troop ship was kind of all these marines, all these air force guys. It was this huge monster ship filled with young guys just out of various schools going over for overseas duty. There was this incredible storm and everybody in the ship got sick, so the ship was virtually awash in puke. And if you didn't get sick from the seasickness, you got sick from the fact that there was puke smell everywhere.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, that happens.

David Singer: So everybody got sick except for like maybe 5%. Well, I was one of the 5%. I felt sick, but I never actually threw up. I mean I didn't actually get sick. So I ended up being, the 5% that didn't get sick, so we had to clean it up. (laughs) So I spent like a couple days cleaning up puke, hosing everything down. It was unbelievable.

And I ended up in Okinawa, and the first thing the guy said to me... we were looking in awe. There were about 20 of us under the navel-air station in Okinawa, which had a big

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communication center and fifty guys working on Teletype machines. It was like for the whole pacific fleet or something on that side of the pacific, and he looked at all our records and he says "Oh, you're a crack Morse code operator. Yer' not down here; you're up at the hill. So he sent me up to this hill, and on top of the, on the edge of the base, it was a big hill with these big antennas and then a couple Quonset huts. And in there were four radio stations that they had to have one guy on duty all the time, monitoring these Morse-code radio stations. So instead of working in this big communication center, I worked all alone. Once again, I'm completely alone, up in this Quonset hut in this thing. And strangely, I was just thinking of this the other day too, because one of the main ones we had to monitor, were the Morse-code messages that the guy in the plane running down the Taiwan straights between Red China and Taiwan, like the one that was just forced down.

That's what was going on at that time. This was like in 1963. And so this has been going on forever, and once an hour they'd send a encrypted message but in Morse code, which I'd have to intercept and then send. It was all encrypted, so I never could read it, and then I'd have to send it by this Teletype machine down at the communications center, to the top-secret room. And it was probably their position and whatever, I don't know. There were four major circuits that I had to monitor, and then what happened was I ended up in a situation where I had all this time. There wasn't much to do, so I read. I spent a year and a half reading.

Finding My Way in San Francisco

Michael Erlewine: How did you get into the art scene like in San Francisco? How did that happen? You weren't there at the very beginning.

David Singer: Well, what happened is that I was in San Francisco, and I finally realized after working for a few months in this place, I had to get a job and I went to all these job agencies. And of course I didn't have any skills, as far as they were concerned, except I'd been in the Navy as a Teletype operator. I knew how to run the Teletype machines. I'd learned Teletype, and of course Morse-code didn't do me a bit of good.

I was in communication, so they had a hook and they could plug me into Teletype situations in downtown San Francisco. So next thing I know, I'm working for stock brokers, running teletype machines. I had to get to work at 5:30, 6 in the morning, because the stock market opens at 9:30 AM in New York.

And we had to open at the same time, so it was a really odd job, where I had to get up real early and get there real early. And mostly, it was just sending stock trades back and forth by Teletype to the floor of the stock exchange.

So I did. Then from that I got a better job at another place in the communications department. At P&O Lines, in the shipping lines.

And I befriended this guy that was working there, the first gay guy I ever really knew, beyond that "he's gay", you know, and we became friends. We used to go have coffee together all the time. And he was the assistant to the art director of this place and it sort of stirred up all that design part of my past.

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And there was another aspect of this whole thing too, and it was actually before this. I had decided when I was running around San Francisco for awhile, trying to figure out what I was going to do, that I should go to art school. So I collected together a bunch of sketches. I pulled together whatever I could and I went around to various art schools. I even borrowed a car from a friend and drove to Los Angeles (laughs) trying to get into the Art Center School, which is a really well known commercial graphic arts school in L.A., and the Otis Art Institute in L.A., and they all turned me down. So it was kind of depressing and it put me into a state of depression, and I figured that I couldn't really get anywhere without having some training, cause I didn't have any training, and so I ended up in this company, and here's this friend of mine, who is an assistant to the art director, and he announces to me one day he's quitting. I was just working in the communications, the Teletype, you know, communications and I thought, "Man, that's what I should get. If I can't get into art school, I'll become an assistant to an art director." So I marched into the employment guy there, and I said I want George's job. And they said well do you have any experience? And I said "Well no, but you know..." Well, he wouldn't give it to me, and so I went to see the art director. He liked me and he said "Well, I don't know it's up to the employment... I can't really say." Anyway this thing went around and around and finally I said I'd quit, if they didn't give me the job. So they knew I was serious and they worked it out, and we had a meeting one day with the employment guy, and the art director and he says " Well, let's give him a

chance." (laughs) So they gave me a month's chance, and I did fine, so that was for like a year or something. I was coordinating the different brochures they sent out for various kinds of tours. This is a big shipping line, where they sold tours.

And they were working through a few of the commercial artists, who worked in the downtown area, and I was like the guy who would run over to the commercial artist to get the stuff and coordinate everything. So I suddenly was in all these artists' studios. You know these commercials, and this was real hack downtown commercial design stuff. But suddenly I was in all these guys commercial art studios and seeing what they did and everything. A lot of it really turned me off because it was crank and grind, and they were like always against the time and essence, and it was you know...

This guy had Bank of America as a client and the P&O line and he had three guys forward at drawing tables you know, working, learning at night, laying out stuff and they'd just throw everything on the floor and you'd wade through piles and piles of typeset stuff that they'd cut things out of to paste down on and art board and throw the rest on the floor. And they'd sweep it up once a week and it was just..., This guy had a wall in which he took his paintbrush while he was getting a little color here to put a little color on his rough drafts and stuff and he'd go against the wall, take the excess paint and the whole wall was like paint blobs of these...

It was like an abstract painting or something. And they were kind of crazy, but I met them all, and I kinda went

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"Geez, you know and this is what I want to get into?" (laughs) But then, you know, at the same time, there was all this hippie stuff going on and I was pretty much a loner. I didn't have a lot of friends and I wasn't involved in any of that stuff, but I met George in the street one day and now George (who's job I took) was working at the LSD Pizza Shop on Haight Street, Ok? And next thing I know I'm at the LSD Pizza Shop on Haight Street and hanging out with George and smoking joints. And I started looking at all the posters and everything, and they just blew me away, so I sort of got into the whole scene.

I started going to a lot of concerts. And actually I'd been already going to concerts, so I knew something about posters. Even when I was in the Navy, someone offered me a joint and I smoked it and it didn't do anything to me. It didn't connect me into anything. It didn't affect me into anything. But somehow I was on Haight Street and I started smoking grass and hanging out and one thing led to another, and I started going to concerts and everything changed for me. I started looking at posters more...

Commercial Art and Psychedelic Art

Michael Erlewine: Which poster artists did you look at? Which one's affected you?

David Singer: Well, all of them. What blew me away about the whole thing was that they all looked so much more spontaneous than what was going on in the commercial arts. See, I was seeing both sides. I was out there now going to concerts and looking at all this stuff. And then there was like another scene going on in the downtown commercial art

building. And while all this was sort of going on, actually, as this whole thing was developing, I had this guy come to me one day and said "You ought to get out of here and come work with me." And he took me to lunch and said that he was working for this large firm. He was their guy who was in charge of all the advertising and sales promotion material. And he was going to become a vice president in a year, and he needed someone to train to become, first his assistant, and if I was good enough, I could step into his job. Well, certainly he was much higher paying, so I went and the next thing I know I'm his assistant, you know, designing wine stuff, and coordinating, mostly coordinating.

So what was happening was that I was at this cross road and began to realize that this is really where I belong, in this kind of design milieu, but at the same time, the path that was being set out for me, that I was sort of... I mean here I could step into this guy's job in a year. I'd be a big honcho in this corporation. I'd get a car every year and I'd have a secretary, and I'd have a good job and I could, you know, go on from there. But, what it really was, it wasn't designing, it was managing design. It was like art directing and it was all putting stuff together to present to the corporate meetings, so that they could look at it. And the more I saw what was going on there, the less I was really interested. And at the same time, I'm getting more and more... On the weekends I'd smoke dope and go to (laughs) the Avalon and Fillmore up on Haight Street and I'm thinking, "God, you know." And I just kinda' went through this period where I just announced that it was done.

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Michael Erlewine: You weren't doing that much actual art?

David Singer: No, I wasn't really doing artwork so much, although what happened was I moved up to the Haight-Ashbury. I moved up on Frederic Street and got an apartment. I had these three or four cardboard boxes filled with magazines and pictures, not for anything particularly. It's just that every since I was a kid, I'd been pulling the pictures out when I liked the picture. I'd started very early cutting pictures out and I always had these boxes full of pictures and magazines

Michael Erlewine: Is that right!

David Singer: I was a magazine person.

Michael Erlewine: And you'd cut them out with a razorblade or scissors or?

David Singer: Yeah a knife or scissors or just pull them out of the magazine. I always had this thing about magazine pictures and so I had these cardboard boxes filled with magazines. And then what happened was, I was in this apartment. I didn't have much furniture. It was a nice hardwood floor, big living room, bigger than the room in there, but with no furniture.

So I thought "Wow, you know." So I dumped these cardboard boxes out one day and started putting all these pictures in piles and then one thing led to another. I started making collages. And I'd seen some of the hippie collages around, you know, and Victor Moscoso was doing collages, I saw some of his stuff, and there was a bunch of them around.

Michael Erlewine: Did any of those artists befriend you?

David Singer: I didn't know any. I didn't know anything about the scene at all. I mean I used to go to the Avalon and Fillmore on occasions, but I was just one in the audience. I wasn't part of anything, you know. I was sort of removed from the whole thing, and so I started doing collages. And one day I just upped and quit my job and I said "This is it! forget it." And it started when I went in one day and I think I drew a peace sign on something.

Michael Erlewine: Oh, that'll do it.

David Singer: And my boss had sent it back to me, and he'd turned the peace sign into a bomber, with wings, with bombs coming out of them. And I looked at this and I thought that's really where it's at. We're on completely different sides of (laughs) everything, you know. So I just quit and he was blown away.

He went through this whole thing. I had to stay to train someone else and you're giving up your career and I said "Well, it just isn't for me." And here's this guy, who's like in his late thirties and he's had ulcers and he had all kinds of...he was smoking like a fiend and going out and having lunch and getting half drunk everyday with the people that he had to... all his printing salesmen, and the paper salesmen, and you know. And then they all drink together and it's all that scene of like constantly dealing, and I thought I couldn't possibly get into hanging out with all these salesmen, getting drunk every lunch, so I could get their Forget it! So I just quit. And then I had no money. (laughs) Well I had saved a little, and so I just ended up in this place on Frederic Street, making collages.

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Michael Erlewine: How did you ever get to work for like Bill Graham?

David Singer: Well I ended up with ah It partly had to do with my boss, God bless him and even though he was completely freaked out, when it finally came to the day that I left, he went out and bought me an art portfolio, cause I told him I was going to become a graphic designer and on my own, you know.

And he asked me about how would I have done this, and what do I know about it, do I have any connections? I said "No, but I'm going to do it." And so he went out and bought me a kind of an art case, black art case, the first one I had. He gave it to me as a going away present.

By that time, he'd realized, and then he found someone else that was much more....and I'd kinda' trained him for a couple weeks. And so I had this portfolio. At one point, I had all these collages and started.... and there's a lot of poster companies going on and this was like in, god I don't know, 1966. And I started going around to all these poster companies, thinking that these would be greeting cards or like ahh... I don't know. Maybe someone... they were kind of small for collages, but I'd.... I went to East Totem West right off, and they were doing these greeting cards along with their posters.

And I met Johnny Q. ???? and then got to know him real over the years. He said "Well, you should go to Bill Graham, man." And I thought "Geez, you know." I didn't really see myself doing concert posters. And I hadn't been doing lettering for awhile, so it was like kind ofI hadn't really had to do lettering. I did

sketching for my job and making layouts and everything, but it was sort of rough.. So, after I went to all these different companies and then I did go to see Victor Moscoso. I don't remember exactly how I found his number. It escapes me how it happened. I called him up one day and went to see him. And Victor looked at all my collages and said he really liked them and the rest is history.

Michael Erlewine: And your things are dramatically different than anyone else's.

Meeting Bill Graham

David Singer: Well that was another experience. I walked in there with this portfolio full of collages and the guy, Pat Hanks was Bill Graham's right hand man at the time, and was there that day. And he said, I have this art work I'd like to show somebody. And he said "Oh, come with me." And he took me into where the rest room was and there was a door up the side, there was a little room that was about as big as the bathroom there, maybe a little bigger or like the alcove in there. And it was filled with artwork that people brought in and left there.

And he said, "Well you can leave it in here." And I said, "Leave it! Oh I don't want to leave it." And he says, "Well, you have to." And I said, "Well, can't you just look at it?" He said, "Well, every so often Bill needs another artist and he'd come in here and look at all the stuff and you know. If something appeals to him then he'll hire them. But you know we don't look at stuff on an ongoing basis. He has this series of artists that are working." And I said, "Well, I can't leave this stuff here. It's valuable. It's my

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baby and what am I going to use to go around and show other people." And he says "Well, what do you got anyway?"

So I opened my thing and I show him these collages. And he went, "Geez, you know I've never seen anything quite like this." And they were nice, you know. He didn't know quite what to say. So he went and took one in and showed Bill, and then it happened. I heard them talking over there and then finally he comes out and says, "Well Bill says he'd see you. Come here."

So I went into Bill's office, and Bill is on the phone, you know, and he says, "Yeah, just line them all up over there." So I took all of my collages, took off the tissue paper. I had them all tissue papered nice and neat (laughs). But I lined them all up and then Bill gets off the phone and we shook hands and he says, "What do you got here?" And then he starts looking at the collages and he looked at me and looked at these and looked at these and then he says "Geez. Hmmm," and he ran out of the room and he told Marishka Green, Herb Green's wife at the time, was Bill's secretary (laughs) And that's how I first met Herbie Green. But anyway he went out and told her to hold his calls for a half hour and ran in and closed the door.

And then he'd just sit there, and for about half the half hour, he just sat there and looked at these collages. Didn't say a word. He's like silent, you know. And then he kinda' leaned back in his chair, and the other person in the room was Pat Hanks, who was still there. And he said to Pat, "Well, what do you think, my summer series?" And Pat says "Yes, that's a thought."

And then next thing... and then he looked at me and says "Do you know how to do lettering?" (laughs) I'll never forget this and I thought "Lettering?" Well yeah! I can do lettering and he said "Well, there you go." And that was it. One thing led to another, so I just suddenly had these 12 posters to do, and I really had never done any lettering, with a tool, that was ever published, and but I could do it, and I did. I worked out a design that was the same for the first twelve. which saved, whew, saved my ass.

Well, he really liked it. When I first did the first lettering layout, he really liked it, because it was readable, you know? And he kept saying that to me, he said "I really like your posters. They're readable!"

Michael Erlewine: Couldn't deal with that Wes Wilson, right?

David Singer: Well he'd been, you know... Not Wes Wilson, Lee Conklin. He'd just gone through Conklin period.

Michael Erlewine: Oh really!

Eric King: Oh god!

Meeting Randy Tuten

David Singer: And I think he was done with Conklin, but Randy Tuten was doing a lot of posters then. When I came along, Randy was the main guy. Randy didn't cotton to me too much

And Randy was a stoned-out head, you know, from Hollywood, raised in Hollywood. High, hip, you know really, you know... And I was kind of square. I was still had a lot of Pennsylvania in me and I was like a kind of a loner

I went to Randy's studio a few times and it was amazing, I was like suddenly in

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an artist studio that I could kind of relate to. I mean, even though Randy was in another dimension than I was, he was really into...from my view at the time... He was a druggie (laughs). you know?

Michael Erlewine: Right.

David Singer: I mean I had smoked some grass, but nothing like... I mean Randy was like, you know, he was really into it. And he gave me some. I remember one time I was in Randy's studio, but he was with some friends, or maybe they came by later. Oh no, they came by, and this guy had some grass and they said, "Do you want to smoke grass with us?" And I said "Sure," and they rolled a joint, and we smoked a joint, and it was like on another total level from the grass I'd smoked.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

David Singer: I mean this was like catatonic, you know. You know that kind of grass.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, absolutely.

David Singer: I never liked that kind of grass very much, but this was like... and I had smoked a couple hits of this joint, and then that's what happened to me. I kind of went into this catatonic trance for like about an hour, you know, and they were just... God, it was the funniest thing. In fact Randy, for a long time used to kid me about that. He has a whole story about it. Didn't jog with my memory of it, but anyway it was really interesting. I was never real heavily into drugs. I was surrounded for years by people who were... not that I didn't do any, but, and there were, you know, some years where I'd get stoned fairly regularly, but it was mostly just grass. And I had a

certain grass, it was a certain kind of mellow kind of grass.

Michael Erlewine: Did you do acid?

David Singer: Oh yeah I did my share of acid trips. Not by the hundreds, you know. I used to have a friend (laughs), they'd count their..."Oh, I did acid 387 times. This is my 388th."

Michael Erlewine: Sure

Eric King: No, yeah sure, we all knew people like that.

David Singer: I did some acid trips, but nothing, you know. Yeah, I, I was just too... a little bit too cautious. And partly it had to do too with when I was still in the navy, in the last year and a half, I was stationed on the ship. They used to come in and out of San Francisco. And at that time, we'd finally come into San Francisco. We'd be in port for a week and a half. And you could get on the bus, and then off at the downtown station, there at Mission and First. And at that time, there were still some remnants of World War II in the downtown. Cause you know, downtown San Francisco had been where the service men all went and I'll tell you some interesting stories about that.

But one of the things that was still there was, you could come out of the bus station, and to the left over there, there were a couple businesses that were on the ground floor had the machines you could look in and see naked women. You put in a quarter and...

And they would sew any patch on your uniform. There was still the uniform thing downstairs, and then upstairs you could rent a locker, put street clothes on, and put your uniform in, and wear street clothes. So I rented a locker, and

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for like a year and a half I'd come in for a week in San Francisco and I'd go in there and put my street clothes on and I'd wander around town.

And I forget what the point of that was. What were we talking about?

Michael Erlewine: Where I'm at is you got the gig with Bill Graham and you did more posters than anyone! So, is that right?

David Singer: Well it turned out that way, but I mean, you know.

Michael Erlewine: But, I'm kind of wondering, that when the whole scene died, how... what was the exit strategy? I mean how did you get out of it? Each of you artists have done different things.

David Singer: Well I'm still struggling to figure that out. I mean my whole life has been a struggle to figure out what I'm doing.

Eric King: (laughs)

David Singer: (laughs)

Michael Erlewine: Well I just want to make a comment, that from what I saw today, I mean I've always liked your work (I have your work on my walls at home), but I think what I saw today is like your best work from my point of view, is in there, in the collages.

David Singer: Sure.

Michael Erlewine: Because I think that you have a huge future and that you just need to get...

David Singer: Well, I felt for the last year or two I'm moving into a completely other career.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

David Singer: And the computer thing has been part of it. And I'm really pretty savvy now with that, and I don't particularly want to do commercial design though.

Michael Erlewine: No that'd be, fine art is what you're going to be doing.

David Singer: Yeah, yeah, and I think that's the direction I should go.

Sacred Geometry

Well it's interesting that you are from Pennsylvania. You know where the hex signs are. That's where my interest in geometry started! When I was about 6th grade or 5th or 6th grade, I very specifically remember we were... You know, you get art classes or whatever. And I was always, in every school setting I had, all through my high school years, if we had any kind of art thing, I was always the one that kind of really stood out, in a certain way. And so I'd get either special attention or they tried to... tend to try to ignore me, because they had to deal with all the other kids, it seemed. And what would happen was... I remember this very specifically. I was always bored in school, a lot of the time, and what would happen was... what happened this one particular day was we were taught how to take a compass, foot and draw a circle, and then put it in the edge and draw six circles around and make this classic hex sign.

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David Singer's Studio

Michael Erlewine: That's right.

David Singer: And I was blown away. I was so blown away that I went off on this kind of compass thing for like, (laughs) I don't know. It ended up coming back at me the rest of my life. I mean I'm really into geometry, and it's sort of like it was a very empowering moment, because it made me realize that it was like...the thing about geometry that is so powerful is always..

Geometry was very much used in the ancient times by a lot of these mystical systems, mystery schools, various... It was used by the Egyptians as well, where they would get all the potential...And they were in power positions in the culture, so they could sort of look out and pick out the ones, the ones that were gifted or whatever. But what they would immediately start to do was teaching them certain types of geometry. Because if you could get them into geometry, and show them certain things in geometry, you could immediately see which one's the mind went....

Because what was happening was, you were showing them something that was

completely empowering, in the sense that it had nothing to do with what they thought about it, or what they brought to it. It didn't matter whether you were old or young, what your religious view was, whether you were a male or female. It didn't even matter whether you were an Egyptian or any other culture. What they were showing you was something that was totally universally real. It didn't even matter what the teacher thought about it. It worked or it didn't, and if you could somehow grasp the magic of that, where like suddenly you are shown something that is in itself completely empowering, it could be a revelation. And I had that kind of experience, when I was growing up, with geometry. And so later they'd see those students, who would be blown away with what they were teaching them, and they'd pull them into mystery school, and they'd become the priests. (laughs) And that was one of the... They used geometry as one of the gauging....

Michael Erlewine: This is an interview, but we can have a little dialog here. That was one aspect. I mean I think that's true of.. that's what's called 'pointing out' right, and your life says this and you say that and in Buddhism, they have pointing out instructions, the teacher points out and sometimes the student gets it, then it's an "Aha!" that you were talking about.

David Singer: Mm hmm.

Michael Erlewine: They suddenly... It doesn't have to be geometry. It's the fact, it's now you're looking at the mind.

David Singer: Right, yeah. Well geometry has a very unique power, in the sense that it's almost part of

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everything else. I mean there's hardly anything you could mention that...

Michael Erlewine: In a sense, I'm saying it's not unique. What is unique is the pointing out and then...

David Singer: Yeah. Yeah. I understand what you're saying. In that sense your right. There are other things that.

Michael Erlewine: And the idea of empowerment and transmission is something that's big.

David Singer: Right, well I had that experience with that because...and then I got so into it. In school they had art classes and whatever we had there, they were all very important to me. And I ended up being the... I used to design stage sets for the various plays in school and stuff, and they were corny, and, you know, cut outs and stuff. And but I used to do that, and I ran several campaigns when I was in school. I got my best friend elected as the class president by putting up 400 posters around school. You know. "Vote for Dick cause he's a Prick," or whatever.

Michael Erlewine: (laughs)

David Singer: I just would do all these signs and put them up everywhere, and they were the best signs, and they looked all great (laughs), little posters. They were actually posters.

Michael Erlewine: Right!

David Singer: And stuff like that. And when I was in 8th grade, they had just completed a new senior high school and my class was going to be the first class that was going to be in the new senior high school. And they decided to hold a school-wide contest for a seal, logo, for the school. And of course older kids

were really into it. And very few in my class got into it. We were in 8th grade, but I did submit a design and won the contest. I was like..."When I was in high school, I created the school seal." So I had this kind of little bit of a, you know... I don't know what you call it (laughs)

Michael Erlewine: Special.

David Singer: I had a little bit of a fame there.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah that's cool.

David Singer: And we put it on everything. It was going on the flag and their stationary and you could get it sewn on jackets and all kinds of stuff. They still use it too. So you know, I had this kind of you know, skill.

Bill Graham Pre-Fillmore Story

But there was something else I was going to tell you about the Haight-Ahsbury thing. The first time I went to Fillmore was... I was with some guys, and this particular night, for some reason, we didn't change clothes or I can't remember the circumstances around why we were still in uniform. But I was in my navy uniform with this other guy, this one other guy. And we went up market street and, at that time, the place that became Fillmore West, which at that time it was the Carousel Ballroom. It had this kind of light in it and it liked swirled around and they even used it during the Fillmore. It was still a USO club, from World war II.

I mean this was like in the 60's, but I mean early 60's, but they still had this... (laughs) You could go in there, and they'd pass out little cards on the street or in various places. You'd get one to go to get a hot dog or something. They just had these little cards that, you know,

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"Come up to the USO," you see. So one day, with this friend (we were in navy uniform), we ended up all the way up there at Van Ness, and there was the USO. So we went in, walked up the stairs, and went into the USO.

Well, at the time we were looking for girls, and there were a bunch of girls there, but they were... it was highly chaperoned. And it was really kind of a dead place, but we stayed there for a couple hours, dancing with these girls, and had coffees and doughnuts and that kind of stuff (Laughs), you know? And finally we just left, and years later, I went up there to show Bill Graham my art.

And I remember I told Bill that story one time. I said, "You know Bill..." This is after I knew him for awhile. We were standing there one day. And I told him the story of how the first time, we were standing at the steps. Because he had taken... He had asked me to take the collages that I'd done and paste them down on a board and they were going to put it there on the middle of the steps, where you came up the steps one way, and then turned around and went the other way. There was a big wall there and they had 200 prints on there.

So I took a piece of board and put my 12 collages... I laminated them and put acrylic all over them, you know. It looked really nice. I arranged.... just took the collages out of the posters. And he put it up there, and we were standing there looking at it. And I told him I said..., I told him about the first time I walked in there, in the navy and this was a USO, and it blew him out. I don't know if he even knew that before. But it was a really nice piece too. And they had it framed and I'd done a... There was a little area and I put "David Singer" in

there and a nice little collage, but it burnt up in the fire.

Michael Erlewine: Too bad.

David Singer: They had a fire there and... Yeah, because, well, he moved it to the offices, and then it burnt up in the office.

Eric King: I was there when he opened the office.

David Singer: Yeah it burnt up in the fire.

New Collages / Alton Kelley's House



David Singer Collage

David Singer: I seem to be moving more and more into people, than I used to. Like this one, was a Gauguin piece and the one with the Rock Poster Society, it has lots of people in it... I like the challenge of putting all of these people in the different setting. And I thought of another one to do, which is the stage set, behind the scenes.

Where I put, if it was like, say Hollywood, behind the scenes, you could put any kind of character from any movie, or any movie star, all from the 20's and 30's, you know, like the older ones. And, they can all fit in there, any

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character you want, because they'd be all back behind the scenes. And that would be an interesting one.

Michael Erlewine: I have no problems with your imagination.

ALTON KELLEY'S HOUSE

David Singer: (laughs) Ever been to Alton Kelley's place?

Michael Erlewine: No! now I've never met any of you until now.

David Singer: You've been there haven't you, Eric?

Eric King: No!

David Singer: Oh geez! His house is like... First of all, it's one of the heritage houses of Petaluma. And they fixed it up. It's filled with antiques and it's just like a museum.

Eric King: They have real taste.

David Singer: And he's got his artwork integrated everywhere and Margaritte's art work integrated and the house is actually a work of art, I mean (laughs) it's just ... They've gotten into the house itself and the way, and all the stuff, the designing, the painting, and the wallpaper....,

Kelly's house looks like it would be Kelly's house. When you're in there for a while you say Yeah, (laughs) this is what you'd expect.

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Ed Walker of S.F. Rock

by Michael Erlewine

[Ed Walker, owner of S.F. Rock Posters has put together one of the great poster stores in the world. Located in San Francisco, Walker's store is a must-see stop for any collector.]

Ed Walker: Farm and my garden and my orchard... I'm out there playing on my tractor and my loader and mullin' the weeds. That's what I like doin'. I was born and raised on a farm that's all I learned how to do when I was a kid.

Michael Erlewine: let me set this over by you and we'll just talk for minute. Ok, first of all what's your birth date and year when were you born?

Ed Walker: May 25, 1945

Michael Erlewine: And where?

Ed Walker: I was born in Brush, Colorado.

Michael Erlewine: And what was your given name?

Ed Walker: Edward George Walker.

Michael Erlewine: Cool, now what we what we want to know is a couple things. One would be... and it can be in

whatever order, I wonder how, how you got into this. We also want to know, how you were connected with the scene in the 60's and how did you integrate to that, I mean what part of it did you see, or not see...

Ed Walker: I got here I came from Colorado in 1965 and lived in the bay area ever since, and started in the antique business in 1973. I started with furniture and did that for 15 years, did toys for a few years and in 1989 I switched over to paper and posters and been in it ever since.

And I just like collecting and I was, like I said, my cousin told me that these rock and roll posters are gonna' be great and a good thing to do in the future, and I went that direction, but I never got to be on the scene. I moved here in 1965, but I didn't really get into the scene until 1970, so I missed all the good ones. I missed Janis, and Jimmy and all those. I missed 'um. I didn't get into the scene 'till after it's over.

Michael Erlewine: Could talk about what you like about the posters? I mean, sure it's an investment thing, but they're beautiful things.

Ed Walker: They're beautiful, yeah. I mean I got into because I like the art. I mean you know, it is a form of art that came out of that era that changed this whole world. It changed the whole United States then, in the 60's. And part of it is the posters and being they're limited too.

Michael Erlewine: And this stuff is appreciating, right?

Ed Walker: Oh definitely. It hasn't stopped rising as you know. It hasn't

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leveled off. It keeps getting better and better and harder to find.

Michael Erlewine: And more, would you say more and more people are interested in collecting this stuff?

Ed Walker: Oh, I got new people coming all the time, young people collecting old style.

Michael Erlewine: Really?

Ed Walker: Oh yeah, and then people that were there at the time, and now they've got a little money, and they're into their later years. Man. I'm gonna' collect some of the stuff I had before. A few people really get into it. They see that it's not only an investment, but it's nice stuff. You know a lot of people make an investment and they go put it in a safety deposit box. Here you can buy your nice piece and enjoy it on the wall as it appreciates.

Michael Erlewine: What do young people see in the old stuff?

Ed Walker: Well, the young people, I mean the ones that are into music. Nowadays is pretty hard to create new music. when you know the ...

Michael Erlewine: It was all done.

Ed Walker: It was done, and now they're just fine tuning it or distorting it, and it's not like a personal thing for the artist. In them days, they put it together and it's... but the new people that realize that that this is the art of the music, and they're collecting that, because they were the founders, the early people, you know?

Michael Erlewine: Do you carry the new poster stuff?

Ed Walker: Oh yeah.

Ed Walker: It's new, and I carry it because the people are collecting it. You know, the people that like the new bands or whatever, they're collecting it now, and then, down the road, I'm sure that they'll keep collecting more. And all the new stuff now, even though it's new, it's still collectable. It's numbered. A lot of it's numbered, and then they got artists doin' it to, and it is good work, even though a lot of it's computer generated. It's still nice art.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, what about all the punk stuff? All the handbills, and the Mabuhay Gardens and the Kennel Clubs. Do you carry any of that?

Ed Walker: Yeah, I carry it.

Michael Erlewine: Does that sell?

Ed Walker: Well, a few people. It's not as, as popular as the common, everyday stuff, but there are people collecting everything.

Michael Erlewine: Do you think it will grow in the future?

Ed Walker: Oh, definitely.

Michael Erlewine: And whether it's colorful or not?

Ed Walker: Yeah, a lot of the Punk stuff was black and white or whatever, but still, it was so vividly produced that it is good stuff and it will be popular. It's popular now because there's not a lot of it.

Michael Erlewine: But you guys don't issue posters.

Ed Walker: No. I don't reproduce. I have produced two posters since I've been here, but I've never reproduced a poster. We get everything just get off the street. And everything's authentic. We try to strictly stay to the real stuff. I don't

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deal in seconds and thirds or reproduction. I don't advertise them, even though I do carry some for the people that can't afford the \$1000 poster. They can buy a \$150 second printing.

Michael Erlewine: Right!

Ed Walker: Even though they call it a reprint, it was still done at the time, but you know, it's all documented and whatever. So I do carry some, but I like to deal the original rare stuff. That's what we strive for here.

Michael Erlewine: And you do handle some original art? I saw some out there today.

Ed Walker: Yes, original art, one of a kind, things. Most of that is only done one time, the original art, and that's kind of like what I stress. I like to have the rare stuff and the original art.

And original art is getting in demand too. A lot of people feel, well, I got the poster, and maybe if I could find the original art, I'll buy that too.

Michael Erlewine: And your customers aren't just San Francisco people

Ed Walker: No, I deal with everybody all over the world.

Michael Erlewine: Really.

Ed Walker: I have my web site, with people from all over the world. People all over the world want to trade, and the web site has helped me tremendously in getting out to the world, and there are people all over the world collecting this stuff.

Michael Erlewine: And when were you founded. When did this start?

Ed Walker: I started in 1991. I started down on Fisherman's Wharf at the Cannery. I started and opened up a gallery there with a partner. I had Rick Griffin as a partner.

Michael Erlewine: Really.

Ed Walker: And Rick Griffin had put 95 pieces of original art work on the wall, and unfortunately Rick died three months after we opened up, on June 1st, 1991. Rick had his fatal accident on the 15th of August. And so, it kind of drove me into a spin. I lost Rick. He was my partner at the time, and he was gonna' do some art work for us at the gallery, and do a few things for us, and he ended up gone and that kind of put us in a spin. Then I moved into this location and I've been in the same spot since 1992.

Michael Erlewine: What are some of like the rarest posters now. What are some of the most in-demand rare posters? What are the most common really rare ones that people ask for.

Ed Walker: A lot of people ask or are trying to get the early Family Dogs and the early Bill Grahams, early like the first twenty are hard to get. It's the early stuff that's in demand. Jimi Hendrix stuff is always the best, hardest, hardest to find.

Michael Erlewine: More than Grateful Dead?

Ed Walker: More.

Michael Erlewine: Oh really!

Ed Walker: I mean Hendrix stuff is more in demand, I think. I mean there's a lot of Grateful Dead fans, but Jimi Hendrix still is somethin' special. It's the hardest to find, and the easiest to sell, because it is in demand but, all the stuff of people that have died, the Jim Morrison, the

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Janis Joplin stuff, any of that stuff that's really obscure, is really in demand, collectable, because they are the one's that are gone. And then there is the Acid Test stuff, which was done early, and it was is in real demand, because not so much of it was printed, you know, and that was the start of it all -- Ken Kesey and his Acid Test. That is in great demand and then in the last two or three years, Sonny Barger's got popular with his book of the Hells Angels and since that the Hells Angels stuff is really becoming rare, and that stuff is getting impossible to find, I mean it's hard to find and it is easy to sell.

It's goes right out, and it's one of those things. They put on a few shows, and they were part of the scene at the time, the Hells Angels. They helped them out and all that. The angels were part of it, and that stuff is really hard to get a hold of and it sells real well, and it's rare.

Michael Erlewine: Is stuff still turning up?

Ed Walker: Oh yeah. I get stuff comes through my door just daily, but it keeps turning up, especially with the Internet. People are aware and I get offered stuff off the internet all the time, plus I've been at the same location for 9 years and people know I'm here. I treat them fairly and I get a lot of stuff that comes through the door.

Michael Erlewine: If someone was a first time collector, and they don't even know where to start... they just kind of like the idea of collecting posters, you know, creating an investment of some kind, where would you recommend they start?

Ed Walker: Well if, somebody's new, we have some steps we take them through,

and try to get an idea of what they know of the past or kind of what their feelings are, and then start them off. We find out what you like and then tell you what's available and the variety available, because there's tickets, handbills, postcards, posters, banners, bumper stickers, buttons, you know. There's so much of it that was produced, that I mean, a lot of variety. Then you get an idea of what they're interested in, and I usually step through with people asking them what do you think your budget is and then try to fit them into something where they're happy and to get collecting for the future. We see what they are interested in and try to fit their budget and to tell them that it's something to enjoy that's also a good investment.

Michael Erlewine: What's your philosophy on the collectable business.

Ed Walker: Well, I like, the collectable business. It's not like a business you can call up on the phone or order off of a catalogue and restock your inventory, so you gotta' buy it off the street or from collectors or collections or whatever.

To make the customer happy, I've always tried to be honest in this business, that's what I was trying to say. In the collectable business, it's easy to not be honest, because you have the knowledge and a lot of your customers don't. But I've always been true to people and tried to treat them right by being honest, because I want them to come back. And when they buy something, I want to make them happy. And if they're happy and I've made a sale, I'm happy, so that's what I call good business, when both people are happy and they got what they wanted and I got what I wanted and we got a

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deal. And they come back, and I try to treat people fairly, so in my philosophy, like I said, I'm gonna' pay a little more for the people who walk through the door, and charge a little less, and it's worked out great for me.

So the philosophy that I had is to "pay a little more and charge a little less" and just to be honest with people, to let them know that I'm here to serve you, not here to take just your money. I make the guarantee that whatever I sell is guaranteed as what I sell it. It's a first whatever and I'd back it 100% and a lot of my deals are done on a handshake, and a lot of that isn't done nowadays. A man of your word is more important to me than your money or whatever. You know and, and that has really worked good for me over the years.

Michael Erlewine: And what I found out about the poster business is the "word" is important in this case.

Ed Walker: Right. And I just have the philosophy: you tell people the truth. If the posters got four tack holes in it, you don't tell them that it doesn't have any tack holes, cause when he gets it, it's gonna' have four tack holes. so you might as well be honest.

Michael Erlewine: Right

Ed Walker: And tell them the way it is, because the common person is not so dumb. He can see, you know.

And it's worked for me because I've been successful and everybody is happy with what we've done, because we've treated people fairly. Like I say, success in business is not always dollars and cents, you know?

Michael Erlewine: Right,

Ed Walker: I've been in this business in the same location for nine years. I've never had to hire a layer, and I've only had three bad incidents with UPS where I've lost stuff or whatever. In 9 years, I've only had three bad incidences.

Michael Erlewine: I think that's pretty good.

Ed Walker: As a business part, I feel is important to people. And we haven't created hassles, you know, haven't misrepresented ourselves.

Michael Erlewine: And you ship carefully?

Ed Walker: Right, I ship any way the people want it shipped. How would you like it shipped? I'll do whatever you ask me. And if you'd let me do it I ship 3rd day air UPS or the US mail or whatever. Everything's insured, guaranteed. We've never had a bit of a problem.

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Classic Posters – The Interviews Book One

Eric King by Michael Erlewine

[Note: I want to personally thank Eric King for being kind and generous enough to act as my guide to the poster world and as a friend. Eric patiently answered endless questions by phone and email. When I visited the Bay Area, he personally took me around and introduced me to the players and the places. Thanks so much Eric!]



*Vicor Moscoso and Eric King
(right)*

Eric King: Anyway, one of the things I want to do is honor the people who have treated this thing as a science, as archivists. So I'm interviewing Jacaeber Kastor, he's agreed, and Phil Cushway and Dennis King and others, like Paul Getchell.

I am going to have a section on the people who know about posters. You are going to have a little area in it, where I talk about you and tell them about your book. You work is indispensable for serious collectors of the Family Dog, Bill Graham, Neon Rose, and Grande Ballroom.

Eric King: It's not that this makes a lot of money for me. What it does, is that it

makes information available to people who want to buy posters, who then are able to buy posters more confidently and that's the whole purpose of this thing.

GOT INTO POSTERS

Michael Erlewine: What I need to know is how you got into posters?

Eric King: Well, I was into rock and roll from 1954 or 1955, right at the beginning. I was listening to the radio in New York and I was in love with the stuff.

I was getting my Masters at Cal. in English Literature. I was walking down Telegraph Avenue sometime in the mid/late winter of 1966 and a kid handed me a handbill for one of the Family Dog events. It was either the "Love" or the "Paul Butterfield".



Paul Butterfield Blues Band

And I am looking at this thing, going "What the hell is this?," and it was neat! I just stuffed it in a book. I managed to go to one of the early events.

Michael Erlewine: You don't remember which one it was.

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Eric King: No, I was stoned. I was working very, very intensely, and it was before acid was made illegal and I did it, you know once or twice.

Michael Erlewine: And this is what year?

Eric King: Early 1966.

Michael Erlewine: Okay.

Eric King: And it was so totally different from the Times Square Paramountshows that Alan Freed did in New York, which were the premiere rock and roll shows in the 1950s. I mean, I went to see Little Richard and Fats Domino out on Long Island, when I was about 15, I think.

Michael Erlewine: What month and year did you come to California?

Eric King: I came here in late August of 1965. I was in the PhD program in English Lit at Cal., Berkeley.

Michael Erlewine: So we must have passed each other in the dark, because I had, I was there for the whole year of '64, into '65. I lived on Haste Street, near Telegraph.

Eric King: That's where I lived. I lived two blocks off of Telegraph.

Michael Erlewine: So did I, but in 1964.

Eric King: We may have walked past each other in the street.

Michael Erlewine: I worked at the Café Mediterranean, at Lucas Books, and was the assistant manager for Discount Records on Telegraph.

Eric King: I still go into the Med every now and then. It's crazy as it ever was. Still inhabited by old beatnik types, only now I'm old and one of them (laughs).

Michael Erlewine: So you came out in August of 1965 and you were pursuing, you were studying what?

Eric King: English Lit. I was gonna' be an English professor.

Michael Erlewine: Did you ever write a dissertation?

Eric King: Sure.

Michael Erlewine: What was it on?

Eric King: Lawrence Durrell. He wrote "The Alexandria Quartet," a major piece of Twentieth Century literature.

He wrote a lot about the creation of art. Durrell said: in order to create art, you have to begin with the notion that everything that was ever created before you, was created with the express purpose of you borrowing from it. The only problem is, you have to pay back the artistic debt, by creating something new. And in that, what he's saying is there is nothing completely new.

And the thing is, if you look at the psychedelic poster art, despite the fact that it is radically different than anything that comes before it, they're taking old images. They're taking old stuff, they're creating from things that are...

Michael Erlewine: Some of them aren't, people like Bob Fried weren't in general. Well Stanley Mouse and Alton Kelley borrowed all kinds of stuff, which did not detract from the power of many of their posters.

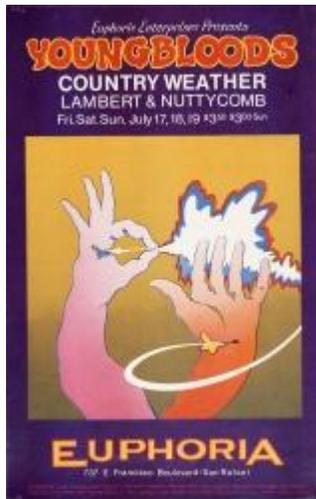
Eric King: The only one that really wasn't was Wes Wilson. Wilson did these drawings, that really did come out of his head. But a lot of Fried is borrowed.

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Michael Erlewine: Well, a lot of his paintings and some of his posters are abstract.

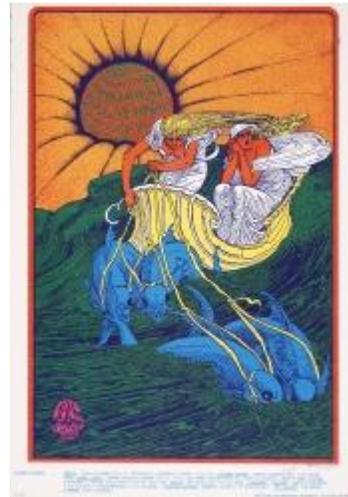
Eric King: No, his paintings are not; his paintings are geometric.

Michael Erlewine: I'm thinking particularly of the Euphoria poster, which is not geometric.



Bob Fried Euphoria

Eric King: Sure, those are things that are his own, that are out of his own head. But, if you look at, for example, the dolphins pulling, that is collage. He cut that out of something else and just did the lettering in the middle of the sunburst.



Bob Fried FD-D 14

Michael Erlewine: And he did the sunburst. I just finished transcribing the Kelley interview. He and Mouse just went to the Library and made copies. That's the stuff they traced and took it from there.

Eric King: Right.

Eric King: One thing, and I think that this is very important, and I make this point in lots of emails, when people ask me questions; my area of expertise is extremely narrow. I'm limited to the four venues that I have in my guide. Every now and then I have to pull rank and say this is what happened in 1966, I was there, and I did interviews with the printers in 1968.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Eric King: I went and talked to Frank Westlake, no later than 1968 and I talked to him a number of times. He was Bindweed Press.

Michael Erlewine: Let's talk about some of these things. I think we should go back and pick up your story about how you got into this.

Waiting for Posters

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Eric King: I got the handbill. I got another one the following week and started saving these. I do have a collecting mentality and seem to enjoy putting things in pages and albums or something.

There was something electric when these things started clicking. When Wes Wilson started getting the rhythm of more than just lettering, when Stanley Mouse and Alton Kelley started to click with the imagery that they were finding, and when Victor Moscoso started to hit the thing with color.

Every week, you would walk up, on Friday around Noon, on Telegraph and Bancroft and you would wait in a little line. There weren't a lot of people -- maybe twenty or thirty -- and the poster people would pull up in a car, hop out with a pile of posters and hand you one, and then go, you know, someplace else.

Now I don't know where else they were handing them out, but this was more than just sticking them in the windows of stores. They would stop, and if you were there at the right time, they would hand you a poster. It's like you're standing around, and Toulouse-Lautrec is hopping out of a coach and handing you a poster.

Michael Erlewine: But logistically, there were many different venues. Was one person bringing posters for all of them?

Eric King: No, each venue had it's own poster deliverer. They tended, I forget exactly the time, but there was some regularity about the time they would show up. And one of the places they would show up, was Bancroft and Telegraph.

Michael Erlewine: Do you know of any other places?

Eric King: No, it never occurred to me to wonder about it, because that is where I got them.

Michael Erlewine: So there would be more than one that came that day?

Eric King: Oh yeah.

Michael Erlewine: What other places were they put.

Eric King: Store windows, I mean, I don't remember a lot of them being on telephone poles, but they didn't try to cover Telegraph Avenue, the way they did the Haight-Ashbury. But Victor Moscoso's descriptions of, and I can really understand why people did this, Victor would stand on the other side of the street after he had put a poster up and watch people walk over to it, stand there and go wow.

And these had an electric effect on people. It's very hard to communicate in an environment where this just doesn't happen. There's nothing like this going on. People walked down the street, and they would cross the street to look at these posters.

I mean, as soon as something new showed up, because I didn't get everything, you know, handed to me on the street. I mean I wasn't there every time. This was hippie time, you know, twelve o'clock could mean one thirty. And if you waited around, you know, maybe you got it, or maybe you didn't. I'm just saying, I got a lot of posters that way. I'm not saying that this was scheduled.

Michael Erlewine: They would give everyone one? They wouldn't just give a

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pile and let you take as many as you want, or something?

Eric King: With postcards you could get a couple, sometimes, and they would put a stack of them in a store and you could take a couple. I mean, some of the little kids would take a bunch of them, but most people did not.

I can remember being handed "The Sound," the postcard by a little kid -- he was like twelve or thirteen years old -- and looking at that thing and going "My God this is incredible art!" I can remember being handed "The Eyeball". I remember waiting in line, somebody handed me this and I'm just going "what the hell".

Michael Erlewine: The poster or the card.

Eric King: This was the poster. I went home and taped this up on the wall of my living room. I didn't do that with very many of them.

Michael Erlewine: And how did you save them?

Eric King: I just put them in a flat, between sheets of cardboard.

Power of the Art

Eric King: The electricity of being handed this thing, and looking at it and going "wow"; and realizing intuitively, there's a tremendous amount going on in this. This moves on a multiplicity of levels. This is not something that is simply saying Jimi Hendrix is going to be playing at the Fillmore on Friday night. This is saying something tremendously profound and spiritual about the thought process of the guy whose name is at the bottom, Rick Griffin.

Unlike most of the people who were looking at these things, who were sixteen years old and hippies, I was twenty-seven years old and an academically trained critic of art. I was already working on a PhD at this point and it was immediately apparent something was going on here. You know it didn't come to me, right away, that this is 'God the Father' and he is dealing with his crisis, you know Jesus etc.

I didn't know Rick Griffin until somewhat later. I mean I knew Victor Moscoso very early, and I'd met the others. I'd met them, but I hadn't sat around and talked to them. It was only like, in the seventies that I did interviews with them. I started out mainly interested in acquiring information, so that my own collection of posters would be complete. If there were variations, I would know about them. I wasn't seeking to discuss art with them, except that's what happened.

I mean, you sit down with Victor and you ask him a couple of technical questions about printing, he'll answer them, but then, if you let the conversation flow, he'll start talking about art. He also is a very highly trained academic. He knows where he comes from, knows art history, and these are the conversations that I had that proved to be, you know, really meaningful and profound.

I started hanging around with David Singer. I mean it's hard to make, you know, comparisons between Singer and Rick Griffin from the art; but the thing is, they're both tremendously spiritual people. Singer did not focus it within fundamentalist Christianity. He obviously had a different focus, but he was a profoundly spiritual seeker of

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knowledge and he would spend hours, you know, talking with me about Mesoamerica, of what he saw in the architecture, in the petroglyphs. I mean he had spent an enormous amount of time studying, and he continues to do so to this day, studying and searching for.

Michael Erlewine: El Dorado.

Eric King: Yeah, he was into El Dorado thirty years ago. He was getting into that when he was getting into Mesoamerica. As far as I understand it, he had an interest in the Mayas.

I did an embroidery of the Aztec calendar. It took me 400 hours and it was on the back of a jeans jacket and somebody I know who does EBay and is into folk art has said to me, of all the things you own the one I want that in your will. I want that 'cause it will make me rich.

The thing is I discussed it a lot with David Singer before I did it. What's fascinating is that they later discovered that the stone was painted. It was all gray, because the paint had worn, but they were able to determine later what colors were on it, and I had gotten a lot of the colors right. It was interesting.

The Dancehalls by Michael Erlewine

Michael. So you started collecting posters, but what about going to the dances. Let's talk about some of the events you went to.

Eric King: I went to some of the events, and they were spectacular events. They were drastically different from rock and roll shows in the fifties, in that in the fifties, I mean Little Richard was the most, you know, with the possible exception of Mick Jagger or maybe Tina

Turner, the most electric performer. I mean he has.

Michael Erlewine: No definitely, to me they are not even in the same category. I think Little Richard was a genius.

Eric King: Yeah, well Little Richard would, as a live on-stage performer... to have to sit in a chair and not get up and dance was one of the horrible parts of the fifties. Well, to walk into the Fillmore or the Avalon Ballroom.

Michael Erlewine: Which one did you go to first? I don't mean to interrupt, I'm just trying to get.

Eric King: I think I went first to the Fillmore. Well, this wall is jumping all over the place and there's all these people hopping up and down. And was just incredible.

Michael Erlewine: Because of the light shows?

Eric King: Yeah, it was like the wall was jumping back and forth. I'd heard people tell me about them. It was hard to describe these things, even to somebody who'd been to rock and roll shows; and it's very hard to communicate now, to anybody, what these things were like, because they really were something like nothing else. It really was the greatest party since the fall of the Roman Empire.

Michael Erlewine: Do you remember what bands you heard?

Eric King: Most of them, I do remember one thing, one night, Frank Zappa rented a thunder machine from a Hollywood studio and used it as a rhythm instrument. I mean it was noise. One night I saw Herbie Hancock and it was pain threshold, I actually couldn't bear to be in the room. I can see why

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some of these people went deaf. I mean, they have hearing loss as a result of how loud this stuff was. People were stoned.

People would shake hands, dance a couple of times and leave and (chuckle) go screw; there was a lot of sex going on. This was an intensely sexualized environment. All these people had lived through the incredibly uptight fifties. It was like -- in the words of a cousin -- like letting a lion out of a cage, meaning the sexuality of a large segment of the population was literally released. Remember there was this doorway between the coming of the pill and the coming of aids. People did a lot of screwing.

There wasn't a lot of conversation. You danced, you danced with people. It was like watching whooping cranes dance up and down and mate.

Michael Erlewine: What about drugs?

Eric King: Oh well, there was a lot of drugs. In the beginning acid and pot, but it evolved into smack and speed, and that was when the thing fell apart, because a junkie is just a junkie.

You could meet people who were wandering around the country, and would say "Oh man can I crash with you tonight," you'd say "sure." You'd wake up in the morning, they'd be there, you'd have breakfast then they'd leave for San Diego or wherever they were going next. When smack and speed came in, you'd wake up, they'd be gone and so was your stereo. And it didn't have to happen more than once or twice, before you stopped having people, who you met in the street, home. I mean, you know, it ended one aspect of it, certainly by 1968.

How the scene Ended

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, talk about that. One of the things that is most interesting, is how did the whole scene die? I mean how did it just end? How come it didn't just keep on going?

Eric King: Well, the concerts ended because the acts wanted more money. They didn't want to play three shows a night. They wanted to play one big show at the Oakland Coliseum and make 20 times as much money.

Michael Erlewine: Weren't there new acts coming along that would be willing to do that.

Eric King: Oh sure.

Michael Erlewine: But they still died out?

Eric King: Yes, because of the money.

Michael Erlewine: But that doesn't totally make sense.

Eric King: Well, it doesn't totally make sense, but everybody got greedy and there really was, among other things, the neighbors of the Avalon Ballroom became very hostile to the noise and to people urinating in doorways. It really did get irresponsible.

Michael Erlewine: So you'd say it peaked in 1967.

Eric King: It peaked from late 1966 through well into 1968. Exactly when and how it died, I don't know. I lived in Berkeley, and Telegraph Avenue continued to be flaky, crazy and fun into the Seventies. I mean a lot of it was going on, well after the ballrooms were closed. People, you know, there were still kids you know, who were 16 years old, run away from home, and come to Berkeley.

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Michael Erlewine: I was in Berkeley for a year in 1964, and I saw it recently, when I came out to visit you and so forth. But in 1964 and 1965 it was really beautiful in terms of the street. You know, It wasn't like a ghetto zone. It was very clean.

Eric King: Well, they are spending a great deal of money trying to clean it up. It's different now, but even the one block between Haste and Dwight Way, where you find a whole bunch of people who are, you know, kind of scrungy, you are not in any danger walking up the street.

Michael Erlewine: It has a different kind of feeling.

Eric King: It's not like East Oakland. You're not in danger walking up that street. You are right on the edge of a campus of one of the world's major universities, and you have a student body that walks up that street every day. The local government is not going to permit this to become some kind of war zone. Plus, according to several people that I know who hang out there more than I do now, if somebody did assault them and they screamed, there'd be a whole lot of people all over whomever was the bad guy right away.

Michael Erlewine: I used to live on Haste Street.

Collecting Posters

Eric King: That's where I got the nucleus of my collection.

I got my Masters in early June of 1966. I left for Florida for the summer, to spend time with the people I had lived with in Florida when I was an undergraduate at the University of Miami. I came back in late August of 1966 to go back to school in the PhD program, and realized I had

missed a whole lot of posters. I put up a sign, on a number of the telephone poles on Telegraph Avenue, saying "if you've got a pile of these posters, I'd like to buy them." A guy called me; he was living in one of the houses on People's Park. He had systematically saved, about thirty to thirty-five of the posters. I paid him a dollar a piece for everything. He didn't have a "Tribal Stomp". I paid a law student, who had gone to the "Tribal Stomp" six dollars for her "Tribal Stomp."

As far as I know, I was the first person to collect them. Now this guy saved posters, and I had saved posters as well. I was now systematically trying to find out what posters existed; what events had posters done for them; what did they look like ... what were the variations. I was looking around for this information. And, as far as I know, I was the first. By 1967 -- no later than the winter of 1967 or early in the spring -- I was in San Francisco trading with several people who were also collecting.

Michael Erlewine: Any still around that we might know? How about Dennis King. When did he start collecting?

Eric King: Dennis was a little bit later. I didn't know Dennis until the early Seventies.

Michael Erlewine: And how did you keep track of this information? How did you record it?

Eric King: In my head.

Michael Erlewine: Did you even have notes?

Eric King: No, it was all in my head.

Michael Erlewine: And how did you organize the materials themselves?

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Eric King: Chronologically.

Michael Erlewine: In a flat file?

Eric King: Mostly, a flat file.

Michael Erlewine: By venue, or all together?

Eric King: By venue: Bill Graham, Family Dog and miscellaneous.

Michael Erlewine: So you had them in many different files?

Eric King: I had three or four.

Michael Erlewine: And did you interleave them at all or just on top of each other?

Eric King: Just shoved in there.

Michael Erlewine: Handbills separate from posters?

Eric King: Handbills and postcards were in awful little black paper acetate. Get rid of those things, they'll eat the back.

But the thing is, I was on the mailing list very early 'cause I went to the events, just signed up and they started mailing them to me. When they came, I taped them to cardboard backers and stuck them on my wall. I mean, I had hundreds of the postcards on the wall.

It never occurred to me that these would be valuable. I used to pontificate: "you know these posters, they are a dollar, two bucks, some day they're going to be ten dollars apiece."

I mean I thought I was profound when I said that. The notion that the poster, I paid a dollar for -- "The King Kong" -- might be twenty dollars; I thought that was really something. The notion that that would be three or four thousand

dollars, if you had said that to me I would have said, "You're crazy."



King Kong FD-002

Writing It Down and Other Collectors

Michael Erlewine: How did you transform into actually collating and cataloguing; how did that happen?

Eric King: Well, that's my nature. I studied archiving.

Michael Erlewine: You were keeping it in your head, I want to know when you went to writing things down on paper and how that went.

Eric King: Oh, when I went to paper. What happened was, that in the late Seventies, the poster reprints were still readily available in little print shops and they were three dollars. People, who were not particularly scrupulous and some deliberately malicious, started selling reprints claiming they were originals.

At this point the artists came after me. They said, listen, if this goes unchecked no one will collect this stuff, and we will loose out. It is not as though our art will die, but there will be much less interest in it, we will make less money and our

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reputations will be besmirched. You are the only person who has all this information and we gave it to you. We gave you hours and hours and hours; we put up with you and tolerated you, because we liked you, but you bothered the hell out of us. You owe us. Write a book. I said "Ah man, I don't want to." And they said, "Don't give us any shit. Our reputation for the future is going to rest on whether there is, or is not." They all had the foresight at this point to recognize that there had to be a guide.

Michael Erlewine: And what year was this?

Eric King: This was 1977.

Michael Erlewine: Ok, a long time. You were interviewing them?

Eric King: Oh, I was interviewing them. I interviewed Victor Moscoso in 1967.

Michael Erlewine: But you weren't taking notes?

Eric King: I was confident of my memory at that point. I mean I really had a good memory. I never bothered writing any of it down, because I never forgot it.

Michael Erlewine: So you were a walking encyclopedia of this information.

Eric King: Yeah, it was not written down. And there were two other people who were systematically accumulating information.

Michael Erlewine: Who were they.

Eric King: Randy was one of hem.

Michael Erlewine: Randy Tuten?

Eric King: Yeah. And the other was a fellow who is out of it, and has nothing to do with it anymore.

Michael Erlewine: Do you remember his name?

Eric King: No, I remember his name. He doesn't, doesn't want to be involved, he doesn't want to have anything to do with it. But he also accumulated a massive amount of information, and what happened was that I took my entire collection over to this fellow's house. He had sold at the Marin Flea Market for years. ... People would come up to him and say "I've got twenty posters." and he'd buy them. He'd take anything that was different and put them in his own little pile. He tended to have the same mentality as Jacaeber, and I. He had a good eye and he would remember what he had seen. If he saw something new, he did not have to have the old one next to him.

Michael Erlewine: He didn't keep notes either?

Eric King: No, never wrote anything down.

Michael Erlewine: Fantastic.

Eric King: And we sat down and we spent more than a day. I mean it was back and forth. It was several days going through: "What do you think is the original? Why do you think this is the original?" We went through everything.

Michael Erlewine: What about Jacaeber Kastor? When did he click in?

Eric King: Jacaeber was one of the little kids -- who was I don't know twelve/thirteen/fourteen years old -- on Telegraph Avenue with a cigar box full of postcards.

Michael Erlewine: When did you meet him?

Eric King: In that time frame.

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Michael Erlewine: Oh, you did. So you remember him from then?.

Eric King: Oh sure, I knew him all along.

Michael Erlewine: So, he must have taken a very methodical approach to the whole thing.

Eric King: He did, but don't you know the story of the rats.

Michael Erlewine: I'm not sure.

Eric King: He had one of the most omnivorous and complete collections of the material in existence. Because he, and a couple of the other kids who collected this stuff really did well. They really had collected systematically and accumulated a lot of information themselves.

Well Jacaeber moved to New York, and he had this enormous collection under his bed, and either mice or rats came out of the wall and ate the collection. He simply didn't know they were under his bed, and this collection was destroyed, I mean completely destroyed.

Some time, around 1986 or 1987 or maybe 1988, I'm not sure exactly when, he got in touch with me, and said: "Do you know where I can get a collection of posters? My posters have been destroyed." Over a period of several years, I put him in touch with people. He fell in love with the stuff again, and decided to do something with the gallery.

Michael Erlewine: When did you meet Dennis King?

Eric King: When he opened the little baseball card place next to the Post Office on Durant Street. He rented a

thing that was like, maybe eight feet deep and the width of a door.

Michael Erlewine: Right, he told me about this.

Eric King: It was like nothing. You could stand in it. He was into posters, and he had obviously been saving them for a while. He obviously has an archiving and collecting mentality. I started going in there. He would turn up odd things and I'd buy one.

And at this point, my attorney, who is part of the scene in the Sixties, he had been to a lot of the concerts, was a graduate student at Cal., and lived in the Haight-Ashbury. About 1973 he said to me, you know those posters, I'd really like a collection of them. He said "Ben Friedman offered me such and such for such and such." I said "That's too much money. I can get it cheaper." I went through another collecting process for him, rounding all these things up. Some of the business involved Dennis King. That's how we did business together and over time we began to socialize.

Michael Erlewine: Can you say something about how readily available were these posters? You talk about Ben Friedman's shop. How many other kinds of shops carried these?

Eric King: Common.

Michael Erlewine: Very common?

Eric King: Common.

Michael Erlewine: In Berkeley and San Francisco?

Eric King: Yeah. Right across the street from the Med was the old Reprint Mint. It was called the Print Mint and then for some reason or other they had to change the name to the Reprint Mint. I

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can remember walking in there and going through the bins and seeing the "Toronto Poster", in the bin for three dollars. I didn't buy it. I had one. The notion I could have bought eight copies of the "Toronto Poster" for three dollars, put them in a portfolio and thirty years later, sell them for six thousand dollars apiece, never occurred to me. I mean this is 20/20 hindsight, but there they were. And this was right across the street from the Med.

Michael Erlewine: Interesting.

Eric King: And they had all the posters. And they had a little rack of postcards. I remember when I realized I wanted a set of postcards that was neat and not all taped up on my wall. I walked in there and bought the ones that are the nucleus of what's in my notebooks, you know the little binders from Light Impressions, for ten cents apiece.

Michael Erlewine: Wow, interesting, that's cool. Say a little bit more about how you put your book together.

Eric King: Well, I had all this information and I had to figure out what to do with it. I had a lot of training as a professional archivist. At this point, the originals were twenty or thirty dollars, with the exception of the "Tribal Stomp," which had sold for two hundred dollars. The Toronto poster was already something you could get maybe one hundred and fifty or two hundred dollars for. All the other stuff, say a number eight -- you know the Andy Warhol -- a really nice clean copy of that would be \$20. But you could get a reprint for three bucks.

Well, I sat down and figured out that. We first of all -- this other fellow and I -- agreed upon everything that was going

into "The Guide". He didn't want to write, but he was willing to spend the time, to show me what he owned.

Michael Erlewine: Did he know more than you did from that time?

Eric King: No, he didn't know more, and I didn't know more.

Michael Erlewine: So you each knew different stuff?

Eric King: We each knew different stuff, but what was interesting, we came to. It's like one of the things about this stuff that makes the judgments that we've made valid, is that the people who did this did all their own research and came to the same conclusions. That's why it's valid. It's like science. It depends on independently verifiable, repeatable testing. Well, if, four people who are systematically studying this material came to almost entirely the same conclusions, then it's pretty clear. What we didn't have, I mean for example, we didn't have access to the invoices that indicate that Capitol Records bought 100,000 posters, we didn't know that.

Michael Erlewine: They did, eh?

Eric King: Yeah, Capitol Records, there is an invoice, Jacaeber Kastor, I had them at one point and I sold them to Jacaeber because he likes that stuff. I mean, I liked it, but he likes it more than I do.

Michael Erlewine: But you were the first to precipitate this on to paper.

Eric King: Oh yes, I was definitely the first.

Michael Erlewine: Before Jacaeber?

Eric King: Oh, Jacaeber's catalog dates from the 1990s.

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Michael Erlewine: Yeah.

Eric King: This was 1978.

Michael Erlewine: Well, what was your first edition like and do you still have one anywhere?

Eric King: No.

Michael Erlewine: You have the Master.

Eric King: I have the Master.

Michael Erlewine: That's too bad, because that's an historic document. You might want to run off a couple of them, just so there's more than one in existence. What year was that?

Eric King: In 1978, I spent six months typing all the information without a numbering system. I just said first, second, third printing. This one's got a number here; this one doesn't.

It was very slovenly in the sense that I knew that all the Family Dogs from forty-four to eighty-six had been reprinted. I didn't attempt to distinguish them, because Chet Helms had put "-1" at the bottom, and I wasn't going to call Chet a liar. And nobody cared. They were three dollars, whether they were this or that variant. .

I knew people knew that I was working on this thing. What happened was I said to everybody -- and I mean there's like two hundred people -- "I'm not going to lose money on this. You send me a check for twenty dollars. I will not cash the check until the book is done. And it'll take me six months." Over the period of about a month, I got a lot of support. People said: "Yeah, we really want this."

I sat down at that point and typed it -- it took me six months --went to a photocopy place and printed it up, then

cashed all the checks and mailed all the books. There are probably some people, who still have it but I don't. What I have is the manuscript.

Michael Erlewine: The annotated one.

Eric King: Right after I did it, people started saying "Oh I've got this; I've got that" and they'd show it to me. Well, I'd write in the margin, I would write in here I would write in there. You know I'd scribble in hand in between lines; it's a mess.

Michael; Well some day, if you are feeling kind towards me, you can make a copy, send it so I can put it in the archive. You know how I build libraries; you've done it.

Eric King: Yeah.

Eric King: No, I think if you look around you'll find one of these.

Michael Erlewine: How many editions have there been? .

Eric King: I'm on the 5th edition, now. There were two editions of the original one. It's a little thin thing; it's only like one hundred pages long.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, that's how things start.

Eric King: Yeah, there were no illustrations in it and when I ran out of them, I'd go with the manuscript to a Xerox place and run off another hundred copies.

Michael Erlewine: Let me ask you this, why do you still call it "Volume One".

Eric King: Oh, that's a joke.

Michael Erlewine: Okay.

Eric King: The joke is there are all these other venues, that's "Volume

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Two". Somebody else can do "Volume two".

Michael Erlewine: Right, we'll do it on the web.

Eric King: I know my limitations. There's all this stuff from Santa Barbara. There's the Carousel Ballroom, there's.

Michael Erlewine: Everything. but your book.

Eric King: Yeah, and I have reached the point where I'm not interested in devoting the massive amount of time to.

Michael Erlewine: You've paid your dues, and you did pioneer work. I'm going to try and document what you and a few other people have done.

Eric King: Well, I.

Michael Erlewine: I mean you've made it available to others.

Eric King: I was the first one who did it. But -- I say this, and I say this definitively -- the person who knows more about psychedelic posters around the world, than anybody else is Jacaeber Kastor. He knows as much as I do, about the Fillmore, Avalon, Grande Ballroom and Neon Rose, but he knows the rest of this material.

Michael Erlewine: But the difference is that you've actually published something that and shared it with masses of people.

Eric King: You are doing something very similar to what I think you're doing, academic research.

Michael Erlewine: I have for all my life, right?

Eric King: Yeah and this is who and what you are and this is why I'm comfortable speaking with you.

Michael Erlewine: Instead of academia, because I never got out of high school, I like popular culture. I was bored with high school and just left. Never finished. I was accepted at the University of Michigan, without a high-school diploma, went for a short time, and found it just as boring. No, I am not an academic.

Eric King: Yeah, but you got the smarts. My father, God rest his soul, had the equivalent of an engineering degree, despite the fact he never went past the tenth grade.

Michael Erlewine: I have a vision of trying to raise the bar for everybody interested in these posters, and if I can make it break even, I'll be happy.

Eric King: When I did the Guide, I said I'm not going to lose money on it. I am not going to make myself rich off this, but I don't want to lose money. And I think that's a reasonable statement.

Michael Erlewine: Oh, yeah I think that's fair.

Eric King: I mean, in the same way that I spent thousands of hours, I'm dealing with this FD-42 thing now, I've got five, or six, hours in this. I've got seven, or eight, hours in something to do with FD-101 within the last two weeks.

This is ongoing. The thing is: I don't need to make my sixty-five dollars an hour doing this, but I do not want to lay out lots of money. When I go to the printer, to print my guide, I'm laying out four thousand some odd dollars. And I do this every time I print the damned thing.

Michael Erlewine: But, it comes back right?

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Eric King: That's my point. I'm not going to lay out five grand without some reasonable expectation that the money's coming back in.

Michael Erlewine: Cool, that's what you said.

Eric King: You bought all these expensive cameras, and you bought all this, you know.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, well I have a whole studio now.

Eric King: Your time, I assume was a labor of love. Your money is something else, you want to get your money back.

Michael Erlewine: Full time on this, right, for a long time now. I'm trying to get -- to do what you did -- almost the level of detail that you did, but for the whole field.

Eric King: Right.

Michael Erlewine: And it's very difficult.

Eric King: Believe me I am glad that someone else is doing it.

Michael Erlewine: If anyone can appreciate what I am doing, it'll be you.

Eric; Oh God, do I appreciate. Well Jaceber Kaster will appreciate it. He's gonna' look at this thing and he's gonna' say "Oh my god there's another nut like us."

SHIPPING POSTERS

Michael Erlewine: Let me ask you some questions.

Eric King: Sure.

Michael Erlewine: Let's talk about shipping posters. What if somebody wants to ship an expensive poster?

Eric King: I think that what you do, is you give the customer the choice and charge them accordingly.

If somebody has a poster of lower or even middle level value, a large 4 inch diameter, or larger, mailing cylinder is adequate to the purpose; and you wrap standard brown paper around the poster.

Michael Erlewine: What does that do?

Eric King: If the poster moves around in the mailing cylinder, it keeps the poster from damaging the edges.

Michael Erlewine: Sometimes I notice, that people put tissue in both ends.

Eric King: Yeah, that keeps the poster from moving. If it is hit at one end, or the other, dropped and the poster slides and hits the end of the cylinder, it will damage the poster.

Michael Erlewine: What about flats?

Eric King: With flats, I go by what -- how expensive -- the thing is. I like refrigerator cartons; I've used bicycle cartons, I cut them so that the corrugations are at right angles.

I'll use four or six layers depending on how heavy the stuff is, and I'll make it at least an inch, or an inch and a half, larger than the poster. You put the poster in a plastic bag, tape the plastic bag so it snugly fitted length and width to the poster. Then you put each of the four corners in the corner of an envelope [that you have cut from an standard mailing envelope] and you tape that down so that the poster can't move. Then you tape the outside with several layers of that plastic tape.

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Michael Erlewine: You're talking about when you close the corrugated cardboard together to make a package.

Eric King: Yeah, you seal it all around the edges. For a long time I used Registered Mail.

Michael Erlewine: US Registered Mail.

Eric King: Now the thing about that, is you have to use the brown tape that you moisten. There's a nuisance factor with this, but Registered Mail can be insured up to \$25,000.

[Editors note: you no longer have to use brown tape]

Michael Erlewine: I see.

Eric King: I now use Express Mail on expensive posters.

Michael Erlewine: US Express Mail.

Eric King: And I ask the client to pay for that.

Michael Erlewine: Can you insure them?

Eric King: Five thousand dollars.

Michael Erlewine: Up to five thousand?

Eric King: But it's a dollar a hundred. So if you ship \$4,500 worth of posters, that's \$44 in insurance. You're talking about \$75 worth of shipping costs. But it gets there the next day and the theory that I go by, is that the faster it moves, the fewer hands that touch it, the less likely it's getting stolen.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Eric King: And I tend to believe that the most expensive items, under five thousand dollars go by Express Mail.

Between five and twenty-five thousand dollars, I believe in Registered Mail. More than that, I'd rather hand deliver it.

Michael Erlewine: Hand deliver it, right?

Eric King: I mean I really didn't know who you are, until I met you. I felt one of the vulnerabilities of shipping, was not the loss or the damage, but the possibility -- please do not take this as any mean statement about any person - - that someone would say there was no number seven in this pile; this was a reprint.

Michael Erlewine: I see.

Eric King: And, you know, I couldn't replace it.

Eric King: You might want to consider something like feedback, so that if there were disputes and somebody did behave badly, over time, if either a buyer or a vendor proves to be a pain in the ass repeatedly.

Michael Erlewine: No, they would be asked to leave.

Eric King: They're out, but the way you're going to know this is feedback. Let's say Joe Jones in Philadelphia sells, you know, puts up on your site an original number twenty-eight and what shows up is a reprint.

Michael Erlewine: Well then, he's out.

Eric King: How do you know. You see the thing is you don't know if the guy in Cleveland who bought the thing is lying, or the guy in Philadelphia is lying. You don't know.

All you know is that the guy in Cleveland complained about the guy in Philadelphia.

Michael Erlewine: So what do you suggest? I mean I see the problem.

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Eric King: That's why you should keep track of the feedback.

I have a little number after my name on eBay, its one hundred and fifty nine. That means one hundred and fifty nine separate individuals have said nice things about me, 'cause they are all positives.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, I'm, I'm not going to invite anyone to be a vendor who cannot produce references. One reference that I will accept, is a very good auction record.

Eric King: I get dozens of emails from people saying "I just found eight posters in my attic. I want to sell them;" and "I'm really broke, I lost my job I'm in deep crap, I've had these posters since 1968, can you help me?"

Michael Erlewine: I may not be helping them myself, but I will send the to someone who wants to do that.

Eric King: No, but the thing is, if they want, they want to sell their posters: there's a lot of nice, decent people, who are in trouble. The economy is not in good shape, and I think one of your main markets for what you want to do, is these people who have eight posters. I want to be able to say "Why don't you check out "ClassicPosters.com."

Michael Erlewine: I am not sure how much I want to inventory anything. But what I will do is find someone who has more time and who wants to gamble a little bit and take over the responsibility. I'll make a deal with them that I send these people to them and they work something out.

They will become the broker and decide if they want to work with these people or not. And his agreement will be that he

will put them for sale through this site, so I still get my commission. But I don't want to handle too much. I will be pretty busy, as it is.

Eric King: This strike[s] me as a very intelligent way to do this. It would have to be somebody who really knows all the material and who would, if you're offering a number twenty-eight original, be able to look at a scan, and say, oh yeah, that's right.

Michael Erlewine: I may go to people like Phil Cushway and Jacaeber Kastor and say: are there any venues that you want to be the gatekeeper for, and they may say, yeah I want to be the gatekeeper for The Grande Ballroom, or something. Also, I will keep a thing that as these things come through; I'm able to look at what it is, so I can see if it is something that I want.

Eric King: I'm still interested in looking for a small number (Laughs) of Grande things. I'm wondering whether it would contaminate my status acting as the gatekeeper on this.

Michael Erlewine: Well you might want to be Grande gatekeeper, or something like that. After all, you know the stuff better than anyone.

Eric King: No, I think that it's tempting, but it would be bad judgment on my part. I do think you ought to ask Jacaeber Kastor to be some sort of referee of disputes over authenticity. Because, if the guy in Cleveland claims it is not an original, he should be required to ship it to somebody, who will say this is an original, this is a pirate; this is a reprint. This is what the seller has claimed it is or it's not. Whoever is wrong pays the expense.

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I think you ought to have that as part of the site, and personally, if Jacaeber is willing to do this, he's pretty much the only person competent to.

Michael Erlewine: Right, well we'll work up to that. I think that I'm going to start with vendors that have lots of material and are on the money. If someone says it's not their thing, they have no right to destroy the poster; they'd have to return the poster. I'd figured out I may have to eat the costs of some disputes, just because I don't want to cause trouble.

Eric King: Okay, this is your judgment.

Michael Erlewine: I think I will delegate. There must be people who are lean and mean and hungry, who want to have people bringing them posters to buy and can go on this site and identify the poster very clearly.

Eric King: I believe that this is true, and I believe, from the nature of e-mail that I get, that you are going to get people who want to put eight posters up. When they're done with their eight posters, they're gone. I believe this will be a considerable source of your income.

Michael Erlewine: Here's one thing I want to do. Anyone can come and use the site. No problem. If someone wants to buy a poster then we have a secure socket, credit card information like anything else.

Eric King: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Now, there's one other little caveat. One of the features on the site, is going to be that you can go to a poster, like the Cincinnati Pop Festival, and turn on a flag that says buyer waiting, "I want this poster, if anyone has it please know that you've got a buyer."

Eric King: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Now, I'm not going to let just anyone do that, because nuts would go in there and turn on a hundred of them. So in order to do that, they have to register as a buyer in some way.

Eric King: You'd have to be really careful about this. What I can tell you, is the number of people who want to buy good stuff, without paying for it much, is legion. You are going to find legions of tire kickers, who are going to want to do this and even if they have to put up a credit card number, they are going to do that. And you are going to have twenty people waiting for this poster.

Michael Erlewine: That's good,.

Eric King: Yeah, but the thing is.

Michael Erlewine: It'll be first come, first served.

Eric King: If you've got multiple copies, maybe you want to consider the possibility of auction.

Michael Erlewine: No, I don't know if I want to get into auction, unless perhaps with runs or sets of posters, or special posters.

Eric King: That's your choice.

Michael Erlewine: Let's just say "The Cincinnati Pop Festival." You've already got it; I don't have it. Let's say that ten people, who are registered as buyers, come in and they say they want that poster. And it comes up for sale; it pops up on the site. The moment it is up, those ten people get sent an e-mail, that says that poster is available. It's up to them to go to the site and be the first person that buys it, gets it.

Eric King: Oh, that's interesting.

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Michael Erlewine: I think that that's a fair way of doing it.

Eric King: I will tell you, that in the world of postcard collecting, there is one who's identifier is Postcard Man France. What he does, is he has a large mailing list, and he sends out, maybe two or three times a year, a little notice that says I have new material that may be of interest to you on my site. And he sends this to what must be thousands of people, and it's first come first served. And it works.

Michael Erlewine: It's all going to be automated. So that as something comes up, if somebody signaled that they wanted to know about it, they would immediately get an email and depends who's vigilant enough on their email, as to who gets in and whether they want to pay the price.

Eric King: I really think this is a great idea.

Eric King: But I've said, you've heard me say this to Gary Grimshaw, if Gary created this art in San Francisco, it'd be the big six.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Eric King: It's as simple as that. He is on that level, and entitled to that kind of recognition, and an art book of the Grande would be nice. I have to be very careful because I have a great deal of personal loyalty to Jacaeber Kastor. I will not do anything.

Michael Erlewine: I am not suggesting a book.

Eric King: Okay. The thing is what I write, you know; I don't want to give up.

Michael Erlewine: If you write something for the site, you can do whatever you want with it elsewhere.

Eric King: Oh, I wasn't clear on that.

Michael Erlewine: Oh no, totally. I am talking about something on the Grande for the site, written by someone who knows something. I am not talking about exclusivity or any kind.

Eric King: Okay.

Michael Erlewine: The ideas where you and I don't see the same way and have different visions, is that to me this kind of website is what has replaced most books.

Eric King: I'm not sure that I like that, but I agree.

Michael Erlewine: It is not an opinion; It's just a fact, and I'm not sure I like it either. I would much rather have a six foot shelf of books, each on a poster venue, but it's not going to happen, at least not soon enough for me to use it, which is now.

Eric King: No, that's not going to happen, but I do believe that it is entirely possible that there be a book, a serious coffee table book, on the Grande Ballroom.

Michael Erlewine: Jack Bodnar is working on a book, with Gary Grimshaw and with Leni sinclair. But it is not going to be a Grande book.

Eric King: The best of Gary's art is what he did for the Grande. No actually, what he was doing later -- for some of the other venues -- that is great work.

Michael Erlewine: You know that Dennis King and Paul Grushkin are making the second edition of "The Art of Rock".

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Eric King: Yeah, I've been told that.

Eric King: I am at your disposal, and I was not aware that you wanted me to write something about collecting of the Grande.

Michael Erlewine: I think it would be a wonderful thing and it would inspire people.

Eric King: I will go with the notion of how I encountered the stuff and how it suddenly jumped for me and said wow!

Michael Erlewine: And talk a bit about what's hard to find and what's easy to find.

Eric King: I am more interested in writing about it as art.

Michael Erlewine: Well do it. I think I have to let people know what collecting is. What are the dreams of the collector? How do they think? What do they do? People want to learn how to collect, catalogue, and do all this stuff. You see, I'm a facilitator, that's how I see my role.

Eric King: Well, you certainly are, and one of the things is that, from what I gather, you are arranging some kind of numbering system.

Michael Erlewine: I think that it will have to be a date; but for shorthand you need something more, 'cause people can't remember dates.

Eric King: I agree with that.

Michael Erlewine: I still am confused about it, but not totally.

Eric King: Use your own judgment.

Michael Erlewine: I am.

Eric King: If anybody knows how to set something like this up, it's you. I trust you. You're going to do a good job.

Michael Erlewine: Oh, I hope I'm going to do a good job. There's going to be a lot of errors in it because there are errors in everything. Data is not cleaned in a linear fashion, starting at "A" and going to "Z." It is cleaned iteratively, a pass at a time, the way you would focus a telescope to bring it into perfect resolution. It will start rough and gradually be refined, as people comment and contribute.

Eric King: Don't worry about it.

Michael Erlewine: In fact I just found some errors in your book.

Eric King: Yeah I was going to say, you found eight pages of errors in my book after somebody else had already gone through it.

Michael Erlewine: I just found one the other day. I think what I am going to do is go through your book one last time and when I do, I'm going to make a new list of things.

Eric King: Please, I'd appreciate it.

Michael Erlewine: I may not get it done, but if I can as I go through it, I will try.

Eric King: Do it if you do it. If you don't, you don't.

Michael Erlewine: Well one of the things I've been working on is breaking out all of the light shows. I think the light show people have really been given a bum deal.

Eric King: I agree.

Michael Erlewine: I'm going to break out the light shows, the promoters, and presenters, you know. Plus each poster, if it has twenty events, I'm breaking them all out with each date, each group

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for each date. Some of them have, as you know, multiple venues.

Eric King: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: So anyway, all that's going to be broken out.

Eric King: I do know that a large number of The Grande Ballroom items simply didn't have the right bills, because they were changed at the last minute.

Michael Erlewine: Oh that's possible.

Eric King: Although I don't know if that's something you ought to be addressing.

Michael Erlewine: Well, I will do my best.

Eric King: This is what the handbill says.

Michael Erlewine: I start out with what's on the handbill.

Eric King: At the entrance to certain parts of the site, you could put a note "there is the other site that deals with this particular situation." Because there are a lot of people who seem to be interested in "who played, where, when." What are the, you know, such and such a group. What's a complete list of everything they played?.

Michael Erlewine: Just like the time I played at the Fillmore West, opened for Cream, I substituted for the Electric Flag -- BG-84.

Eric King: Right.

Michael Erlewine: So, of course, it's important -- to me -- that I was the one who played that night with Cream. I think it was their second date in this country. But for most, this is minutia.

Interview with Frank Kozik

by Michael Erlewine

[Perhaps more than any other younger artist (relatively speaking), Frank Kozik has changed the sheer face of the poster scene, influencing at least one generation of poster artists and probably other generations beyond that.]

Background

Interview done January 30, 2003

Michael Erlewine: And I have some basic questions that I've got to get to build a biography. For example, it would be good know the birth date and year that you were born.

Frank Kozik: January 9th, 1962 in Toledo, Spain. I'm not American.

Michael Erlewine: You're not an American citizen?

Frank Kozik: Oh yeah, I came over here when I was a teen-ager, joined the military, got citizenship all that kind of deal.

Michael Erlewine: What was your given name?

Frank Kozik: Cebrian Sanchez. But my father's name was Kozik. So like when I came over here, he was an American. He met my mom over there; she got pregnant; they got divorced; he split. I was born over there, raised over there, and in my teen years I had a rapprochement with my father and I came over to the states.

And I had dual citizenship, and then I joined the military and got like full U.S. citizenship in 1978 or something.

Michael Erlewine: So you went into our military?

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Frank Kozik: Yeah, I went in the Air Force.

Michael Erlewine: I'd like to know how you got started with art.

Frank Kozik: When I was a kid, I always liked to draw, and I was always the guy who could draw goofy shit or whatever. And then in the 1970s, I grew up with European comics, right?

Michael Erlewine: Which I know very little about.

Frank Kozik: There was a great school of European comic book illustrations. It was very strong in the 1970's, late 1960's and the 1970's. There were some French and Spanish publishing houses that put out, like Heavy Metal Magazine.

Michael Erlewine: Would you name a few artists ?

Frank Kozik: Sure, like Mobius, and Phillippe Druillet and Francisco Ibanez and all these European, sort of like comic-book artists and they would put out these hard-bound comic books. And so I grew up with this really rich culture of illustrative comic art, but more adult themed, you know what I mean?

And I was just really into that and like fantasy art in the 1970s and all that stuff, you know, Roger Dean, and all that kind of shit. I never liked... I was never exposed to the psychedelic-era art. I still don't like it to this day, just sort of a weak Art Nouveau rip-off, if you ask me. So, I kind of grew up as a kid with European comic art. Okay, and I grew up in Spain, and my family was extremely right-winged, so a lot of...sort of like social-realism-propaganda art was very important to me. Then I came over to the states, got turned on to rock

and roll music. So I sort of absorbed that. I found out about punk right at the beginning, like 1979, so early punk stuff had a big sort of impact on me. So my stuff is like a mixture of traditional comic book stuff, political art, and sort of the crude factor of the punk rock thing. I had a good exposure to classical art as a child, but you know.... that's something that I couldn't do...so...

Michael Erlewine: Did you have any formal art training?

Frank Kozik: None whatsoever. And the way it really started was probably around 1979 or 1980, when I started doing mail art. I don't know if you remember that?

Michael Erlewine: Now what is it?

Frank Kozik: I started doing like 'mail art'. It was something kind of like before there were fanzines. I would just correspond via mail with people in various countries and stuff and we'd just do weird shit and send it to each other, it was kind of like a little, sort of... just a weird thing to do.

Years in Austin

Frank Kozik: And then I was stationed in Austin, and I was doing this mail art stuff and some people that I had been corresponding with up in Portland, they moved -- four of them moved -- down to Austin, and they had a sort of art collective called the Artmaggots, right? So we'd hang out and sort of do this like Dada kind of flyers in little magazines and stuff they'd just put around town.

And then, some of the local bands approached us to do like little flyers for their bands. So I did like my first official band flyer in 1981, but it was sort of an outgrowth of this sort of just weird art

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shit that we were doing that was collage stuff. That we just put up for no reason, just to be weird, right?

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Frank Kozik: And then I sort of didn't do very much until the mid-80's, like the occasional thing or whatever. I was just like going to shows and getting high and stuff. And then, I had hooked up with this guy called Brad First, who was the one guy in Austin that consistently tried to have a good venue, right? He had many venues over the years. He had worked at Club Foot. He opened the Cannibal Club.

He opened the Cave Club. All that stuff, so Brad and I were friends and I worked actually at his clubs, like I was a door-man and stuff for a long time.

And he was really into doing posters, so he was a guy that was like "Hey, like let's do a poster with color on it," right? So we would do like a two-color offset at the same time, his one club was kind of successful. He started getting touring bands coming through.

Michael Erlewine: Which club was that?

Frank Kozik: This was the Cave Club. It was a large club. So this is about 1987, 1988. I start doing posters not just for the local acts, but for like Sonic Youth came through and Ministry came through, and the Red Hot Chili Peppers and all those bands were still small then, right?

And so, I started doing these national acts, basically, and that opened opportunities in other cities. And so, there was never a plan. I just started doing it and at the same time, I managed to quit working construction. I

got a job at a local T-shirt place. I started doing production art for this T-shirt guy.

And learned about printing and stuff, just by hands-on. And I worked for him for about a year and then like 1989, I just went to all my clients and said if I quit, will you just pay me direct for your art? And they said, "Yes," so I started making a living. I started making a living in like 1989 by basically taking all this guy's T-shirts clients away from him.

And the posters I was just doing for fun, right? And then one thing led to another, and I started selling stuff through a gallery in Los Angeles and they were like "Hey man, have you ever thought about doing fine art stuff?" And I'm like "no," but I will, so I did a bunch of big fine art pieces and they were sort of spending this fortune getting my stuff printed as silk screen editions.

Michael Erlewine: What was this "L'imagerie"?

Frank Kozik: Yeah.

Frank Kozik: So I sat down. Look, for what we are paying to print an edition, I can buy a silk screen press and I can print my own shit and we'll make all this money.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Frank Kozik: So, they did that. They coughed up like the ten G's, I set up the press. I did up some stuff for myself. I printed some Roth stuff, some Williams stuff. It was pretty boring. And then one day, I was like "Fuck it, I'm going to do a poster on this thing." Right? So I did like the first large-format silkscreen poster, which was a pig-faced poster. It was just like two colors, but people fucking loved it.

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And then after that, like the first 10 or 15, I did them on the sly. Then I started selling those, and you know, just sort of kept growing, and just basically kept getting better equipment. And making larger more elaborate posters. And I was just doing it because it was just a pleasurable thing to do. Right?

And then in the mid-90's it kind of like, I came out here on a whim, kind of deal. I had the first book and I was kind of like, "Fuck maybe I could do this like as a full-time business."

The Beginnings

Michael Erlewine: I'm in the process of interviewing a lot of the Texas guys. And for some of them, the more recent ones, you figured very strongly in their whole development.

Frank Kozik: Right.

Michael Erlewine: I don't have images for a lot of your work.

Frank Kozik: Yeah, I'm not prone to keeping anything, so I have basically nothing. I've got zero, I guess. I just... you know, once I'm done, once I do the stuff, I want to get rid of it, so I don't tend to keep piles of my own stuff. I have little or nothing to help the archivist.

Michael Erlewine: Well, then it just makes my job all the more fun, right? [laughs].

Frank Kozik: [laughs] At one point I was probably doing four or five things a week, and you know, just no way to keep track.

Michael Erlewine: Now are you computer-oriented. Looks to me like your doing them on computer.

Frank Kozik: I always have.

Michael Erlewine: Oh, you always have?

Frank Kozik: Sure, I mean, ever since computers were around. I mean, the majority, anything that has an illustration on it... it's actually a hand-inked illustration, which has been scanned, and so forth.

Michael Erlewine: And you put it in Adobe Illustrator?

Frank Kozik: Yeah, I scan it, put it in Illustrator or Photoshop, whatever works the best. For the silkscreen posters, all of it was cut by hand, of course. These days, like I no longer do music stuff. I'm just like sick of it. I started that label [Man's Ruin] and that was a big five years of craziness, and I put out like 300 records and I just got totally thoroughly disgusted by rock music with that experience.

I shut the label down about two years ago. So now I just maintain my commercial accounts. I'm doing a lot of toy design these days, and I started doing like large-format oil paintings, which are selling quite well. So, basically, I'm never going to do any more music stuff.

Michael Erlewine: Oh, that's too bad for the music poster collectors.

Frank Kozik: Dude, I don't care anymore. I did it for 20 fucking years, man. You get tired. I did like 800 posters, produced 200 full-length record albums, did the art for those, countless other things. I mean, I think....

Michael Erlewine: So there are 800 Kozik posters out there?

Frank Kozik: Oh yeah, easy. Sure. I mean the problem is that, like I say, I never kept track. I mean the stuff that I

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printed myself in my shop, with the exception of one or two pieces, those are all numbered, those all have a KZ number on them, all the silk-screens.

Michael Erlewine: Do you still have a site where a lot of these are available?

Frank Kozik: No, there's a commercial site called fkozik.com, which this guy bought a bunch of inventory over the years. He's peddling the stuff. There's no cohesive...I mean I don't even...I see stuff all the time, like, "Oh yeah, forget I did that one."

Michael Erlewine: Do I have your permission just to try to get thumbnails of some of this, just so I document your work?

Frank Kozik: You do whatever you want man. I mean I have three books out on Amazon.com, and the stuff I really enjoy is in those books.

Volume four is coming out in about a little over a year, so there will be four volumes of the stuff I kind of like, but there's also a lot of stuff not in those books. So my problem is...you know, ever since like 1982, I just banged stuff out. There was one stretch where I was doing like four or five posters a week.

And, the deal is, like I say, none of the offset posters were ever kept track of. In 1991, I kind of...well the stuff in 1991, I didn't put numbers on it. I think probably 1992 was the first year I started putting like "92-whatever." So for about 10 years the silk screens, the majority of the silk screens, there are numbers. Now, how many I did in a given year I have no idea. I mean in some years I would do like 65 or something.

Michael Erlewine: And how did you do the silk screens? Would you cut all of them by hand?

Frank Kozik: Yeah, I had a print shop all those years, so I was going to do the art, print out a positive, do hand separations, you know, throw it on the press.

Michael Erlewine: But you weren't cutting them like in Rubilith?

Frank Kozik: Oh yeah, sure. Of course. Only way to do it. Yeah, see my whole thing was I... is... What you have to understand about my posters is that like what's going on now is just like artist-people doing these artsy posters and doing like these really small runs and trying to somehow become an artist or something.

Like what Jermaine Rgers is doing. I mean, dude, I was doing real rock posters for real promoters and real tours, so it was a commercial enterprise.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Frank Kozik: Which, was based on volume [laughs]. So, like I say, I produced an awful lot of stuff over the years ... countless editions of posters that were paid for by clients that I have no copies of. There's so much crap out there, it's like retarded. And like I said, I just never really had a personal interest in like keeping an archive of the stuff.

Michael Erlewine: But it's just important, for the future, to try to archive it, so that there's some history.

Frank Kozik: Yeah, like I say it's like, you know, have fun [laughs]. But like I say, I literally can't even sit down and tell you how much stuff I've done because I never kept track.

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There's an excess of 800 posters, there's an excess of 300 CD, album and single covers, hundreds of commercials illustrations, maybe 85 different commercial-ad campaigns over the years. I mean...right now there's like 52 toys. I mean I just tend to do a lot of stuff.

Michael Erlewine: Well Jermaine speaks of you like you are the Godfather, right? These guys really look up to, you know that already?

Frank Kozik: Well, that's cool.

Michael Erlewine: And where are you now?

Frank Kozik: San Francisco. Yeah, been out here since 1993. And in the mid-90's the poster thing really peaked and I had a lot of money. So I did the label. I started this record label and the label kind of became important and it made a lot of money, and then it crashed and I lost all the money.

And in the interim I started doing commercial design work, right? And that sort of developed into its career. I've done ad campaigns for everybody, dude, Nike, Gator-Aide, Camel Cigarettes.

I did Slim Jim for three years. So I have this whole other thing where I do, like, you know, large scale. I might do a big job for A. T. & T. You know, all of it, print media, TV commercials, radio stuff. You know, all that kind of like hard-core-like commercial design work.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Frank Kozik: You know, which is basically like anonymous, but it pays lots of money.

Michael Erlewine: I bet it does.

Frank Kozik: And that kind of actually funded the posters and the label the whole time. Do you know what I'm saying?

Michael Erlewine: I do.

Frank Kozik: And in like 1996, I hooked up with a design collective in Japan and so that's been real nice, and I've got a whole deal over there. You know, I have a house, and a studio in Tokyo.

Michael Erlewine: Your kidding.

Frank Kozik: No, I spend a lot of time over there.

Michael Erlewine: So you're doing well then. Lucky for you, because so many of the guys are doing terrible, right?

Frank Kozik: Dude, I've had years where I made like 300 grand, you know. But, I mean, because, dude, I'm not political. I don't have any like... You know, people say I have no ethics. It's just like if someone wants to give me 25 grand to do a TV commercial, I'm going to fucking do it.

You know, because it's like the same job skills apply. But overall dude it's like, how can I put this. I don't think my work is very good, okay? All right?

My work is okay, All right? But, I like to do a lot of work so it became ubiquitous, okay? And I was in the right place at the right time, and because like I don't have any fucking hang-ups, I've gotten a lot of work and a lot of money. So I try to tell people, because kids will always ask me, like how do I do it? And I'm like, look dude, it's like it's a business, right? Your job is to solve a problem. Like my deal with my art is not about art. Or ego.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

I just want to get paid, right? And I want to work everyday

Frank Kozik: I've never had an agent. I've never done promotion. I don't give a fuck. I just want to get paid, right? And I want to work everyday.

So you have to understand that, like my whole thing is completely natural and organic in nature. It was like a hobby that turned into a business, which I enjoy. It doesn't mean anything. There is no message. It's not about me as the artist. You know, I really like doing stuff that works. I love doing commercial products, like I do toy design in Japan. And it's nice because it's like aesthetically pleasing. It's interesting work and children play with the toys, so that's my deal. So, there is a big schism between me and the rest of the crowd.

Michael Erlewine: I'm not aware of that. Tell me about that.

Frank Kozik: Well, well it's a friendly schism. They have a hard time understanding that if you want to be successful as an artist, you better leave the 'artist trip' out of it, because everybody wants to be an artist. No, no. Your job is to be like an effective craftsman or whatever.

Michael Erlewine: Well of course, it's commercial art, right?

Frank Kozik: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: That's what it's called.

Frank Kozik: If you want to do art with a capital 'A', you need to go paint or whatever, which you can do too. Which I do. I paint and people buy the paintings and so it's very nice.

So there's a lot of people that are doing good stuff, but they are destined to failure, for whatever odd reason, and the more liberal they are, the more they box themselves in. They are like "I can only work in this narrow confined area."

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Frank Kozik: And if it's not all handed to me, then I'm going to complain endlessly. Where I'm always trying to get these guys to, you know.

Favorite Poster Artists

Michael Erlewine: Well I hope so, right. That's very far out. Who are some young posters artists that you think have real talent?

Frank Kozik: The Factor 27 team; they are exceptionally gifted designers. There's this guy who calls himself, Scrojo, who's a really gifted illustrator.

There's a group called Nocturnal Showprint that does amazing work. There is some really high caliber work, but the problem is they ghettoize themselves, because we only want to do stuff for these really obscure little bands. Blah, blah, blah...so

Michael Erlewine: But, with many liberal ethics, sometimes it's hard to break through commercially.

Frank Kozik: Well, well, well, we're living in fantasy world. They don't understand that, like, the liberals won.

Michael Erlewine: [laughs].

Frank Kozik: You know, it's all the same anyways. Punk rock won, you can do what ever you want to. Your average television commercial is a lot more creative and liberal than any piece of art in a museum.

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Michael Erlewine: Oh, yeah, totally.

Frank Kozik: They just can't understand, cannot grasp the concept that there is no "us vs. them," it's all "us" now.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Frank Kozik: And I'm trying to get that across.

Michael Erlewine: See I had no idea you had this dimension, right?

Frank Kozik: See, I'm a real person.

Michael Erlewine: Right, I get it.

Frank Kozik: Art is not my life dude. Like I have a real life.

Michael Erlewine: Are you married? do you have kids, or anything?

Frank Kozik: No, no, no, god forbid.

Michael Erlewine: So you work a lot?

Frank Kozik: No, no, no, a normal amount, I guess, I fuck off a lot. I think I have struck a decent balance.

The Bands and Venues

Michael Erlewine: That's cool. Let me ask you a couple other things. Are there any favorite venues over the years that you love to work with?

Frank Kozik: Yeah, Emo's. I mean Emo's was like the perfect rock venue in Austin. It was a large sprawling, comfortable place. They always booked excellent bands. For me Emo's was a perfect place. Emo's, Austin. For ten years it was just a great space, a great ownership, a great booking policy, perfect location. You know, it was for the 90's like a great place for a young person to get turned on to sub-culture.

Michael Erlewine: And what bands did you grow to love...that you loved to do art for?

Frank Kozik: Oh, the ones that I loved. I was very fond of the Butthole Surfers in their heyday. I'd say probably that was my favorite. That was a band that I dearly loved to go see, and when I did their posters, it was very rewarding on a personal level. I'd say of all of the stuff I did, that stuff was really what personally excited me the most because I loved that band.

Michael Erlewine: What about media and size, formats of stuff, what is your favorite. You've said you worked on a bunch of silk screens and...

Frank Kozik: Bigger the better, baby.

Michael Erlewine: Really?

Frank Kozik: Size matters.

Michael Erlewine: Okay, today, your mostly working in Illustrator and?

Frank Kozik: Dude, well I do work in all media currently, hand-done illustrations, computer graphics, traditional, 16th century oil-painting technique.

Michael Erlewine: Really. I'd like to see some of that.

Frank Kozik: Woodwork, metal work, sculpture. I do textile design, clothing design, you know...anything. ...I do 3-D plastic design for toys. You know, like I do all the shit so they can make the machine tools, you know. Just whatever.

Michael Erlewine: What about posters shows of your work, have there been many?

Frank Kozik: I've had over 70 exhibits, worldwide.

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Michael Erlewine: How would we ever document that?

Frank Kozik: I have no idea, dude. I've never kept a list. I've done shows. I've done many, many, many, shows in the United States; I've done many shows in Canada; I've done eight show in Japan; I've done over a dozen shows in Germany, Sweden, United Kingdom, Portugal, Spain, Italy, Serbia. I've done shows... I've had shows where I wasn't even involved, and they've sent me press later, so.

Michael Erlewine: Do you have any people in the poster world that you consider peers, I mean...kind of like...like yourself out there floating?

Frank Kozik: All of them, everybody, anybody who does a rock poster is my peer.

API: American Poster Institute

Frank Kozik: I set up this whole API thing (American Poster Institute). We set up these huge exhibits. It's going to be like really historically important. This thing down in Austin, Flatstock, Hatch Show Print, just signed on board.

I try to give these guys a logistical basis, like look, you don't have to sit here and suffer in obscurity. There is no shame in getting paid or whatever.

Frank Kozik: There's this website, this Gigposter site.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, I know gigposter. Great site.

Frank Kozik: Which is really great.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah.

Frank Kozik: And I've been on there awhile, because it's fun, and everyone's bitching about, "like nobody cares about us." Well, fuck! You got to organize yourself. So I organized a poster convention here about six months ago, which went off very well.

Michael Erlewine: Okay, that was the Flatstock.

Frank Kozik: Right, Number one. And then I went off...

Michael Erlewine: See I thought...I thought Nels Jacobson maybe did that or something....

Frank Kozik: No, no, no, I did that. And then I got hooked up with Nels, because Nels is like this big lawyer...

Michael Erlewine: I know him. Great guy. Uses the name "Jagmo (Nels Jacobson)" on his posters.

Frank Kozik: We set up a non-profit corporation, trademarked "Flatstock," set up a board, right? And now we own it. It's all registered and crap, and we worked a deal with South-by-Southwest for Flatstock II, which is going to be big. Everyone is coming. It's going to be really big.

And we're going to, in the next six months, we're going to set up a big FAQ site for membership, you know just to give some logistical support for the endeavor.

Michael Erlewine: Cool.

Frank Kozik: They are trying to turn these kids on to some money and shit.

Michael Erlewine: Well I think, that's exactly my view, is that these guys need some help, just business wise.

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Frank Kozik: Unfortunately, it's like these modern American children, who don't know how to do anything in the real world. Yeah, you know the deal, it's like, they think that if I'm cool, it will all come to me and it don't work that way.

Michael Erlewine: No.

Frank Kozik: So my new mission is: I'm not doing the posters anymore, but I'm going to try to setup like, hopefully set up some kind of association where these guys can get turned on to facts and figures and connections and hook-ups, and they can start to make some ... It's already starting...

Michael Erlewine: That's kind of you do that, that's really great.

Frank Kozik: I enjoy the stuff, you know, plus I have a point to prove, which is you can make a decent living as a creative person.

Flackstock

Michael Erlewine: The most interesting thing you've told me so far is this thing you're doing with Flatstock.

Frank Kozik: Well, we're setting up a site, I mean, what I want to do is... The common complaint is that people just basically are clueless as to how things really work, so there is the questions that are repeat questions, from all the kids are things like legal stuff, contracts, how to get paid, how to actually deal with a commercial job, printing questions, you know. API. We call it the American Poster Institute. What it's for is, basically, I see it as the beginnings of like a graphic-arts guild, which is specifically focused on people that want to be poster designers.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Frank Kozik: Okay, doesn't matter what else they do, but, to be like an actual, quote, a voting member, you have to consistently produce actual music posters. Okay, that's part of what it is that you do. There was also going to be a category for people who are enthusiasts and they can join, so their \$20 will just help support. So, there's like a yearly fee, a small yearly fee, in order to join.

Michael Erlewine: Is there a web site yet?

Frank Kozik: It's in progress.

Michael Erlewine: Cool.

Frank Kozik: The Flatstock site will turn into the API site. And there's going to be two things that we're going to do. One is we are going to have a web-site that's going to be an information site, and it won't be forums, and the first rule of the board is: no politics or sort of like, nothing, no critical stuff. What were going to do is, I'm going to start amassing information from people, printing techniques, experiences with printers, supplies, equipment -- all that kind of stuff. And there are going to be sections, which are going to be like how to coat a screen, how to build a silkscreen press, how to print, where to get printing supplies, how to cut separations. Blah, blah, blah... Just technical stuff. Then we're going to go through and have contacts for all the poster artists, where they can have their contact information up. Then we're going to have contacts for suppliers, dealers, printers, with ratings. Okay?

People are going to vote and then I'm going to do an average and go okay, this printer received a four-star rating, and shit like that, okay? Then Nels

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Jacobson and I are going to sit down and Nels is actually going to write a set of standardized contracts.

Michael Erlewine: Good idea.

Frank Kozik: Like a bill of sale, work for hire, basic contracts that will be our trademark. And that are free under license to any official artist members. So, they can go to the website, type in their code number, and download a contract which they can use.

Michael Erlewine: That's great.

Frank Kozik: So they don't have to go to a lawyer and so that their actually getting a real contract that will stand up legally, right?

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Frank Kozik: So, like the website is going to be like for that sort of logistical support. In a year you'll be able to go there and get your technical questions answered. Oh fuck, I need a bill of sale contract, and you can go download one that is going to work for you. Then number two is we want to do two of these poster conventions a year, okay?

Michael Erlewine: I think that's great.

Frank Kozik: So, having a corporation, while there is a way to channel the money and pay the bills; it's all tax-free. It gives it like the scent of proprietary for the real world. There is actually an entity that can deal with a venue or a supplier, right?

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Frank Kozik: The events basically are going to pay for themselves. You know the money will go through there, right? All that kind of stuff. The hope is that in a couple of years, okay, we've done a bunch of events.

Michael Erlewine: Yep.

Frank Kozik: It will have gotten press; we have a membership; we have a web site; it's an art situation; we can apply for some funding.

Michael Erlewine: That would be great.

Frank Kozik: From like whomever, the state or the feds or whatever, right?

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Frank Kozik: And if some funding comes in, then that can be used to do things like improve the services or perhaps put out a bi-annual publication, like a workbook/magazine that features our members, which is nice to have, but also going to be sent out to design form as a workbook for this niche in the graphic design field.

Michael Erlewine: I think that's cool.

Frank Kozik: Does that make sense?

Michael Erlewine: It makes perfect sense.

Frank Kozik: That's kind of like the idea behind API, what it does for me, is I don't want to do rock posters anymore. I'm 40 and I'm tired of rock music, but I still like the form. I still want to be involved in the community.

But I don't want to churn out rock posters, so it's my way of coming in and being involved in the community, having some fun, right? Keeping my finger in the pie. And sort of paying back the favor, because I've had a very nice life based on this genre.

Michael Erlewine: That's right.

Frank Kozik: So I feel like I should try to help the new people, because once upon a time people helped me. Does that make sense?

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Michael Erlewine: Of course.

Frank Kozik: That's kind of like the deal.

Michael; That's very cool. Who thought of the name Flatstock?

Frank Kozik: Some guy that is a member on gigposters.com. I think it was some guy in Canada.

Yeah, it's going to take a while. I mean the site is going to be up and running, but it's going to take a while. I said it's going to take a year. I have to question everybody, a lot of people have to submit stuff. It's going to be a long process. You know how it works, I mean, it takes forever, so...

Michael Erlewine: Well, that's very neat. I didn't expect to hear about this, but I'm sure happy that I did. I think that's just what's needed.

Frank Kozik: Yeah, I mean if you could attend the event in Austin, you should come down, because we're going to have over 60 of the current working, you know, really good poster people in a room. And I think, historically, it's important; I don't think it's ever been done before. Flatstock I was a precedent, and this will be even bigger, I mean, Hatch Show Print is going to come. Some real heavy hitters are going to be there.

So I think, for people that are interested in this genre of graphic arts, well, everybody whose currently working, with one or two exceptions, because they are such assholes, are going to be there. But your going to have this broad spectrum of artists in a room showing their wares in a non-commercial environment.

Frank Kozik: You know gigposters is a really great, like that's the living side of it, right? We all get on there and all yammer and a lot of stuff comes up from chaos. Our site is just going to be non-interactive on that level, it's going to be like, a website set up as a sister site to gigposters, where the information is there in permanent FAQs.

Michael Erlewine: And hopefully, classicposters.com will be like your archive site, where you can go, if you want to see a picture of every poster that ever was.

Frank Kozik: Right.

Michael Erlewine: You know, except for all of yours.

Frank Kozik: [laughs].

Frank Kozik: My experience is that I've seen a lot of cats try and fail in the last 15 years, and a lot of them were really good, and the problem is that there is no lack of creative genius.

There are a lot of people who have done really exciting work. But then they end up running up against the wall of reality, right?

Like how it works in the real world, what it actually takes to make something financially viable, and my hope is to be able to steer them in the right direction to where they can actually make enough income to support their ideas.

Michael Erlewine: Well, I think one of the most beautiful ideas you presented was this idea that if they are going to put blinders on, what we'll call liberal arts blinders and whatever... and refuse to consider this and refuse to take part in that...

Frank Kozik: Right.

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Michael Erlewine: Then, there is no one to blame but themselves.

Frank Kozik: A lot of people are really into building these imaginary fences and I try to tell them there is no fence unless you create it.

Michael Erlewine: Also, if you're doing commercial art, your going have to... I think you also said something really nice, which was like you get off on solving a problem or something like that, you said, that you enjoy the challenge of trying to create art for a given something or other, right? I don't know what your words were but...

Frank Kozik: I like art to actually be useful.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, amen.

Frank Kozik: So whether it sells a product or enhances an event, or you know, decorates somebody's wall, it's all the same to me.

Michael Erlewine: But if you could teach them that, then they'd have a much better chance of making money.

Frank Kozik: But the problem is if you've worked with creative types, you'd have to understand. I mean I was lucky. I had a real life, you know... your miserable blue-collar existence before I was rewarded for my creativity. Our society is so wealthy, that, lot of kids now, like maybe your kids, well they've grown up in this sort of paradise of wealth. They've never had to go dig a fucking hole to earn their bread. So they kind of have this skewed view of like what the world owes them for their endeavors.

Michael Erlewine: Yes, that's true.

Frank Kozik: And I try to tell people, that like look: it's like you can't just like draw pretty pictures and expect everybody to kiss your ass. There's got to be a reason why people want to interact with you. You have to put your work in a context. You know what I'm saying... that's how society works...

You know, I'm a very liberal person, but also you have to pay your bills; you have to find a way to do both, and this is what I try to enhance. And I think it actually makes the work better, because it gives the work a focus.

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Interview with Grant Mechinan of S.F. Rock

by Michael Erlewine

[Grant Mechinan has been a mainstay at S.F. Rock Posters in San Francisco for as long as I can remember the scene. Mechinan is one of the great experts in not only Bay Area posters but in Michigan and Midwest posters as well. He was always there and ready to answer questions. Thanks Grant!]

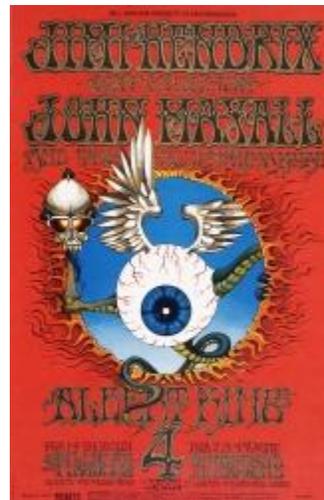
Michael Erlewine: What is your birthdate, with the year?

Grant Mechinan: June 2, 1959, in Mobile Alabama.

Michael Erlewine: How did you get into posters?

Grant Mechinan: I started out in a similar, but different industry of dealing comic books and comic book related material, in the 1970s. As a matter of fact, one of my great stories that I love to tell people is how I first met Rick Griffin, and he really introduced me to the rock and roll art work, because I only knew him from Zap Comix and the underground surf stuff. And he was slightly older than me. This is about 1977, at a big comix convention in San Diego, the biggest one in the world

This older fellow, who had gone to Woodstock and stuff hit me on the shoulder and said "See the guy with the long hair? That's Rick Griffin walking down the isle." And I zoomed over there, chased him down, and shook his hand. "You know, I'm a big fan of yours. What do you have that you could sell me, that you could autograph for me?" And he had a big black portfolio, and he pulled out what later turned out to be the second printing, which is sad for me, the Flying Eyeball poster that he did of the Jimi Hendrix poster, signed it, and gave it to me for \$15. You know that's over \$1000 nowadays for one of those signed by him.



Flying Eyeball by Rick Griffin

And that was really my introduction. I had never really seen any rock and roll poster stuff. Up until then, I was living in San Diego on the beach and...

Michael Erlewine: You hadn't seen the Flying Eyeball before?

Grant Mechinan: Had never seen it, and the artist who drew it handed it to me. It floored me. I still didn't see to much art work. I had that one piece for a long time, and then in the mid-eighties, I

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moved up here and I started seein' it everywhere. I'm going to go check out North Beach, and I drifted into the Poster Mart, the old shop over on Grant street that had stuff for sale. And at the time right when I first moved here, I started working security for Bill Graham, and so I was doing a couple hundred concerts a year, and they were printing posters at the Fillmore and at other venues as well. And so I started grabbin' those and started realizing this whole legacy that was around here. And I was working with a fellow up on Haight Street, selling comic books and ...

Michael Erlewine: Ah, just a side thought: What kind of comic books did you personally really love and collect the most?

Grant Mechinan: Honestly, probably my biggest collection of stuff was, or is like horror and science fiction from the 1950's. I liked the EC Comics a lot.

Michael Erlewine: Oh really. So you know all of those.

Grant Mechinan: A lot of the more obscure publishing companies disappeared really fast. I don't know, I was always drawn to that crazy stuff, the sci-fi and the horror, when I was a kid.

Anyway, the fellow that I was working with sold these rock and roll posters on his wall too, as well as mostly comics, but there was this rock and roll stuff and I just started falling in love with it. And then he started a partnership with Ed Walker.

Grant Mechinan: And we all opened up a store down in the cannery and the third partner was Rick Griffin, and he came in and hung his own art work in

the gallery section of the store. And that was all well and good, until Rick died.

And Griffin left no will, and so the court or whatever came and stripped our walls down, roughly handling the art work, and just throwing it in the back of a car, the framed stuff, just stacking it on top of each other.

Grant Mechinan: And that partnership fell apart, and Ed asked me if I wanted to stick with him and just sell this stuff, and I said "yeah!" And we came and opened this store and we haven't looked back.

Michael Erlewine: I understand according to Ed that you know a lot about a lot stuff, but what is the stuff that you know most? What is the stuff you love most in the whole poster business? What's your favorite stuff?

Grant Mechinan: Oooh... that's too hard to narrow down.

Michael Erlewine: Well, some of it then.

Grant Mechinan: I collect the Detroit area, Grande Ballroom type things are one of my biggest collections. I'm a big fan of the Velvet Underground. Another collection that I am chasing is the whole back end of the Art of Rock -- the punk section. I have almost a hundred of those images, original flyers that I've been collecting and posters.

Michael Erlewine: You mean like the Mabuhay Gardens?

Grant Mechinan: Exactly, exactly all of that and let's see, another thing that I collect is old sixties garage and psychedelic bands from around here such as the Count Five and the Seeds and the Chocolate Watch Band and

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several others of that ilk. And it goes on and on.

Michael Erlewine: And how do you see the poster business going? Are there more people becoming interested in it?

Grant Mechinan: We feel that there are more people coming into it, because our business keeps getting better. We have more people right now that are asking for rare items that we've already found for all our previous customers, and it's like here's a new fellow and he wants this \$3,000 item as soon as we can get it. You know, and there's a really strong market right now. Really strong, which is surprising because of the way most of the economy's happening right now, but if you've got a really good item, it doesn't matter. There's someone out there that wants it.

Michael Erlewine: What about people that are new, that have just come in and, and they don't have \$3,000. They just want to start collecting posters. How do you handle those people? What do you recommend to someone who wants to get in the scene of collecting

Grant Mechinan: One of my favorite rules is collect what appeals to you, collect what you really like. So first things: Do you like certain artists? Do you like a certain band? And go from there, If you're on a tight budget, you can get reproductions of a lot of things, and even some of the reproductions might cost you \$200-\$300, still might be better than paying the \$2000-\$3,000 for the original. For high ticket items, we do lay away. We're perfectly happy to make an inaccessible piece accessible to someone who isn't a doctor, or isn't a lawyer, or an investment banker. Cause we have a lot of lawyers and investment

bankers and doctors and such that have the money to drop on whatever they want.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Grant Mechinan: And we have a lot of working class guys that grew up in this city, grew up in the bay area, and that just fell in love with it as a kid. And now they're doing their regular job, whatever that may be, but they have a family to support, and they have the mortgage to meet and all that.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Grant Mechinan: And this is a luxury and that's something' that can't be forgotten about. You know, it's not bread and it's not milk

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Grant Mechinan: It's not somethin' you need to take home everyday, but, we'd like you to, you know. (laughs)

Michael Erlewine: What about posters as an investment.

Grant Mechinan: There was a long period up until say 1996, 1997 that the prices were kind of holdin' steady.

Then in 1996 -1997, the market really started pickin' up, and more and more people had to find things to do with their money, as well as getting back into some of this stuff that they enjoyed as a youth or what have you.

Michael Erlewine: I understand.

Grant Mechinan: But there's a lot of things. If it's a boring piece to begin, with it sittin' at that \$75 level, and that's as far as it's gonna' go for awhile. If it's a really ugly image, and there's no strong bands on it, or the artist you know.... if it

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doesn't have the three or four things that really make a poster...

Michael Erlewine: Which are what?

Grant Mechinan: Which is the band, the artist, the rarity, you know. If it doesn't have some of those items attached to it... There's thousands of pieces that languish you know in the \$150 or less range, and a lot of them are going to stay that way, because there's just not that much desire for them. But the things that are good, the Jimi Hendrix pieces, the Rolling Stones pieces, the Doors, all those key bands that are still perennial sellers. You go and you look in record shops and CD stores now, and those guys are sellin' more records than they did when they were in a band, you know? It's astounding, and a lot of those people are really fascinated by seeing the images of the actual concerts.

Michael Erlewine: And another question for you: of the artists out there that made these posters, or the venues, however you want to look at it, what are the I don't want to say bargains... what are the under-appreciated artists/venues that are bargains now, in a sense. Do you know what I'm saying, that no one really likes, ones that you think are cool.

Grant Mechinan: There's some decent images in the Matrix club, that's still relatively accessible. There's Pepperland across town, most of the major clubs are well defined, and a lot of people are after it now. Let's see, here, artist-wise you can still get a lot of Lee Conklin art.

For a fair amount, a lot of his posters are still pretty reasonable which I find astounding, because I think he's one of

the strongest, in a pure psychedelic sense, because a lot of the artists back then and I love Stanley Mouse and I love Alton Kelley and I love David Singer and those guys. But a lot of that work is collage work, which has it's own merit. But like Lee Conklin or Rick Griffin, the more the artwork gelled in their brain and poured right out in a pen out of their arm, you know, and that I have a higher appreciation for...

Lee Conklin I think is just amazing for the amount of detailed pen and ink work that he did, where as the next person, looks at is a photograph slapped on with some lettering by someone else.

So, I think Lee Conklin is under appreciated.

Michael Erlewine: Any others you can think of?

Grant Mechinan: Well, a mutual love that you and I have is Gary Grimshaw. I think is he has one of the strongest bodies of work that there is, of any of these artist and to quote I believe Eric King, if he'd lived on the west coast, he would have been part of the Joint Show. He would have been major artist, kickin' everybody's butt out here, you know. He really would have because he has a real strong sense of color.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah. I agree.

Grant Mechinan: He has a really good fine line, and he's a really nice person too.

Michael Erlewine: Just my comments. No one has done more work than Grimshaw, no one has done more physical quantity of work.

Grant Mechinan: There's one guy that come close.

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Michael Erlewine: Who?

Grant Mechinan: Randy Tuten. Randy Tuten started in '68 and is still...Every single decade, he has worked for Bill Graham Presents, he's on his fifth decade now of doing posters, and he's probably done a couple of thousand, whereas Gary's probably done 3000 or 4,000, or somethin', you know?

Michael Erlewine: I interviewed Randy Tuten the other day and Tuten is one of the few artists that is consistently turning out quality work.

We could agree on the numbers, probably, but Grimshaw, because it didn't pay well in the mid-west, he had to do an enormous amount of stuff for the alternative community, just for every kind of little tiny bar. I just photographed a lot of it. It's just an enormous amount of work.

Grant Mechinan: Five jobs for every two that the guys out here had done.

Michael Erlewine: These guys got rewards much faster out here. They were paid better, although still not well. It was a cool scene in the Bay Area.

Grant Mechinan: More clubs.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, I don't think that Gary Grimshaw got that kind of attention. Grimshaw was part of a cause. I was there. He was part of the alternative community, like he was helping the community, helping radio people, and all that stuff, doing every little benefit, every little thing there was a little flyer that needed to be done. You've probably seen a lot of them but I've seen and there's just tons of them, more than I would have ever imagined.

Michael Erlewine: Anyway, we share that love for Grimshaw.

Grant Mechinan: Oh yeah, and I wish he was still really working.

Michael Erlewine: He's not doing a lot?

Grant Mechinan: He's not doing a lot right now.

Grant Mechinan: One of our original things that we started out when we opened the store is that Ed Walker and I collect original things. We don't really like collecting reproductions and reprints. And so, we sell what we collect. And that's one thing that's been a strong selling point for us in that we don't like to collect reprints, so we don't really want to sell reprints.

And that's become a really strong tie for a lot of our customers, because they know when they contact us they're going to get the real deal.

Michael Erlewine: And that's the stuff that appreciates.

Grant Mechinan: yes, and that's the stuff that's always going to appreciate more.

We have so many return customers, and so many people that refuse to buy from anyone else. There was a fellow that came in yesterday from Chicago, that two months ago I sold a BG-1 to for over \$6,000. He bought it sight unseen from me, just letting me describe it to him over the phone. And he was a doctor and he was in town for some huge meeting thing. And he spent over \$4,000 with us yesterday.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Grant Mechinan: It's so simple, to just treat people like human beings, treat them the way that you feel that you should be treated, you know? And they come back in droves. It's shocking. We'

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just treat them like a human being.
That's all we try to do.

We're a little off the beaten' track. We don't we don't have any national advertising or anything. It's mostly been word of mouth and people stumbling on us, when we put up our web site. You know searching up something and your web site came up and so I called your 800 number and now they're hooked with us.

Michael@Erlewine.net

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Interview with Penelope Fried

by Michael Erlewine

[Bob Fried is IMO one of the most important and daring artists of the great San Francisco poster scene. He died so early on that less is known about Fried than most of the other artists. Fried is one of my personal favorites. I had a chance to interview his wife, an artist in her own right in 2001.]

Background and Training

Wednesday May 9th, 2001
San Rafael, Ca

Michael Erlewine: When was Bob born?

Penelope Fried: Okay, he was born in April 7, 1937 in Flatbush, Brooklyn, New York.

Eric King: Well, he and Victor Moscoso...

Michael Erlewine: Is that how they knew each other?

Penelope Fried: They met here, but they had... I think Victor was a little older or ahead of Bob at Cooper Union. Bob went to school in Brooklyn and wanted to go to art school. His father insisted that he go to commercial art school, so he went to New York City College and studied graphics.

Michael Erlewine: What do you call him, Robert or Bob?

Penelope Fried: Bob.

Penelope Fried: So after that, he did work for a while at an agency, but he got a scholarship to go to Cooper Union ...

Michael Erlewine: Can we back up?

Penelope Fried: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: To the best that you know, how did he get into art as a kid?

Penelope Fried: Oh, he was an artist. He took classes at Pratt, you know.

Michael Erlewine: At what age are we talking about?

Penelope Fried: Probably between 11 and 14.

Michael Erlewine: Really.

Penelope Fried: Yeah, Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: So he's always drawn?

Penelope Fried: Always.

Michael Erlewine: Do you know what kind of stuff?

Penelope Fried: Well, figurative a lot of the time, although Bob's father originally was a clockmaker and a horologist, actually.

Michael Erlewine: Really!

Penelope Fried: Which is a person who studies time. And he's written many, many books and dictionaries of time pieces and mechanisms and he created mechanisms. Well, he did all of his own illustrations, but he also taught Bob. One of Bob's jobs in the family was to do these very, very precise illustrations.

[Henry B. Fried, "The Watch Escapement," "Bench Practices for Watch and Clockmakers"]]

Michael Erlewine: Wow.

Penelope Fried: So even as a young person, you know, his father was training his eye.

Michael Erlewine: When you say precise... What would be a picture... of what? An Illustration?

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Penelope Fried: You know the inner workings of ancient... antique clocks ...

Michael Erlewine: Do any of these exist anywhere? Are there any copies of this kind of work?

Penelope Fried: Well, you know what... I think there are, but when Bob's father died, about five years ago, his... Bob's sister dispersed the books and gave them to other members of the family, not to my son. And that was a disappointment, so I think they exist with other Frieds.

Michael Erlewine: I see.

Penelope Fried: Clifford Fried in Florida, I think has some there.

Michael Erlewine: I'd love to get some pictures of that, just to show folks... That's amazing!

Penelope Fried: Yes.

Michael Erlewine: At an early age, he could do technical illustrations?

Penelope Fried: Oh yes! And I mean his father Henry did the first prototype talking clocks and watches for a Swiss company. And he did gyroscopes for missiles and all..

Michael Erlewine: In high school, what was he doing? Was he doing illustrations for his father then?

Penelope Fried: I think he was doing a lot of ... I mean I haven't seen a lot of those works, but he did, how am I going to put this: He liked figurative works. He did a lot of figure work, a lot of portraits.

Eric King: What media was he going to work in?

Penelope Fried: He worked in charcoal and graphite, and he did also...What else? Umm.

Michael Erlewine: Was he involved in school, like high school... A lot of these guys did high school publications, cartoons, etc. It doesn't sound like he was a cartoonist.

Penelope Fried: No, no. He didn't do those. He was more into his personal discovery.

Michael Erlewine: When we were at Victor Moscoso's, we saw one of my favorite Bob Fried pieces, would be one of the ones he did on acetate, the Grateful Dead poster of skeleton on stilts walking across books. I saw it for the first time in person.

Penelope Fried: Oh yeah.

Michael Erlewine: I mean I've seen pictures, but I've never seen the real thing. Really pretty amazing to me, the concept. The concept of time, clocks and so on. Did he ever talk about that? Did he ever have anything to say about that particular poster that you know of?

Penelope Fried: I don't really remember. I remember sort of the time, the era... I mean he's called a visionary artist

Michael Erlewine: He is that.

Penelope Fried: I mean. In his work so, you know when you say 'conceptual', it's ...

Michael Erlewine: Well that he was.

Penelope Fried: Yes, I mean... but that's what he played with.

Michael Erlewine: When I said conceptual, really that's what I'm talking about.

Penelope Fried: Yes.

Michael Erlewine: The reason I liked him so much is because he was

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visionary, and also was a master, to me, of a kind of understatement, you know gestures, like in that Euphoria poster.

Penelope Fried: Yes.

Michael Erlewine: It's one of my very favorites, but it's just... a little understatement.

Penelope Fried: Mmmm

Michael Erlewine: So high school wasn't a big drawing event for him, like for the school paper or any of that stuff.

Penelope Fried: No. I would say he was a little shy, you know. He pushed himself out into, you know, sort of more gregarious situations, although he was a very funny, sort of very humorous person. So in high school, he probably wasn't a great student, but he was really, you know, sort of focused on his own work and discovering what his own work might be.

Michael Erlewine: So even then, you're saying in high school his work was art!

Penelope Fried: Yeah, yeah.

Michael Erlewine: That's something.

Penelope Fried: Always.

Michael Erlewine: What kind of more formal art-school training did he have?

Penelope Fried: Well, as a young person he went Pratt. He had classes or went to classes on the weekends and he continued to do that. He went to New York Community College and studied graphics.

Michael Erlewine: Do you have any idea what years these are?

Penelope Fried: That must have been about between 1957 and 1959 or

something, as far as I know, because I didn't know him then.

Michael Erlewine: Somewhere we need to know how he came from the East coast to the West Coast. When did you know him?

Penelope Fried: I met him, I think, in the last year that he was at Cooper Union. At that time, he also had another scholarship to do printing at Pratt. He did stone litho work at Pratt, in Brooklyn. And at Cooper he did... one of his teachers was Nick Corone. I don't know if you know him?

Michael Erlewine: I don't.

Penelope Fried: It's interesting, because I just read something about him recently, so you know it came back into my mind., Nicholas Corone was a highly regarded teacher at Cooper Union at that time, and he was a figurative draughtsman. And I think it, that's where Bob became very involved in abstract work, very large abstract paintings.

Michael Erlewine: I've seen some of them.

Penelope Fried: Very large.

Michael Erlewine: I should ask you what you mean by very large.

Penelope Fried: Probably 8x10 feet.

Michael Erlewine: Very large!

Penelope Fried: Yeah. These were expressionistic, abstract expression... big.

Michael Erlewine: What ever happened to them, you don't know?

Penelope Fried: You know, I don't, because, we were out of the country for some time. And I think they just got

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dispersed. I don't know where those very early pieces are. I don't know if there's anything at the Brooklyn Museum. Maybe they gave him a show, you know a local show in 1967... 1968 maybe, or 1970. Maybe later. Oh yes, maybe then! But anyway, so he graduated from Cooper Union, I think, if my memory serves, in 1962. And he then got a Fulbright Scholarship to study in Spain.

Michael Erlewine: Really!

Penelope Fried: And he actually had two Fulbrights, one after the other.

Michael Erlewine: That's great!

Penelope Fried: We were there by that time. I met him at an art exhibition in Brooklyn, New York. And that was in 1961.

Michael Erlewine: When did you marry?

Penelope Fried: In 1963, in Queens. His parents had moved to Queens, by then. We were married at their house.

Michael Erlewine: And what did you study? Were you an artist also?

Penelope Fried: Yes. In England, I studied in South Hampton. That's where I had gone to school. However I came to New York as a diversion, I think, not with any intention to stay. And I definitely suffered from culture shock, when I first arrived.

Michael Erlewine: I believe it. (laughs)

Penelope Fried: (laughs) At first I didn't work. I was just going to visit and I really didn't like New York. It was overwhelming. I left and went to Canada, just for a vacation, like six weeks. And then I came back to New

York and it was a more gentle entry. And that's when I started to work.

Michael Erlewine: What medium did you use?

Penelope Fried: I was doing watercolor and tempura at that time, when I was in England and I wasn't working. I wasn't doing artwork. I worked for "American Home Magazine," in the advertising department.

Michael Erlewine: You were doing graphics and stuff?

Penelope Fried: As a gopher, I think. (laughs) Yes! it was a very strange time. The early '60s was an odd time.

Michael Erlewine: I remember that.

Penelope Fried: Do you?

Eric King: I was living in New York at the time.

Penelope Fried: Were you? Right.

Eric King: I was born in New York City.

Michael Erlewine: Well, Eric and I are the same age. We are just going to be sixty.

Penelope Fried: Oh yes, well I'm the same. (laughs)

Michael Erlewine: How old are you? When's your birthday?

Penelope Fried: Mine's March 17, 1942, so next March I'll be sixty.

Article: Interview with Penelope Fried

Two Years in Spain by Michael Erlewine

by Michael Erlewine

Penelope Fried: Yeah, so Bob actually went to Spain to I mean, the premise...

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Michael Erlewine: You were with him right?

Penelope Fried: Yes, we married in January and we left in March, I think it was.

Michael Erlewine: What was that like? What was happening in Spain for him?

Penelope Fried: Well, he wanted a Fulbright, and you know everyone wants to go to Italy. If you paint, you go to Italy. Well, it seemed to him that it wouldn't be wise to have that kind of competition. And then everybody that went to Spain wanted to study Goya! And as much as he loved Goya, he decided that Zurbaran was less recognized. And so, he got his scholarship based on his desire to ...

Michael Erlewine: Well, what did he actually do there?

Penelope Fried: Painted!

Michael Erlewine: What kind of things?

Penelope Fried: Big paintings and these two little oils. [she points to the wall]

Michael Erlewine: The ones on the left?

Penelope Fried: Yes, he did those.

Michael Erlewine: Wow! That's incredible.

Penelope Fried: So, we had a very large, very large, flat right in the middle of Madrid.

Michael Erlewine: Hmm! Sounds like fun!

Penelope Fried: Oh it was wonderful, really wonderful.

Michael Erlewine: Spain is also great.

Penelope Fried: Oh, Spain is wonderful! Spain is very deep and very mysterious and I felt very, very comfortable. For a southern climate country, it's very northern, in my experience.

Michael Erlewine: So you both enjoyed it?

Penelope Fried: Yeah, very much It was a phenomenal time. And so he painted and did a lot of work, and you know, I didn't tell you, also, before we went to Spain, he taught at the Provincetown Workshop. Victor Candell was one of the founders, and I'll remember his name, the other painter. Anyway, it's been in existence for quite a long time. So in the time frame that I knew Bob before we went to Spain, we spent summers in Provincetown. He worked there and he worked with Robert Motherwell. He was Motherwell's assistant. And I modeled for Helen. (laughs).

Michael: And then he did a lot of painting there. Did he bring those back? What happened to them?

Penelope Fried: Yes! on the top of the Chevy. Tied on. (Laughs) Yeah, he was tremendously prolific.

Michael Erlewine: Really.

Penelope Fried: He was, all the time.

East Coast to West Coast

Michael Erlewine: So then... how did you get to the West Coast?

Penelope Fried: When we came back from Spain, we were in New York for a year, in 1965, and Bob had applied to different schools, to Yale and UCLA and I think the San Francisco Art Institute. And he decided at that time, that he

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didn't want to go to Yale, because it was on the East Coast. He had some idea he wanted to go to the West Coast. And UCLA didn't accept him. And he wrote a very stinking letter to the chancellor (and I can't remember his name) at that time, and the chancellor was stressed that Bob hadn't been accepted and offered him a place at UCLA in the art department to get his masters. And I think by the time that letter came, he'd also been accepted to the art institute here, and so we came to San Francisco. And we drove across country.

Michael Erlewine: Was that fun?

Penelope Fried: Yes! It was a good thing to do. It was boring, I thought. I didn't much care for it. Our first child was born in Spain.

Michael Erlewine: Oh, so you had a kid.

Penelope Fried: Yes.

Michael Erlewine: Did you take the northern route?

Penelope Fried: No, we came sort of through the middle, and it was very uneventful, I think until Colorado.

Michael Erlewine: Well, that's about right.

Penelope Fried: And then it seemed to be exotic to me.

Michael Erlewine: Well, I think that's true for all of us. Those are the plains, right? After that, you get excited by the mountains. Right?

Penelope Fried: Is that right, Yes! The West was something I had never encountered.

Michael Erlewine: You hit the Rockies and it gets interesting.

Penelope Fried: Yes, very wonderful. And we spent time in Colorado, in Aspen, which was a little nothing town at that time.

Eric King: Yeah. That is not what it is now.

Penelope Fried: No, and then we dropped down and came through New Mexico. And Zephania, I guess, was, well a year and a half at that time.

Michael Erlewine: How my children do you have total?

Penelope Fried: We had two. I have three, but Zephania was the first one.

Michael Erlewine: And then you had a son?

Penelope Fried: And yes Arniel, and he was born in San Francisco in 1968.

Michael Erlewine: And your daughter was born?

Penelope Fried: In 1965. She was born before we left, by a couple of months.

Michael Erlewine: So, so you ended up in San Francisco. That must have been kind of a neat place to be.

Penelope Fried: Yes, it was. It was. I mean, you know, it was also a struggle, so it was sort of tempered, you know, interesting and neat.

Michael Erlewine: What is hard to make money then ...

Penelope Fried: Yes, and to be in a new place and find your way and, you know, have all of those little challenges, all immediately. And then for Bob to be involved in going to school, as well.

Michael Erlewine: What did he work on?

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Penelope Fried: At that time, well I guess he was painting! And that's also when he first started to do silk screens, again. He'd done litho before, years ago, but he started to do silk screens and do hand cuts.

Michael Erlewine: But not posters?

Penelope Fried: He did start to do posters then. I think it was that first year he did graphics. You know he did free lance work.

Michael Erlewine: This was like in 1967 or something?

Penelope Fried: We came here in 1966, maybe sixty-seven. We came back, maybe early 1967.

Michael Erlewine: He started doing posters?

Penelope Fried: That's when we came here, so as he looked for work. He did graphics advertising free-lance work, and then he started to do posters. And I think that the first posters he did were for the theatre, and then he did, I guess, Family Dog posters, maybe first.

Michael Erlewine: And Eric, you probably know...

Eric King: Yeah, I believe that the first thing he did was some early... some of them just around the middle of the Family Dog,

Penelope Fried: Family Dog, yeah.

Eric King: He came and started working.

Penelope Fried: Yeah. It was in the first year that we were here.

Michael Erlewine: Did he enjoy that? What did he think of it?

Penelope Fried: Oh yes! He really enjoyed that. He liked that. He really enjoyed knowing the musicians and I mean it was, it was a full experience for him, I think.

Michael Erlewine: Were you in that too. Did you meet them?

Penelope Fried: A little bit. Yeah, I did. I met, you know, lots of ... whoever was coming through. (laughs)

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Penelope Fried: And at that time, I was making clothing, I made garments

Michael Erlewine: Really!

Penelope Fried: And I was involved with a fellow, an English fellow, named Rose. I can't remember the first name. My memory is horrible. His last name was Rose and he opened the first boutique on Polk Street, It was called 'Orbit'.

Michael Erlewine: Well, what type of clothing?

Penelope Fried: Very, trendy, cool clothing.

Michael Erlewine: Hippie clothing?

Penelope Fried: Yeah, but more sophisticated hippie clothing.

Michael Erlewine: Ok.

Penelope Fried: I made lots of, lots of things for Janis Joplin.

Michael Erlewine: Really!

Penelope Fried: Lot's. Really simple, not, not very intricate pieces.

Eric King: Did you make any of her stage clothing?

Penelope Fried: No, these were all very simple, shifts of different fabrics. But she

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liked that place and she used to like to hang out there. So the more posters Bob did, the less other advertising work he did.

Michael Erlewine: But he still kept on painting.

Penelope Fried: Oh yeah.

Michael Erlewine: So, the painting was the # 1 thing for him?

Penelope Fried: At that time, yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Even through the poster thing.

Penelope Fried: Yes, although he really liked doing the posters, because I think he had that, you know, he'd had all of that training in graphics.

Michael Erlewine: I guess so!

Penelope Fried: And then also the fine arts, so it was really an opportunity for him to bring it all together.

Joining the West-Coast Scene

Michael Erlewine: And how did he meet the other artists there?

Penelope Fried: I think he met Victor first of all, you know because Victor was already working and had been here. I don't know how long he had been here, but it was before Bob got here. And then also Alton Kelley. I think Kelley had been to Cooper Union. So I don't think he met Kelley until later. So it was Victor Moscoso and Rick Griffin, that I think he met first of all.

Michael Erlewine: Were there anyone among them that he thought was especially. Who did he admire?

Penelope Fried: Yeah, it was Victor. Yeah, he really liked Victor.

Michael Erlewine: As a person? Or as an artist?

Penelope Fried: As an artist. He had great respect for him as an artist. He thought he was a little off hand as a person.

Michael Erlewine: Victor is emerging as a really important person.

Penelope Fried: Is he? Yeah. That's that.

Michael Erlewine: But I also feel that Bob Fried was not recognized enough.

Penelope Fried: Not enough, but I think Bob was known more in the fine art world.

Michael Erlewine: But is that persisting at all?

Penelope: I don't think it has. I mean I think it has amongst people who had seen his shows in the past, and...

Michael Erlewine: And how would someone like myself ever see any of this stuff?

Penelope Fried: Well! I don't know!

Michael Erlewine: You have any pictures of it?

Penelope Fried: Yes, I have pictures, and, as I say, I think the Brooklyn Museum has pieces. I think there is a foundation that has prints, and the Santa Clara University has actually a lot of paintings, quite a number. Yeah, so while he was doing posters, he was also studying at the art institute, and then graduating and having his masters, and then he was teaching printmaking there.

Michael Erlewine: Did he enjoy school?

Penelope Fried: I don't think he did.

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Michael Erlewine: But he did go through it.

Penelope Fried: Oh yeah.,

Michael Erlewine: And completed his masters and ..

Penelope Fried: Yeah, yeah. Well he had to really complete a body of work, which you know he had always done. I don't think that he had as much regard for his teachers there as he did for his teachers in New York.

Eric King: Oh!

Michael Erlewine: Did he consider any of the poster artists, able to instruct him in anything?

Penelope Fried: I think he really admired Victor Moscoso and I think he might... they were very different people, but he liked Rick Griffin?

Michael: And they knew each other? They were friends?

Penelope Fried: Yes, and at that time, Rick had little children as well, so you know, there was a bit of more backwards and forwards. So that was, you know, socially at least... that was something.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Penelope Fried: But Bob would be the kind of person who would really go into his studio and be absorbed, and Rick could sit at the kitchen table with everything going on around. You know, so their personalities were really different.

Michael Erlewine: You mean Rick didn't care where he was.

Penelope Fried: No, I mean Rick stayed in one place, basically, the

kitchen table. (laughs) Yes, he's an old surfer kid.

Eric King: Yeah. There's all these images of surfing, and when he got into fundamentalist Christianity, he had Jesus surfing.

Penelope Fried: (laughs)

Eric King: You know it's a logical explanation. So did, you actually knew all these people as well!

Penelope Fried: Yeah, yeah... I knew Victor Moscoso and Gail, and Rick Griffin and Ida, and Wes Wilson and Eva, who were also very good friends of ours, very good friends. You know, they had children also, so when the move to Marin County, from San Francisco, I guess, around the very beginning of 1970 and they were already living in Lagunitas.

Eric King: Yeah, Everbody had moved out of the city.

Penelope Fried: Yes, yes.

Michael Erlewine: Was bob interested in Wes' art?

Penelope Fried: Not very much.

Michael Erlewine: But they were friends, good friends.

Penelope Fried: I think yeah! Definitely friends, and Eva and I were very close.

Michel: What about Stanley Mouse?

Penelope Fried: Not very much. No.

Michael Erlewine: Kelley?

Penelope Fried: On and off. I mean we knew them, but, but we weren't close. And Kelley used to be, almost our next-door neighbor in Fairfax, for quite some time, with Cathleen.

What Was He Like

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Michael Erlewine: What can you tell me about... One of the things that attracts me to Bob's art is and I'm gonna' stumble around a little bit to find a good word... Let me see if I can put in a way to you. Again, I say things like understatement, a feeling of lightness, just like the name of that Youngbloods poster at Euphoria, there's just, a very lightness, almost like a kindness, that is kind of like a philosophy to me of some kind.

Penelope Fried: Mmm mmm.

Michael Erlewine: I'm curious what were his philosophical interests?

Penelope Fried: He was a pretty political character too.

Michael Erlewine: He was?

Penelope Fried: Oh yes. Bob was very involved in the students strike when the, 30 students were killed at Penn. State. He did a lot of posters

Michael Erlewine: Oh really! God I'd love to see some.

Penelope Fried: Yeah, I have fliers.

Penelope Fried: A lot of his work, I mean this water color here...

Michael Erlewine: Is this one of his?

Penelope Fried: Yes, on this wall here. This one... was Cambodia.

Eric King: That's marvelous!

Penelope Fried: Even in New York, he went to activist parades.

Michael Erlewine: Did he know anything about Eastern philosophy. What were his philosophical interests?

Penelope Fried: This umm piece was pretty prophetic. I mean, I think, because it is a commentary on Israel.

Michael: Hmmm, I would love to sometime get a picture of this or something,

Penelope Fried: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Some of this stuff we need to document somehow.

Penelope Fried: Well I'll bring this and you can look at this. It's very hard to see. I've got a light table. I can get that out, but you could just... Maybe, when we finish doing this, we could come out and do this as well.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, let's talk first and .. So he's very political?

Penelope Fried: Yes, he was.

Michael Erlewine: What kind of philosophy?

Penelope Fried: He didn't study Zen and he didn't meditate. He worked a lot. He read all about things. He liked Gustave Corbet for his philosophical and political action. A lot of his prints came from Corbet's action. He like peyote, so he had his own peyote experience and ritual. Yes, so, I think through those experiences, there was a lot of opening and he became very compassionate. I mean he was very compassionate.

Eric King: One of the of my own experience with acid... In his posters, these symmetry of line and these little rows of dots. These are things that I saw, and other people I know saw, when they were taking acid.

Penelope Fried: Mmm Hmm

Eric King: I've wondered about this for some time. This is a common experience that he put down. He must have also seen these ordered lines and 'twink', they would... you couldn't

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capture it in art but they would 'twinkle' when you saw them, and I had the feeling that that was some of his experience. Is that correct?

Penelope Fried: Yeah, oh yeah.

Eric King: That's really clear to somebody who did acid,

Penelope Fried: Yeah

Eric King: That this is Acid. This is acid drawing.

Penelope Fried: It's, yes and you know in that sense it's very cosmic and very connected to ...

Eric King: Web to work with time and space, that was what he was trying to deal with. Yeah.

Penelope Fried: ... to the sort of human subconscious.

Eric King: In that space and time. Yeah ok, that's something that I've been curious about for a long time.

Penelope Fried: Yes.

Eric King: Because it most closely parallels my own experience of how you would see things, when you're under the influence of acid. That's, that's interesting.

Michael Erlewine: So you did, I mean all of us did acid. He did a lot of acid? A little? I just wonder..

Penelope Fried: Well.

Michael Erlewine: For many years? A few years?

Penelope Fried: I would say a few years. When we lived in Spain, you could buy Sandos LSD at the pharmacy. We were there from 1963 to 1965.

Michael Erlewine: Oh really!

Penelope Fried: And it was perfectly legal and actually it was sold as a headache remedy.

Michael Erlewine: Woah! That could cure a lot of things.

Penelope Fried: (laughs)

Michael Erlewine: Clear your head! (laughs)

Eric King: (laughs) Oh my god!

Penelope Fried: So, that was so, if you took more than one pill. If you ganged up and you know took another pill, you've got the 300 or 600 milligrams.

Eric King: Sandos was in Switzerland?

Penelope Fried: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Did he treat acid experience like... He did it often? Or was it once and then he'd wait awhile?

Penelope Fried: He didn't do it often. He did it significantly. Yeah, so it wasn't like a recreational thing. Yes, it wasn't a hip thing, at all. It was really a discovery, I think.

Eric King: He was, and I would I ask this question. He was older than the hippies in the same way that we were older than the hippies. He wasn't 15 years old. He was a mature adult with an established identity. So he was gonna' have different experiences of acid.

Roots in the Beat Movement

Penelope Fried: Right.

Michael Erlewine: Did you have any connection or roots into the beat movement?

Penelope Fried: Oh yes, he's considered a Beat artist.

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Penelope Fried: Yes, Robert Johnson? Did you know him? Robert Emery Johnson, who is the artist who made this piece.

Michael Erlewine: Which piece are you talking about?

Penelope Fried: This large piece here. He wrote a small book about Beat artists. He'd written something about maybe the writers, but he included Bob.

Michael Erlewine: Even though he's really too young to really be in the beat movement.

Penelope Fried: Right, but, but you know he was sort of in that crossover. He was in that bridge.

Michael Erlewine: I came to Venice California in 1960 and then to San Francisco and even then, I was trying to reach back into the beat movement, but it was already really too late.

Penelope Fried: Yes.

Michael Erlewine: It was already dying out...the end of a culture.

Penelope Fried: Yes, but you see in Provincetown also, a lot of those people were bi-coastal and Eric Somebody or other, I don't know, he was always in Provincetown. There was a big mix and then Malo (SP?) was in Provincetown and, although he wasn't really a beat person by any means, there was this sort of entourage. We used to stay at Millbrook with Timothy Leary and Ram Das, who was still Richard Alpert at that time.

And it was a very... it was a mixed community, and in New York at that time, when things were beginning to happen in San Francisco, the hippie movement was really growing in a

different way. You know, it was very intriguing and I think also the fact that we met people who had come from San Francisco might also have been part of his leaning, to accept the San Francisco Art Institute over UCLA.

Michael Erlewine: So he read the beat poets and was he very literate?

Penelope Fried: Yes, he interviewed Allen Ginsberg on WBAI once, as well, when the first rulings came down from the district attorney when LSD was made illegal.

Eric King: Ohhhh! And he interviewed Allen Ginsburg about that.

Penelope Fried: Yeah. A profound, of course, individual, Bob said he came... he came to the studio with a pile of law books with papers stuck in...

Eric King: He was serious.

Michael Erlewine: And so Bob read literature, in general, also at this time. Was he reading European literature like Thomas Mann or...

Penelope Fried: When he was younger, not when we were here. No, not so much.

Michael Erlewine: So here, he didn't read a lot, he painted a lot.

Penelope Fried: He painted a lot. He drew a lot.

Religious Background

Michael Erlewine: What about music? What kind of music did he like?

Penelope Fried: In the early days, he liked jazz and he liked rhythm and blues and rock and roll.

Eric King: Did he go to many of the concerts?

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Penelope Fried: Oh yeah,

Eric King: Yes.

Penelope Fried: Oh yes, quite a lot.

Eric King: Yes, because the artists could get in

Penelope Fried: Yes, especially if he'd done the poster thing. He'd get in. Yeah.

Eric King: Kelley told me that he lived at the places, because he could get in.

Penelope Fried: Yes, he could go in, go backstage, hang out, and all that.

Michael Erlewine: Did he like classical music, do you know that at all?

Penelope Fried: Sometimes. Yes. His father wrote in musical magazines about Mozart.

Eric King: Cool.

Penelope Fried: So, yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Sounds like he had quite a father.

Penelope Fried: All of those Frieds were amazing. And the father's generation. They were, you know, Jewish-Russian Immigrants.

Michael Erlewine: Was he a strict Jew?

Penelope Fried: No, they were conservative.

Michael Erlewine: Did he follow it much?

Penelope Fried: No, it was steeped in him. He'd grown up in a big Jewish family in Brooklyn. He spent Christmas' with his Italian neighbors...

Michael: Did he observe Passover or anything?

Penelope Fried: We had a Jewish wedding and I went to the mikveh,

before the wedding, so it was, you know, very proper.

Eric King: Oh definitely.

Penelope Fried: It wasn't until we moved to Marin County, and our children, he thought that the children should have some kind of interaction, so they used to, on occasion you know, go to temple. He also, you know, used that opportunity to show his work and sell his work and I guess he did a poster for one of the anniversaries of Israel.

More About Posters

Michael Erlewine: So I'm just trying to trace... In the poster part, we're at the beginning of it. How long did it... he didn't do a huge amount.

Penelope Fried: No, he did some posters and he did some record jackets, LP jackets.

Eric King: He started out... the first one that I know that he did is one that, he must have been close to Rick Griffin, because it's that triptych, the Charlatans one...

Penelope Fried: Yeah, he did one of them.

Eric King: The first two were done by Rick Griffin and then Rick said to him "Oh, would you finish this for me"

Penelope Fried: (laughs) Right.

Eric King: Rick must have felt positively about him, if he gave him part of the commission, because they finished the thing.

Penelope Fried: yeah

Eric King: And from there, he started to get into them.

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Penelope Fried: So, was that one of the first he did?

Eric King: That's the first one he did.

Penelope Fried: Oh! It is! Oh, so then it was Rick I thought it was Victor who gave him the poster.

Eric King: No, it was Rick that gave him the thing. Rick gave him part of the commission. And he finished it

Penelope Fried: Yes, I remember that.

Eric King: And then, that must have been his entry, I assume.

Penelope Fried: Yes. Well he also did a poster for... Do you remember the play, I think it was 'Billy the Kid', and ...

Eric King: Oh! That's right! He did do the... I had forgotten that!

Penelope Fried: Was with Jean Harlow?

Penelope Fried: Jean Harlow and 'Billy the Kid', was that Michael McCure?

Eric King: Michael McCure's play.

Eric King: I know that poster. I'd forgotten. That is also one of his earliest posters.

Penelope Fried: Yes, he did that. He did one of the early posters for a health food store.

Eric King: It was like, the first couple... he was just feeling his was around. And then when he did the one, I guess it's the Indian, with the violin in front of the Taj Mahal, he hit what he wanted to do,

Penelope Fried: That's right.

Eric King: He was influenced by the others, but then he made it his own. That's the first one.

Penelope Fried: Yes, and it was quite different from the art of the others.

Eric King: Yeah, it was different from all of the others.

Penelope Fried: So, stark almost. Yeah.

Eric King: Yeah.

Eric King: Did he ever say anything to you about his own style, and the way he suddenly had his own voice in this?

Penelope Fried: I think having his own voice was always important to him. Never would he have copied Wes Wilson, for instance. You know there, there may have been things about other peoples work that he liked and would filter in, in some way. Apart from having to be interesting and eye catching, he wanted people to get it. He wanted the impact.

Eric King: Yeah.

Penelope Fried: You know, and I think a lot of people, not a lot, but some people were more interested in, you know, sort of describing whatever their acid experience was in a meandering ... and he would not. He didn't meander.

Michael Erlewine: That's very well put.

Eric King: It's very clear, when you look at these different artists posters, when you look at this poster, they jump right out at you and say this is Bob Fried. Once he did one poster that he finished off the design that had been started by Rick Griffin, the others, when he started doing them, they were very personal. They were very much his own.

Penelope Fried: Yeah, right, yeah there was one, I can't remember which one it was maybe. I like the Indian dancer with

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the red eyes, and I also like the one with the cat in the background.

Eric King: Yes! Yeah.

Penelope Fried: The one with southern Indian dancer. It's just his head, and it's red and green, and his eyes are red. And then instead of a headdress, I think it's got hands.

Michael Erlewine: What did he like best, if you know?

Penelope Fried: I think it was the experience of doing them he really liked. It was just different, you know. He was always mentally restless, so he would like what he was working on, most of the time. Sometimes not. But then, once it was done, he would move on to another piece. And yet he did a lot of, you know, this little drawing is a very playful little piece, or, you know, Tina Turner. Am I being clear enough for you?

Michael Erlewine: Yeah. I guess I really love that Euphoria poster. Is there anything more to know about that, other than just a vision experience? I just found the handbill for that too.

Penelope Fried: Well, you know, I think that was also a change, a changing time.

Michael Erlewine: Hmm.

Penelope Fried: Because he was probably coming to the end of working at the art institute, you know, studying. He was doing record jackets and posters for other things, and he was doing work for the San Francisco Art Institute and their catalogs.

Michael Erlewine: Mmm hmm.

Eric King: He had his own company for awhile that was called "Food"?

Penelope Fried: That's right. He had Food, and before Food, he had the Singing LSD Mothers Society.

Eric King: Oh I didn't know that.

Penelope Fried: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: And what was done in that?

Penelope Fried: (laughs) I don't know. I can't remember, but a lot of his posters that were not dance posters or the rock posters, were the Singing Mothers. And I think it came from... he saw a postcard from the Salt Lake Tabernacle Choir.

Penelope Fried: I think it was the Salt Lake Singing Mothers, and so he took that.

Eric King: Ohhh!

Penelope Fried: Yeah (laughs)

Eric King: What an inspiration.

Penelope Fried: So that was first, and then it was the, the "Food."

Michael Erlewine: Have you collected his posters and stuff?

Penelope Fried: I have actually, and unfortunately they've been stolen.

Michael Erlewine: Oh no!

Penelope Fried: I had them in storage, and very clearly marked as to what they were and ...

Michael Erlewine: Ohh, so sad.

Eric King: One of the things I had wanted to tell you, is that on the off-chance you had any posters that he had signed, that you should be aware that these are very valuable, because there just aren't anymore.

Penelope Fried: Yeah. I have some.

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Eric King: I had wanted to caution you about that.

Penelope Fried: I have some, but I had lots. I had everything that he had done, because, I mean I had specifically packaged them for Armeil and Zephania, because I mean obviously this is the way they have of knowing their father. And, and my son is a pilot and he goes to places and he sees the posters. And, he's just amazed at the attention they get. Bob's posters get attention, wherever they are!

Eric King: With what's emerging now, there's going to be more, and that was why I wanted to make this point to you, that you be very careful not to sell any of these things without it being for a lot of money, because his signature is simply unavailable, and there are collectors who want signed posters.

Penelope Fried: Yeah.

Eric King: And in the same way that Rick Griffin is not around to sign anything anymore, Bob isn't, and you should be aware, that a poster that might be you know \$100 might be 5 or 6, 7 times that.

Penelope Fried: Mmm Hmm.

Eric King: ...because of the signature. Be very wary of parting with any of these things. I wanted you to be aware of that.

Eric King: This is what I'm doing. I do something different than Michael does. I'm an archivist, and I wrote a collector's guide to the material, and I'm a consultant to people who either collect it or have worked for some of the artists and made money for them. I've brought them clients who, you know, bought things. And what I've been described as

is sort of a cop, to make sure that, you know, people don't do bad things. There have been forgeries, there have been, you know.... I have all this information about how to tell these thing apart, in the guide, but there are people, small numbers. Most of the people who are involved in this are either old hippies who follow the old hippie ethics, about being righteous, but there are this small number of people, who have tried to do things that are, you know, improper or corrupt, and cheap. And there are people... I have no idea what your circumstances might be, but if you happen to go to the wrong person, to sell anything, they would tell you "Oh, this poster is worth \$65, when the thing might be worth 10x that, because it was signed.

Fried's Sudden Death

Michael Erlewine: So we were talking about posters and he didn't do that many posters. I'm just curious how we got out of the period during which he did some. What was the next? What year did he die?

Penelope Fried: He died in January, of 1975.

Michael Erlewine: And how did that happen?

Penelope Fried: He a cerebral aneurysm.

Michael Erlewine: Really.

Penelope Fried: He was in the process of opening a printing studio in San Francisco. And he designed and created a vacuum table that he used at the studio, that he built at our home in Fairfax. And was refining that and I guess it was the beginning of the more automatic... So he was going to print his

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work and other work, very similar to what others are doing now. One day, he left to go to the studio, and in the early afternoon he got sick and his apprentice brought him home and everyone thought he had food poisoning, and he just deteriorated. He, you know, slowly... he was in a lot of pain.

Michael Erlewine: And this was very suddenly.

Penelope Fried: Yeah and he was dead within 24 hours. So it was very, very shocking. And he died the night or the day of his opening at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. The museum had given him and a number of other artists, Gage Taylor, Richard Lowenberg, and someone else, who's name I can't remember. They gave him a grant to travel to Baha and produce works based on that experience. And Bob created sculptures and dry points. These are a couple of the dry points.

So they did that. That road trip and camping trip. My whale bone under here, he found on the beach and carried back. And he did a lot of watercolors based on that trip. So that was his part of that show. So at the opening, they announced that he had just died, and it was most dramatic, awful, awful, awful time. And he was 37 when he died.

Eric King: God

Penelope Fried: And he had done a lifetime of work. I mean he was very productive. Yes, and he had lots and lots of notebooks. Lot's of sketches and drawings and poetry and those, those were collected by the Smithsonian. However, I discovered recently that they haven't arrived and I know where they are. There's a person who's a friend of Bob's, who wanted, I think... he's a

photographer. He wanted to document some of the things, but they are still in his possession. And it was my belief because Robert Johnson had created this, that they had gone back to Robert and back to the Smithsonian. So that's something also that's just hanging out there.

Michael Erlewine: Right. So I'm getting the idea of a large body of work.

Penelope Fried: Well it's a diverse body of work, you know, because it was...there were posters, but there were drawings and watercolors and prints.

Michael Erlewine: What's being done? Is anyone gathering this material?

Penelope Fried: Well, I have most of the material, apart from, as I say, paintings that are the Santa Clara, in the Saisset Museum at Santa Clara, and whatever is at the Brooklyn.

Michael Erlewine: And what is in this volume there?

Penelope Fried: This is actually a catalog of works.

Michael Erlewine: Oh, it's all slides. Yeah.

Penelope Fried: Of different a pieces. In fact, this is what I wanted Richard to bring back, so that you could look at them. So Richard is going to reproduce some of these things in book form or portfolio.

Michael Erlewine: Are these the only copies of the slides?

Penelope Fried: Yes.

Penelope Fried: I painted garments, I was always painting, but I did art and the pieces I did were all hand painted.

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And it was my painting imagery, which is of dream imagery. I painted on garments. I did some costumes for the Marin Ballet and for a little theatre company.

So that's how I, began to make my living, which was just really different than my painting. I finished the degree that I had never finished.

I also with, a tiny bit of the money that came from the benefit concert, I bought a little cottage in Fairfax, and then I sold that so, so I had income, that I continued to use.

And then I developed a decorative painting business and I painted residences and commercial buildings, hotels, murals, buildingsyou know furniture --- like those things.

The Sheets of Postage Stamps

Penelope Fried: Well, people really respond to the work. And then you know when Bob had his show... I think one of his first shows had a suite of prints and it had a Native American sort of drawing, with his arm as the map of California, and it's all squeezed off in the middle and, you know, columns tumbling down, all of those are his statements of what was happening politically at the time. You know and then he made those into stamps also. Are you familiar with the stamps?

Eric King: Yeah, I saw them at a show.

Penelope Fried: That caused an enormous flap with the FBI.

Michael Erlewine: Really!

Penelope Fried: And in fact there's a person in the East Bay, who was in court because he did a stamp that he

used as a stamp. Do you remember that guy?

Eric King: Oh, well that's a different thing. I don't know that case, but the thing is, that's different.

Penelope Fried: Yeah.

Eric King: But to make something that looks like a stamp, that's not forgery.

Penelope Fried: No, this was perforated and then sold in sheets.

Eric King: Yeah, I saw them. They were wonderful.

Penelope Fried: Yes. Well kids at the university put their drop cards in the frames of the... which is incredible, I mean it was so moving.

Michael Erlewine: Hmmm

Penelope Fried: They really resonated.

Missing Family Dog Otis Redding Poster

Eric King: Well, Bob did preparation and art work for an Otis Redding concert that was cancelled.

Penelope Fried: The one where he died

Eric King: Yes

Eric King: There has been considerable talk over the years that it's one of the most brilliant designs.

Penelope Fried: mmm hmm

Michael Erlewine: Just, do you have it?

Penelope Fried: Mmm, I think so. Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Have I ever seen it?

Eric King: No, there's nothing.

Penelope Fried: No, it wasn't printed.

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Penelope Fried: No, it's in storage, the artwork, the original art work for it, Yeah.

Eric King: The one thing exists. All the people who collect... there's this gap, you know... There's the FD-15, then there's FD-18. Everybody wants to know....

Michael Erlewine: Now is this something, Did Chet Helms have something to say about that?

Eric King: Yes, but Chet's interested. I've talked to Chet about this.

Michael Erlewine: Ok

Penelope Fried: Mmm

Eric King: That's before I brought this up to you, because it would have his logo on it.

Penelope Fried: Right.

Eric King: He's interested in this. The thing is collectors are interested in what goes in this gap? This artwork goes in the gap.

Penelope Fried: Right.

Eric King: If that was printed, particularly a good quality silk screen, there are a lot of people who would buy that because it's like, the missing link.

Penelope Fried: Yeah, I probably have it. (laughs)

Eric King: And what's more, it's brilliant.

Michael Erlewine: Have you seen it?

Eric King: Yes!

Michael Erlewine: Ok.

Eric King: Oh I saw this, 25 years, 30 years ago. And it was just never produced because the concert was cancelled. What is that!

Penelope Fried: (laughs) Yeah right!

Eric King: It is. It's brilliant, it's two peacocks.

Penelope Fried: Yeah

Eric King: And there is interest in this design.

Penelope Fried: I always wonder if there are sketches for it in here.

Eric King: I didn't see them, I would recognize it. This has been in my mind, and as I say, actually when I knew I was gonna... I raised this with Chet, and he said " Oh yes, this is something that." The main thing is that I know that there are people who would buy it.

Penelope Fried: Hmmm

Eric King: That's the thing that you... You don't want to open up and spend a lot of money preparing something...

Michael Erlewine: You could also one-off it and print on demand.

Penelope Fried: That's right. Which seems to be a good way to do it.

Michael Erlewine: And that's what's what Stanley's doing with printing his own work.

Penelope Fried: Yeah, so if things are on the internet and people say "oooh I want this..."

Eric King: What Victor Moscoso has done, and I've discussed this with him before, he did it. Limited additions that are numbered.

Penelope Fried: Mm Hmm

Eric King: That once the number are sold and that's it, they're gone. What's more, you sell the first one's by subscription, to pay for the thing, and then as you run down on them, you continually raise the price.

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Penelope Fried: MMmm hmm

Eric King: So that the last few are bringing in a large amount of money.

Penelope Fried: Right,

Eric King: And Victor has done. I mean, I went over this with Victor on one of the things that he did, and it's worked very well for him.

Penelope Fried: Well good!

Eric King: All I can tell you is there is interest, enough interest, that this image specifically will, is worth doing.

Penelope Fried: Wow, that'd be really good.

Eric King: So just, be, be aware of that.

Penelope Fried: Yeah

Interview with Phil Cushway by Michael Erlewine

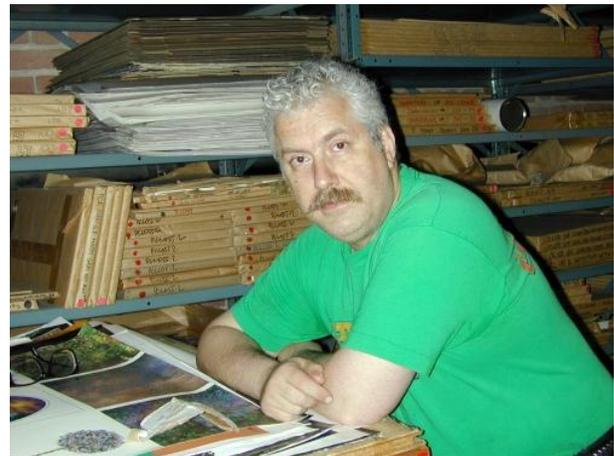
[Phil Cushway is a legend among poster collectors, not only in the Midwest where he started out, but in San Francisco as well. Few know posters and have had their hands on more of the rare one than Cushway. His store "ArtRock" is famous all over the world. Cushway was also kind enough to make many of his rarest posters available for photographing.]

Getting Into Posters

Michael Erlewine: Okay, let's just get the basic information that I get from everyone. I need your date of birth and a year.

Phil Cushway: February 18, 1952.

Michael Erlewine: And your given name.



Phil Cushway

Phil Cushway: Phillip Dion Cushway. Place of birth is Pasadena, California.

Michael Erlewine: All right, the main thing we want to know is how in the world did you get into posters on this scale? How did that all come about? Just take your time, because that will be what interests people a lot and then we will talk about the business of it.

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Phil Cushway: Okay, how I got into posters. I had bought a church in downtown Detroit to turn into a nightclub.

Michael Erlewine: What church was it?

Phil Cushway: I don't remember.

Michael Erlewine: Where was it?

Phil Cushway: Right on the other side of the Chrysler from the Fox Theater. I can't remember all of these roads, because I don't drive them anymore. You know how, when you move, you can't remember streets from the last place very well until you are back there. Okay, and I was looking for things for the walls, and I came across the idea of posters.

Michael Erlewine: What year was this?

Phil Cushway: Around 1985. Then I had bought a magazine, a "Relix Magazine." and it had an interview or something with this book that was going to be coming out called "The Art of Rock" by Paul Grushkin. That got me interested and I flew out to . . . and this is all a little bit hazy, as to what sequence this was . . . but I flew out to San Francisco where my sister lived, and Gruskin introduced me to Ben Friedman and John Burns at Haight Street Graphics and other people like that, and I started buying posters. Either after this or right before this, I can't quite remember the sequence, I wrote a letter to "Siouxsie and the Banshees," a hand-written letter, asking if I could do some posters, because what I wanted to do was create new posters, you know, for the new bands. This was during a period of time when there weren't any posters being created. They responded to my hand-written letter and I had comps

done by Stanley Mouse, Victor Moscoso, and Rick Griffin actually.

Michael Erlewine: Wow, I would like to see some of those.

Phil Cushway: Oh, the Rick Griffin one was fantastic, well, Griffin and Randy Tuten.

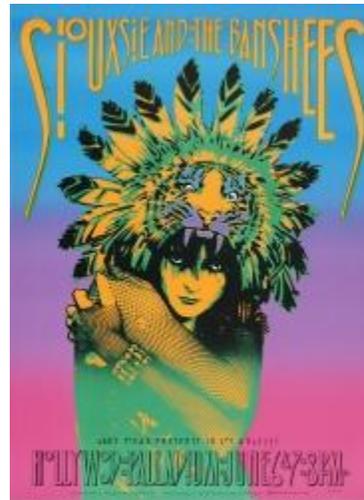
Michael Erlewine: Do you have a picture of it anywhere?

Phil Cushway: No, but I have the original art.

Michael Erlewine: Oh, maybe we can get a picture of it. I think that would be wonderful for people to see.

Phil Cushway: Yeah, it is a picture of Siouxsie and it is fantastic. I'm rather glad it was never published, because that way I have the only one.

Michael Erlewine: How about the Victor Moscoso? I would like to see that.



Siouxsie and the Banshees

Phil Cushway: Victor, yeah, that was PCL #1, the one with the headdress. And, working with Siouxsie, she probably had the best natural eye of any performing artist I would ever work with. Stanley Mouse's was based on a

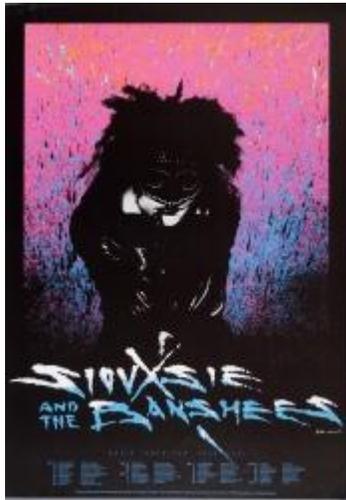
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photograph and I found photographs when I went over to England. Victor did a very unusual one; this was obviously, you know, a very, very punk band. This was less than ten years after punk was born. Victor came up with a fantastic design. It was an Indian Headdress. It was 60's but also very, very 80's and very, very punk.

Michael Erlewine: Right, it is a beautiful piece.

Phil Cushway: Yeah, and then, Stanley did a piece that doesn't photograph well. It doesn't show well, but it is actually fantastic in real life.

Michael Erlewine: Yes, I'm looking at it. I will show them a picture of this.



Siouxsie and the Banshees

Phil Cushway: Okay, the lettering was done with a magic marker and paper toweling. I think it was a suggestion of a teenager at the time and they blew it up on an overhead projector and traced it. That is how he got the lettering. The background he got with his airbrush by holding up a paintbrush dipped in paint, and then had the airbrush blow over it, creating this splatter effect that he has in the background. When you look at it, it

is a very, very different style from the smooth languid lines of his earlier work. It was very punk and very, very different.

Michael Erlewine: Yes, it is not recognizable as Stanley Mouse, right off.

Phil Cushway: No, but it is absolutely fantastic.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, it is a beautiful poster.

Phil Cushway: Okay, so then I started publishing more posters.

Michael Erlewine: Where was this at? Where were you located?

Phil Cushway: I was in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Michael Erlewine: So, you were in Ann Arbor. Where in Ann Arbor?

Phil Cushway: Okay, I had gone to school in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Michael Erlewine: Studied what?

Phil Cushway: The Classics.

Michael Erlewine: Just literature.

Phil Cushway: No, like Classical Greek.

Michael Erlewine: Really?

Phil Cushway: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: So, you learned to read Greek?

Phil Cushway: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Wow, Latin too?

Phil Cushway: No, I never got started on the Latin, but I started on the Greek and I was going to be a Classics Professor.

Michael Erlewine: Wow, I don't think anyone knows that.

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Phil Cushway: That is what I wanted to be. I like language. I like etymology a great deal.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, me too for that matter. I've got all kinds of books on etymology.

Phil Cushway: Really?

Michael Erlewine: I have a lot them. I like word roots. I have the complete Oxford Dictionary, the whole thing.

Phil Cushway: Really, that is a good dictionary; it gives all of the correct roots.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Phil Cushway: Yes, Oxford is usually very, very good. Okay, so anyway, where were we?

Michael Erlewine: We were talking about being in Ann Arbor somewhere.

Phil Cushway: I started off at my kitchen table and started publishing posters and I published the posters at Tea Lautrec, which was the original printer for many of the Fillmore Posters, and I was also buying posters from Ben Friedman and everything. I would have boxes of them.

Michael Erlewine: You were still in Ann Arbor?

Phil Cushway: I was still in Ann Arbor. I flew out to San Francisco. I bought posters, brought them back, and then I boxed them underneath my bed and pretty soon that was what my passion became.

Michael Erlewine: Where did you get money for this? You just had some money?

Phil Cushway: Well, it wasn't a lot of money for this back then. It just wasn't a

lot of money. Back then, buying posters from Ben Friedman, they were like five and ten dollars, with very few over ten dollars. I would buy posters and then I just fell in love with the posters. They have a strong aesthetic quality. They are tactile. They are beautiful. There is a utilitarian purpose to them, so they are not just a pretty picture. They tied it in with music. I like music. They tied it obviously with art and I liked art. So, I rented an unheated basement in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Michael Erlewine: Where?

Phil Cushway: 225 East Liberty, below Afternoon Delights and Muffin Shop.

Michael Erlewine: Oh, exactly, I know where that is.

Phil Cushway: I started buying posters, and it just became a passion and then, because I was in Ann Arbor, I couldn't have good distribution there, because I didn't have a large enough base to really sell a lot of posters. I started thinking about putting out a catalog. Then, I started putting out catalogs. Then I got a toll-free number and then I started taking credit cards. I liked putting out the catalogs.

Michael Erlewine: And, you were still making posters?

Phil Cushway: Yeah, I was still making posters. I did an R.E.M. poster. I had to fly down to Athens, Georgia and everything. I remember when I started my line, I had one Siouxsie poster, and I had to call stores all over the country, asking them to carry my poster line with one poster. It was a lesson in rejection. Anyway, so then I became more and more interested, and I would be buying posters from Ben Friedman and then re-

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selling them through the catalog or however I could, and I tried to develop a mailing list and everything like that. Then my desire was to become the biggest and best in this field, and I guess it gave me direction, because I had a lot of drive at that time. So, I knew the only way to do that was to move out to San Francisco.



R.E.M.

Michael Erlewine: What year was this?

Phil Cushway: We planned the move and the actual date was around February 1, 1989. By that time, you know, Gary Grimshaw had joined my staff as my art director and did a lot of really great work.

Michael Erlewine: And this was in Ann Arbor?

Phil Cushway: Yes, this was in Ann Arbor. He is probably the most underrated artist in the 1960's in my opinion. He is equal to the big five in San Francisco are Victor Moscoso, Rick Griffin, Wes Wilson, Stanley Mouse, and Alton Kelley.

Michael Erlewine: What about Randy Tuten? I think he is as underestimated as Grimshaw.

Phil Cushway: No, I think that Gary is more greater. Gary is a very, very fine artist.

Michael Erlewine: Oh, I know, but so is Randy Tuten and Tuten is the most consistent artist and, along with Grimshaw, the most prolific..

Phil Cushway: Okay, so anyway, by that time I had already bought out John Burns, who had, I don't know, around 50,000 posters or something. He had a lot of stuff. I started buying up any printer I could, just any stashes I could. Before I left Michigan, I bought out every Michigan piece I possibly could and at a time when no one really sought them out, and certainly no one would pay the kind of what everyone thought to be crazy money that I was paying.

Michael Erlewine: Wow, that is interesting. And this was what year again?

Phil Cushway: 1988. So then, we moved out to California February 1, 1989, and it just happened at that time that I think it was a place called "Image Conscious," I think was the name of the company. They moved out and we moved in, so we were right above Tea Lautrec. I used to love to run down and look at the printing press go, particularly with my posters, and ask them millions of questions, which they were kind enough to answer. Two original printers. I can only remember Joe Buckwald, Marty Balin's father, came in and the other guy has passed away now of a heart condition. I can picture him, but I can't remember his name anymore. Even Levan Moscofian came by. You

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know, when Rick Griffin came by, and all of the artists came by. They were still doing posters there, and Rick Griffin worked on a couple posters downstairs on the light table; things like that. So, my focus then was to buy out Ben Freidman and that took quite a while, but I bought him out in May 1990.

Michael Erlewine: And what kind of quantity are we talking about?

Phil Cushway: He had, God, 700,000 or 800,000 plus pieces of inventory. Because what he had done was, I believe it was the spring of 1969... He had a choice of buying a building that he was in at the corner of Grant and Columbus, but he liked posters a lot and so Ben, in a period of six weeks, bought the poster store in Berkley, which I guess went under, bought out Chet Helms, who had tax problems. This is all based on what Ben told me. Friedman gave him \$10,000 and then Bill Graham \$10,000, because Bill was moving his warehouse. So, Ben had bought out those three large stashes at that time, and Ben was a rather eccentric man, who sold his posters one at a time out of the store. He never built a traditional distribution system. And my desire on all of this was to acquire as much as possible and you know, consolidate it. If you will notice, in all of my catalogs, starting from the beginning, we always listen to graphic artists and not just like putting Led Zeppelin, etc. We would put down the graphic artists, because I felt this stuff was art, American folk art, and at that time, was tremendously under valued. Because I look at a poster, not from the point of view of a collector wanting this particular item for their collection, but from the point of view that it is art. It is beautiful. It captures a time

and it represents a time. It reflects the music, and I compared it to and always thought of the Belle Epoque posters of the turn of the century France, where you had people like Toulouse Lautrec, Jules Cheret, and on and on. They did posters for things like women's corsets, chocolate, cigarette papers, but yet those posters have come to be recognized, you know, as highly collectible, absolutely as art in a different concept. And that is how I felt about the 1960's posters.

Michael Erlewine: So, you bought out Ben Freidman. You had a little place above Tea Lautrec Printing.

Phil Cushway: Do you want me to go on?

Michael Erlewine: Well, yeah. I think it is an interesting story.

Phil Cushway: Okay, so I bought out Ben Freidman, I bought out John Burns, I bought out any printers I could and any stashes I could. I bought out any artists I could.

Michael Erlewine: What does that mean? Who are some artists you bought out?

Phil Cushway: Well, like Gary Grimshaw. I bought out everything he had. You know, I bought out everything I could from Stanley Mouse and from any of the others that I possibly could. I usually tried to buy out everything that they had. And, you know, at that time it wasn't worth that much, but I believed in it. I believed in the art. I was willing to stake my future on my feelings and passion for the arts. I just felt this is really, really great stuff. I did a lot of direct mail, which I felt was a very effective means at that time.

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Michael Erlewine: And it worked?

Phil Cushway: Yes. The catalogs we did were not traditional catalogs, like with a white background and with products on the page and a kind of staid look. I went for much more color, for much more of a variety, putting in little tidbits, trying to make them, you know, trying to create a more whole piece of cloth with the posters involved. I continued publishing. I was an exclusive publisher for Frank Kozik for 1992, 1993, and 1994. I published Coop and Piz. I like publishing, I like paper, and I like printing. They were my passions as well and plus I liked to create a process of publishing, buying some of the posters I liked, but I liked the creation of them as well. I've printed silk screens, lithos, letterpress, and any method of printing, I've done. I also like having done a wide variety of bands, like we've done a lot of punk bands like the Damned, Siouxsie, and also James Brown. Then traditional bands like The Doors and The Grateful Dead, a lot of different kinds of styles of art that marry to the music in different ways.

Michael Erlewine: So you have a real series here?

Phil Cushway: Oh yeah. A wide collection of bands. And one of the reasons I liked that was because, when you think about rock-n-roll, one of things I always thought about was the sheer variety and diversity of what rock-n-roll is, from James Brown to Nine Inch Nails, Jimi Hendrix, Beatles, to Beastie Boys and you think about just the sheer unbelievable diversity of the number of bands that have come and gone, the number of bands that have come and stayed. It is truly astounding and it is astounding under the single umbrella of

rock-n-roll and the art that has come forth is very diverse as well, reflecting a lot of different periods and a lot of different mediums. I've enjoyed the entire process.

Michael Erlewine: That's cool. That is really good. Just as a sidebar, can you supply at a given time a set for me to photograph the covers of all of the catalogs?

Phil Cushway: Oh yeah. There are only two of them that are really rare. I never even thought of that, yeah.

Michael Erlewine: I mean, I can send them back to you. I just think that they are a thing in themselves, in the history of posters.

Phil Cushway: Yeah, a lot of people collect them.

Michael Erlewine: I don't need to collect them, but I do want to document them.

Phil Cushway: The first one was black and white

Michael Erlewine: But that you did it in a different style. I think that is something that we could have a little bit of a sidebar on somewhere.

ArtRock Locations

Michael Erlewine: Okay, how about the history of the places you have been in? Let's just run through some of those and the space and how you store stuff. What are the most posters you ever had, you think at a time?

Phil Cushway: In Ann Arbor, Michigan, we had 900 square feet that served as offices, shipping area, storage, and gallery. The next place we moved to was above Tea Lautrec Printing. I think that was 5,000 square feet. We had a lot

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of posters there, and I kept on buying posters, and then from there we moved to 1153 Mission Street, which was 8,000 square feet, and I don't know about storing posters. It eventually got to the point where I had to have a pallet jack and now at the point where I have a hi-lo. I have pallet racking. I put a lot of the posters on pallets and then put them on there with a pallet jack.

Michael Erlewine: How much space do you have now and where are you located?

Phil Cushway: Oh God, I have over a million pieces of inventory and I'm at 893 Folson Street right now, in a 5,000 square foot beautifully natural sunlight place. I also made a point of always having a gallery, because I feel the stuff should always be presented in gallery format, because it is art and it needs to be presented as art.



ArtRock Gallery

Michael Erlewine: Now, how do you present it? Do you frame them all?

Phil Cushway: I used to frame everything and now we are trying different methods, but yeah, everything is framed and we are having rotating shows. Different shows like the "Art of the Dead" that is toured all over the

U.S., including the Rock-N-Roll Hall of Fame. I have had shows on blotter acid art. I've had a Stanley Mouse show, a Alton Kelley Show, and numerous others.

Michael Erlewine: What shows are coming up?

Phil Cushway: The shows that are coming up are going to be a Blotter acid show and a show on Gary Grimshaw.

Michael Erlewine: When is the Gary Grimshaw show?

Phil Cushway: I don't know, I've been so busy with everything else; the move has taken a lot out of us.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, Gary is busy too, as you probably know.

Phil Cushway: No.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, he is pretty much jammed. He is doing a bunch of stuff for Levi's.

Phil Cushway: Oh really. I'm happy for him.

Michael Erlewine: Something like that. He has a new place, with overhead light and great big workspace and he seems very happy.

Phil Cushway: Yeah, his wife is very, very good at decorating spaces actually.

Michael Erlewine: And taking care of him.

Phil Cushway: Yeah, she really has a touch for design.

Michael Erlewine: Let's ask you this? Where are you going from here? What do you see in the future of posters? Let's talk about that for a second. What are your plans other than, of course, you are going to continue.

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Phil Cushway: I can't say.

Michael Erlewine: Oh, you can't talk about it?

Phil Cushway: No.

Michael Erlewine: Okay.

Phil Cushway: You will understand when I tell you why. I'm sorry.

WORKING WITH THE ARTISTS

Michael Erlewine: Okay, well, you covered a lot of it without my even having to ask questions. Let's talk about your work with artists. You talked about Frank Kozik a little bit, but you didn't mention Mark Arminski, which I know you want to.

Phil Cushway: Okay, working with artists. I grew a passion for the new artists and it is hard to break an artist, and by that I mean having an artist be collectible and everything. And what I found through a period of time is, I think, I helped break Frank Kozik and Mark Arminski, Alan Forbes, and others. The catalog was very instrumental in that and a large mailing list. Promoting the art would be paying for the publishing, shows, and everything else. Also like getting the posters, so that they have real value. In my opinion, I think that the artists have to have a poster go for \$250 or more before they are really considered collectible and actually most posters start at \$15 to \$20. Now, that being said, one of my personal favorite posters is actually an 11 x 17 black and white flyer for Ramone and the Runaways. I love the flyer because the image on it is a quintessential image of rock-n-roll.



Armadillo Poster by Cliff Carter

Michael Erlewine: Is this one you published?

Phil Cushway: No, but the thing I think I like so much about it is that it is only worth about \$15. The reason why I say that is, although I have been consciously and deliberately trying to raise prices up so that the posters would be more respected, which when the collectors who already have the posters are happy to see it go up in value. Collectors that don't have the poster get angry because they haven't bought it yet.

Michael Erlewine: Who did the art and what date?

Phil Cushway: I have no idea.

Michael Erlewine: What does it look like again?

Phil Cushway: A woman grabbing her crotch. It is an Armadillo poster.

Michael Erlewine: Oh, an Armadillo; I must have that. Oh yeah. I have it. I'm looking at an image of it. The Ramone and the Runaways, February 17th.

Phil Cushway: It is one of my favorite images, because it seems to grab the

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essence of rock-n-roll and it has no value. I love that about that, because I have been responsible for trying to get prices up on rock-n-roll posters.

Michael Erlewine: How do you do that, because the business aspects are something I'm really going to concentrate on this site, trying to help people invest in this material.

The Business of Posters

Phil Cushway: Actually, you are asking two different questions there, but what I did was try to consolidate all of the inventory, so it was controlled product and therefore a control of the price. It was one thing in the beginning, as there was no real control of pricing. You have to have a steady market and a steadily rising market in order to make things collectible. When people buy something as a collectible, they want to see it go up in value.

Michael Erlewine: Right.



ArtRock Archives

Phil Cushway: That is a process and an art of itself. So, let me go back to my story about the cheap poster. One reason I like it is because it is cheap, because I like people to like things in art

that they like in and of themselves, and not because they are worth \$250 or \$1000. I think part of it is it gets me back to the roots and the beginning of it, that you loved it because you loved it because of the art and not because it was worth a million dollars. I've always tried to do that. A lot of my art right now, some of it is not worth anything and I like that. Some of it is quite valuable and I like that as well.

Michael Erlewine: Right, that is cool.

Phil Cushway: Okay, collecting posters. When I got into this, I thought I was too late. I remember moping around, saying I was five years too late. I was five years too late. I don't know if you ever think of it like that, because you are where you are where you are and this is kind of the way it is. But I think there are a lot of opportunities for collecting now of undervalued things. I think that a lot of the Frank Kozik stuff between 1992, 1993, and 1994 (his best years) are going to increase in value. I think Mark Arminski's classic designs are going to stand the test of time. I think that Alan Forbes is doing a lot of really great work. I mean, you look at his work. A lot is done in ink and brush, which is you know: no computers. His black line work, I never thought I would ever say this, is as good or better than Rick Griffins I think, and over time, are becoming collectibles because some of these posters have reached \$250 to \$300 in value and will increase more.

What's Happening Now

Phil Cushway: On the new sense of where we are at is that there has been a shift. The shift has been, previously everything was venue driven. The Fillmore Auditorium, The Avalon

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Ballroom. The Grande Ballroom - particularly, if they were numbers. People would want to get numbered sets.

But now, it is different. Kozik did a lot of far reaching things and one of them was that he broke with doing a silk screen. The silk screen is a cost effective method of printing low runs of say 500 or less, and he did silk screens as did Andy Warhol, for example. But again, taking more of an art field, it is limiting the quality done and it also shifted things in terms of the artist. The other thing that has happened is that the licensing issues and rules governing name and likeness have changed, strengthened, and altered considerably particularly here in California, where you have Hollywood, so that the necessary approval process for many bands is arduous and difficult. And I'm not trying to stay this in a negative way, but most performing artists with the exception of like, Siouxsie and a few others, do not have a strong sense of graphics. They may have a strong sense of graphics, but it is not like a Stanley Mouse or Rick Griffin, that's what they do.

Because of this approval process, it has made it more difficult to put out posters, because of name and likeness rights. How are bands to relate to individual artists, rather than a business or series, because they are relating to someone like Mark Arminski, who has, you know, never made a million dollars. Sometimes, if they have a personal relationship with the artists or personal relationships with the artists who have a venue, where they can circumvent the approval process. Also, like when talking directly to an artist, it is an art piece. There is less commercialism. The

bands realize there is not going to be a large volume done and an artist can spend more time in the approval process than can a larger business that is publishing a lot more items.

Michael Erlewine: Now are we talking about tribute pieces at this point?

Phil Cushway: No. We are talking about like a poster for "Queens of the Stone Age" and Alan Forbes knows the band members of "Queens of the Stone Age." So if he is going to do an album cover or something for them, he can get the approvals he needs a lot easier direct through the band, and so there has been a shift from venue-driven numbered series to the artist and that is again bringing it back to the artist. A lot of artists like Arminski and Kozik, they all use their own numbering systems. It is an artist numbering system and that is the fundamental shifts that have occurred over the last 10+ years.

Michael Erlewine: What about the tribute pieces? You produce a lot of tribute pieces.

Phil Cushway: They are called "Phantom Posters."

Michael Erlewine: Is that what they are called?

Phil Cushway: Yeah, that is what "Paul Grushkin" told me they are called. Like for example, I wanted to do a Beatles poster but hey, the Beatles were disbanded.

Michael Erlewine: Did you have to get permission for this?

Phil Cushway: Absolutely, they have to be approved by the members of the Beatles.

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Michael Erlewine: Do they get money from it as well?

Phil Cushway: Oh yes, you pay a royalty.

Michael Erlewine: Can you give us an idea?

Phil Cushway: I can't repeat that.

Michael Erlewine: Generic, maybe not just you but anyone. There must be some number.

Phil Cushway: They can be anywhere from 10 to 25%. 10 to 15% is difficult.

Michael Erlewine: Okay, that is what we needed to get, so people can start learning about this. Okay, so the tribute pieces and how have they sold?

Phil Cushway: Spectacularly. And one of the things that surprised me was like one of the posters I did was the Sunflower Poster PCL 068. It was a poster with art work done by Michael Everett. This was 1995.



Grateful Dead Sunflower Poster

Michael Erlewine: The Grateful Dead one?

Phil Cushway: Yeah, so we did a turtle poster and we also did the sunflower.

The sunflower poster, I published 10,000 of them. That is a lot of posters.

Michael Erlewine: It is.

Phil Cushway: Yeah, that is a lot of posters. I sold almost all 10,000. Despite the fact that I sold that many of them, those posters are worth \$150.00 to \$200.00 a piece.

Michael Erlewine: Wow, no kidding. What have you been publishing lately?

Phil Cushway: We are publishing one for Stanley Mouse and it is a poster for the Signe Anderson benefit we are having this Saturday.

Michael Erlewine: Oh, I saw the picture. That is beautiful. I want to get one of those.

Phil Cushway: You already saw the image?

Michael Erlewine: The image was online. Someone sent it around. Maybe it was the temporary image for all I know.

Phil Cushway: Isn't it great?

Michael Erlewine: It is beautiful.

Phil Cushway: It is going to be tricky to print.

Phil Cushway: And one for Mark Arminski for Cynthia Plaster Caster, and I still do stuff, but not on a consistent basis. I don't know how soon I'm going to be doing it consistently. I will take it as it comes.



Cynthia Plaster Caster

Michael Erlewine: Right, so you have done a stint of that.

Phil Cushway: Yes, and I do love publishing. I love it. It is just a lot of difficulty, because of the approval processes.

Michael Erlewine: And that is getting the bands more involved than ever right? What about something at the Fillmore? How does that work?

Phil Cushway: Well those they don't have approved, but they don't sell them.

Michael Erlewine: Oh, they just give them out.

Phil Cushway: Yes, see when the bands don't approve them, you end up with a lot better art.

Michael Erlewine: You don't carry the New Fillmore series. Right?

Phil Cushway: There are some good pieces in there. I'm more excited by like the Delanorock, Lindsey Kuhn, who actually worked for me a long time ago. His work has improved tremendously. He does really good stuff. Factor 27 is quite good and then there are people like Mike King out of Seattle. There are

as good artists now as there was then, period. People say oh, waah, waah, the old days, bullshit. A lot of stuff today is as good or better than it was then.

Michael Erlewine: Gary Houston (Voodoo Catbox is good too. Yeah, so you are providing a lot of information. I'm trying to think of what my question is. You have given me a lot to go with and I think it is important. Let's talk about the trend in terms of these things, the collectibles. Is it going up? Is it holding steady?

Phil Cushway: Posters have always gone up in value.

Michael Erlewine: Let's talk about that for a minute.

Phil Cushway: I think it is because they have a lot of real intrinsic value. They are an American folk art form. They are true American folk art. The artwork stands in and of itself, regardless of the music. Some posters for example like FD-85, which is for Vanilla Fudge, and it features a photo of Wyatt Earp's wife. That poster sells extraordinarily well, despite the fact that no one buys it because of Vanilla Fudge.

The other thing that is happening more and more is I think that the art is standing for more and more than the bands on the art. Obviously the Grateful Dead will always be a classic piece. However, there are other posters that are going to come up because the people love the art on them. I think that is another shift that is happening right now. Posters have always held their value and always risen steadily in value. It is a true collectible and it is only really being collected in the United States and to a much lesser extent, Germany, Japan, and England. As the entire world

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economy is always constantly improve in bits and starts, they will be collected all over.

Michael Erlewine: What about Japan? Are they interested in posters?

Phil Cushway: Yes, they are interested in posters, but right now what their rage is, is that they like cartoon driven stuff like Frank Kozik . They like that stuff a lot. They also like quality printing, as does Germany.

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Interview with Poster Expert Greg Davidson

by Michael Erlewine

[Not as well known as some of the other major collectors, Greg Davidson has moved on to other projects. Back in the day, Davidson was on the spot and on the job. Here are some of his recollections from that time.]

Michael Erlewine: That's partly the reason why I'm calling is that there is...from my understanding from Eric King and from Dennis King and other people, that there was a point and time when you and Eric got together and compared notes. From that meeting, Eric King he went on, at some point, to make a beginning book of poster data and then make it more and more sophisticated as years went by.

Greg Davidson: Okay.

Michael Erlewine: I think he dedicated his first book to you.

Greg Davidson: Well, I think he gave me some credit...

Michael Erlewine: The way I understood it was that you compared notes over some period of time and... You have not been involved in posters recently?

Greg Davidson: No.

Michael Erlewine: Have lost interest in them?

Greg Davidson: You know they reached a point where I looked and I had these cabinets full of everything. And it was everything. What was I going to do? I couldn't even...more than I could do to cover the walls and ceilings. There was nothing left to be interested in [laughs].

Michael Erlewine: So you collected complete sets of what Bill Graham and Family Dog and...

Greg Davidson: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Wow. Well those are worth a lot of money today, as you probably know.

Greg Davidson: They weren't cheap then, but I'm sure they're worth more now. I just bought a poster that I remember was rare, but I...it was an auction...

Michael Erlewine: Which one?

Greg Davidson: The "Gathering the Tribes."

Michael Erlewine: Which one?

Greg Davidson: The one with the triangle in front of the person.

Michael Erlewine: Oh yeah, I've got that one.

Greg Davidson: This is interesting, because it's signed by Bowen.

Michael Erlewine: Really. That is interesting.

Greg Davidson: Yeah. I got a few people to sign stuff at different times, but I never even knew him or heard of him and I wouldn't probably have been interested much.

Michael Erlewine: You probably know Paul Getchell or Walter Medeiros?

Greg Davidson: Paul's still into it?

Michael Erlewine: They're still into posters and Walter Medeiros, of course, has written a lot about posters.

Greg Davidson: Who? Walter, I don't know if I knew him.

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Michael Erlewine: Well, he was active almost from the beginning. Paul Getchell you probably knew.

Greg Davidson: Yeah I knew Paul.

Michael Erlewine: But I think you pre-date most of these guys.

Greg Davidson: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: I'm an archivist, so of course. I think that you guys that have done archiving early on deserve some special credit.

Greg Davidson: Well, I had a lot different background than everybody else. I have had an antique shop for the last 25 years. But my last paying job was a curator at the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco.

Michael Erlewine: Oh, no kidding.

Greg Davidson: So I got an M.A. in Art History, and a lot of background even before that.

Michael Erlewine: Did you recognize these posters as eventually collectible?

Greg Davidson: Probably, yeah. I did it for the art value, rather than... some people got into it the nostalgia value.

Michael Erlewine: So you saw them as art?

Greg Davidson: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: See that's really cool because that didn't happen with everyone. Many view these posters just as memorabilia.

Meeting Eric King

Michael Erlewine: How did you meet Eric King. Who was doing this before you?

Greg Davidson: I went to school. I went to undergraduate school in Berkeley off and on for a very long time.

Michael Erlewine: What years?

Greg Davidson: I actually knew Eric King before I even got into posters.

Michael Erlewine: Just from being around? What years were these?

Greg Davidson: Well I...I came back in 1969. I probably met him around 1969 or 1970.

Michael Erlewine: Okay.

Greg Davidson: But I didn't start then. I went away and did like grad schooling in Michigan. I didn't get back to Berkeley until 1974 or 1975. That's when I started collecting them.

Michael Erlewine: So you started then. Had Eric already been collecting them, or do you know? I'm trying to get dates.

Greg Davidson: He evidently did a little bit of collecting before then and then stopped and then got active when I was hustling all over the place. There were a couple guys out at the Alameda flea market in those days that were dealing in them and I was collecting from them. I bumped into Eric and there was another guy, I forget, who had collected too. But, I think maybe he wasn't really doing any. He wasn't doing anything with the posters at the point and I think that maybe he was at loose ends to make a buck, I think. He started, and he had a friend.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, I think he still does.

Greg Davidson: Yeah, and I think his friend got interested in putting together a set and I think that Eric decided this was a way to make money.

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Michael Erlewine: Interesting. See, I'm trying to put together the history of all this and that is something that I have not heard before.

Greg Davidson: Well, he put together a set for his friend or a couple...and extras. I think maybe his friend put together two sets for himself.

Michael Erlewine: Were these complete collections?

Greg Davidson: No, we're talking complete collections.

Michael Erlewine: With variations?

Greg Davidson: Yeah. I was the person of variations. I was buying and selling for awhile like a junkie and if I bought a hundred posters, I'd put the 100 I bought next to the ones I had and they came up all different. Like there were some really weird color variations in the first, like 60-80, or to 100 numbers in Bill Graham. I remember where the colors could flip back and forth between different...probably the same printings, but just different mixtures of ink.

Michael Erlewine: True. And also just whatever paper they might do. Bill Graham kind of used consistent paper.

Greg Davidson: I don't really know what's happened with this one. I remember like one major difference with him on Eric on the Batman poster.

Michael Erlewine: Well Eric's thinks that's the poster that took him the longest to figure out the variations.

Greg Davidson: Well, I had one that was the original. I feel.

Michael Erlewine: Okay.

Greg Davidson: Because I feel it was really, really rare. The reason I did. It

was the only one that had the same paper that the Batman paper was on, or not the Batman, one of the early Family Dog ones.

Michael Erlewine: Okay.

Greg Davidson: I forget which one at this point. And all the others were on different kind of stock completely.

Michael Erlewine: And they were all...

Greg Davidson: They were all fairly common.

Michael Erlewine: Right. Not anymore.

Greg Davidson: The reprints?

Michael Erlewine: Well, reprints yeah.

Greg Davidson: Well, the ones that I felt were reprints were not rare posters back in the 70's, Batman.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Greg Davidson: But this one that I had, was the only one ever seen and it was on the same kind of...it was a little softer stock than, it was like the same paper that was used on the fine weave pressed Family Dog ones.

Michael Erlewine: I see. Well he still has an incredible collection.

Greg Davidson: Oh, I'm not saying...

Michael Erlewine: And he's still-hunting down variations just within those...

Posters, Posters, Posters

Greg Davidson: I collect at this point mainly in 19th and early 20th century lamps and light fixtures, you know, different things.

Michael Erlewine: I thought I had been told you were in LA.

Greg Davidson: I was. I moved up here about eight years ago.

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Michael Erlewine: So, I had searched LA, trying to reach you, and then I just happened to...I think I did some kind of Internet search and found your name connected to the Northwest, right? So I didn't know if you were the same one, but how many antique lighting people could there be.

Greg Davidson: Not many with my name, that's for sure.

Michael Erlewine: It's great to reach you finally and what you've told me already changes the whole way this thing comes together, a lot that I didn't know. Eric may have told me that he purchased from a lot of posters from you. I can't remember.

Greg Davidson: I had great stuff. I wished I had kept some of it, but I was more interested in other things. I mean I still am. I mean I'm not interested in posters at all, hardly. I still have a few up and just bought that "Gathering the Tribes" just because as I remember the big one was kind of always scarce.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, I have that poster. It's a weird poster. Interesting.

Greg Davidson: Early Mouse.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah.

Greg Davidson: I got some interesting stuff. I tried to talk to some of the artists.

Michael Erlewine: So you actually...

Greg Davidson: See I...that was something.. I don't know if Eric ever kept them, but I had Stanley Mouse and Alton Kelley sign some of those posters. First I had Mouse sign them, because according to Kelley, he and Mouse worked on everything together. According to Mouse that wasn't true [laughs].

Michael Erlewine: Oh really [laughs].

Greg Davidson: So at that point I had one signed by Mouse that he claimed, only he worked on. That's the way I kept them straight, but that's probably all gotten confused.

Michael Erlewine: Well both those guys are still doing graphics. Kelley's doing some incredible stuff even now, really beautiful things. Mouse I think is still doing things too.

Greg Davidson: I knew them when they were just starting to get into airbrushing and stuff and doing acrylics and they were getting too tied up into technique.

Michael Erlewine: Well Kelley never got very tied up, but Mouse has still been pretty tied up with technique and having fancy equipment.

Greg Davidson: Well, you know, at that point I thought their artistic vision..

Michael Erlewine: Well, yeah. I mean the whole scene didn't last a long time, the whole flower of it. See I'm from the Midwest, so I come from a different view. We had the Grande Ballroom out here and that's a...

Greg Davidson: I had some posters, that wasn't Midwest, that was Detroit.

Michael Erlewine: Well, it's Midwest in Detroit.

Greg Davidson: I meant to Ann Arbor. I don't consider it the Midwest, that was the east coast [laughs].

Michael Erlewine: Well I grew up in Ann Arbor, and it is the Midwest.

Greg Davidson: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: We Ann Arborites think that it is the heart of the Midwest, right?

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Greg Davidson: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: But you think of more like out to the coast or something, some 1000 miles east.

Greg Davidson: Well, yeah.

Michael Erlewine: We don't think that way.

Greg Davidson: I went to summer school in Austin, Texas. I guess I hit the area.

Michael Erlewine: Did you go to the Armadillo and things like that?

Greg Davidson: Armadillo was on the way out when I was down there. In fact I think that was gone, the Vulcan Gas Company was still around, but...

Michael Erlewine: The Vulcan went before the Armadillo.

Greg Davidson: Okay, then the Armadillo was going and the Vulcan was gone. That's one of the few posters I kept, one of the best one's from the period, I think.

Michael Erlewine: Which one?

Greg Davidson: It's one by Gilbert Shelton.

Michael Erlewine: One of the Vulcan?

Greg Davidson: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Well those are pretty valuable now.

Greg Davidson: I would expect it was a split-fountain, with these sort of wads of light coming out, it was sort of terrific.

Michael Erlewine: You remember by whom, which poster it was?

Greg Davidson: No, it's out and hanging, it's one of the few that's hanged.

Michael Erlewine: Wow. I love Texas posters. I can't afford to collect the Vulcan Gas, but I collect the Armadillo and I have hundreds of them.

Greg Davidson: The only ones I liked from Texas were, I think, Gilbert Shelton stuff.

Michael Erlewine: Really, so that's more Vulcan Gas.

Greg Davidson: Is it?

Michael Erlewine: Well, it's a little bit like the west coast stuff. But I like the stipple-effect, you know two-tone stuff. I think it looks good on the wall. And I just love it. I don't know why, I just do.

Greg Davidson: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Big sky country.

Greg Davidson: What else do I have on the wall? Not much. I've got a Big Brother and the Holding Company silk screen.

Michael Erlewine: Which one?

Greg Davidson: I think its Matrix.

Michael Erlewine: Mouse I don't think he did more than one poster for the Matrix, and it was Big Brother.

Greg Davidson: It was a rare poster. It's Stanley Mouse that definitely made this.

Michael Erlewine: And so you met all these guys, or most of them?

Greg Davidson: Yeah, before some of them died.

Michael Erlewine: What about Bob Fried. Did you meet him?

Greg Davidson: No, he died. I bought bunch of his posters from his wife.

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Michael Erlewine: I went out and interviewed her. Nice lady. I like Bob Fried's stuff a lot. He's one of the ones I collect. Well, sounds like you actually had training in art and in archiving to some degree, museum work.

Greg Davidson: I guess, yeah.

Michael Erlewine: That's pretty cool. But, who taught you posters? Anyone? Who did you?

Greg Davidson: No, no. I mean I picked everybody's brain.

Michael Erlewine: When we say everybody, we mean?

Greg Davidson: What's his name was helpful. The two guys that bought...started with...that were dealing...one guy's name was Kingsley, I think.

Michael Erlewine: I don't know that name.

Greg Davidson: Well, he was probably...

Michael Erlewine: I'm going to write that down.

Greg Davidson: Probably doesn't survive.

Michael Erlewine: But you would go to people like Ben Friedman, was he?

Greg Davidson: He wasn't... He didn't know anything or if he knew anything it was totally self-serving. If he would...

Greg Davidson: What's his name? Randy was helpful.

Michael Erlewine: Oh Randy Tuten, of course?

Greg Davidson: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: He's a wonder. I like Randy Tuten's work a lot. One of the

few artists/poster experts that are still doing incredibly good work, I think he's struggling to make a living. But he's very funny, and I went out and visited and interviewed him. I talk to him periodically. I like him. His work is still pristine. He is the most consistent producer of all of them.

Greg Davidson: Well, I never liked those later ones, like Tuten, or whom did I hate the most? The guy who did all those collages for...

Michael Erlewine: Oh, David Singer?

Greg Davidson: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Well, I like Singer and his work..

Greg Davidson: I thought Norman Orr's stuff was hideous.

Greg Davidson: My favorite was probably Lee Conklin.

Michael Erlewine: Oh so you like Conklin? Yeah.

Greg Davidson: Conklin, Griffin and Wilson and Mouse, and Kelley.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah. I've talked to most of those guys; Lee Conklin is living still...still living around there. Not doing much poster stuff, more into art prints. Did you know Jacaeber Kastor, who is an expert like yourself?

Greg Davidson: No.

Michael Erlewine: He eventually did the Psychedelic Solution Gallery out on the east coast, which is a major poster gallery. How about Phil Cushway? Did you run across him or was that too early probably?

Greg Davidson: No, don't know him.

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Michael Erlewine: I think it was much later. Well he's Art Rock now, right?

Greg Davidson: Yeah. I knew people that...I got and traded stuff from Cohen.

Michael Erlewine: Now who's Cohen.

Greg Davidson: He was one, who was. They always give credit to for the Family Dog, that was the owner?

Michael Erlewine: Oh, Chet Helms.

Greg Davidson: Yeah, he was the co-owner with Chet Helms.

Michael Erlewine: Oh, I didn't know that.

Greg Davidson: Actually paid off their bankruptcy.

Michael Erlewine: Really.

Greg Davidson: He was a businessperson and he was still wise, because at least 25 years ago, he had many employees and was doing sound for concert productions.

Michael Erlewine: I don't know him. That's funny. I will make a note of this.

Greg Davidson: I mean it was interesting to talk to him, but... And he shared a place with one of the few people I hold in awe from the period, which is Janis Joplin, so I mean [laughs]...

Michael Erlewine: Oh really, so you met her?

Greg Davidson: No, no. I wasn't really into the music that much. The few concerts I went to, I couldn't stand because they were too loud.

Michael Erlewine: They were loud [laughs]. Yep. I can remember that, because I'm from that era myself. But just to be totally clear, that you basically

developed your interest into variations and stuff without instructions...no one passed it on to you?

Greg Davidson: Well no, nobody passed it on. I mean I picked a little bit from everybody.

Michael Erlewine: But I'm trying to understand the 'everybody' would just be other collectors?

Greg Davidson: Yeah, and the folk wisdom that was going around, and then eventually you could see pretty much just because what was around and what was available and where you got stuff from. I went to a lot of people. There was a guy that had the Oracle Newspaper I got stuff from him.

Michael Erlewine: How about Dennis King. Were you in touch with him?

Greg Davidson: The name is so familiar, I'm trying to...

Michael Erlewine: Well Dennis had a small shop in Berkeley, in the beginning...

Greg Davidson: Oh, he was the baseball card dealer.

Michael Erlewine: That's right.

Greg Davidson: Yeah, but he was just starting.

Michael Erlewine: Really. Wow. I'm trying to think who else you would have been in touch with. So Ben Friedman couldn't do much for you.

Greg Davidson: Oh no, he was...

Michael Erlewine: And I've established that pretty well, he was just making money.

Greg Davidson: And if it helped to lie [laughs].

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Trading Posters and Data with Eric King

Michael Erlewine: Yeah [laughs]. I think I've heard that a number of times also. I'm just trying to think of who else was more of an archival person and then...

Greg Davidson: I mean Eric King caught on, or was doing it pretty quick. It's just he...if he hadn't been bankrolled by his friend he wouldn't have done anything.

Michael Erlewine: Right. Well they are still friends.

Greg Davidson: I'm trying to think of this one guy. See I...when I was at Berkeley, I was mostly a Frisbee player and there was one guy I used to play Frisbee with that was collecting early and collecting later who ...

Can't remember his name.

So he got involved with Eric and his friend at the same time too...I mean his friend wasn't selling, but mostly was buying stuff from Eric at the same time.

Michael Erlewine: I think he still is just accumulating posters, like a lot of us.

Greg Davidson: Yeah, well he's got the resources to do that.

Michael Erlewine: He does. Well, what you told me changes the whole picture... It certainly makes you a key figure in terms of trying to build the history of the archival element. I'm trying to find out who was interested in these variations. So I know Eric was.

Greg Davidson: Well I mean...anyone that was collecting at the time was interested.

Michael Erlewine: But not so knowledgeable from what I can tell. You guys took it to greater lengths.

Greg Davidson: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: So you would get together with Eric and then you guys would compare...bring your posters together and look at...put them all together?

Greg Davidson: We might have done that a little bit. I didn't have to do that with him. He didn't have anything for me to compare with.

Michael Erlewine: You mean he didn't have that much at that point.

Greg Davidson: He didn't have anything to speak of.

Michael Erlewine: So how much time did you spend with him. Was it over many years? Over a short time?

Greg Davidson: I was probably only doing it for a couple years.

Michael Erlewine: Okay.

Greg Davidson: My dealings with him were either buying posters from him that he might have scrounged, or if he had bought a bunch of stuff for his friend, for me to go over and pick over and see what I could use or vice-versa. If I bought a stash of stuff, he'd come over and take a look and see what he needed.

Michael Erlewine: Right. Did you part on good terms whenever you moved away?

Greg Davidson: Yeah. Sure. I mean he came down and some material after I moved, down to LA.

Michael Erlewine: Oh okay, you went down there. I see. See all this is very

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interesting. I am trying to understand how the early collectors built their collections and related to one another.

Greg Davidson: Well, he got some material from me after he put together 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ set for his friend, I don't know what else...Wouldn't surprise me if, while he was putting together a set for somebody else, he kept the best for himself [laughs].

Michael Erlewine: Most people might do that.

Greg Davidson: I don't think he had... He didn't have much money to do with stuff, or I don't think...he was on disability or something and making flutes for a living.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, I've heard that, shakuhachi flutes.

Greg Davidson: Yeah. That can't be too lucrative.

More on Posters and Data

Greg Davidson: What I still might have... I'd have to find it, which is rare. I've got a couple of really rare things I kept.

Michael Erlewine: Well I would love to see if you had...

Greg Davidson: One's a little handbill for the Trips festival that Wes Wilson signed because he did it. There's no signature on it.

Michael Erlewine: I know that piece. I'd love to see images of any of that.

Greg Davidson: I'm not sure, but I hope I can still find it but a business card for the Charlatans which had the same artwork on it that the Seed poster did.

Michael Erlewine: I have a copy of the 'Seed' Poster, one of them.

Greg Davidson: I don't want to talk about it too much. I'd hate to find out how much they're worth now.

Michael Erlewine: Oh, yeah. I'm not an expert of prices either so.

Greg Davidson: The only posters I kept, because actually I think I ended up liking them more, but they turned out to be a worse investment were David Goines.

Michael Erlewine: Oh you have some of David Goines?

Greg Davidson: I've got a lot of them.

Michael Erlewine: Oh really, well isn't it a good investment?

Greg Davidson: I don't think so. I don't know.

Michael Erlewine: I mean I think he's very famous.

Greg Davidson: Yeah, I'm not sure his posters are bringing that much. I have the original artwork to one of his I kept that. I've got one piece of art by Wes Wilson, but it's not for a rock concert poster?

Michael Erlewine: Which one was it?

Greg Davidson: It was never used. He submitted it to ACT.

Michael Erlewine: Oh I love to get an image of it, a picture of it sometime just to put it in the database.

Greg Davidson: Last I heard he was moving to the Midwest.

Michael Erlewine: He's down in Missouri. I talk to him once in a while.

Greg Davidson: Well that's Midwest [laughs].

Michael Erlewine: [laughs] Oh, it's kind of lower Midwest...you have an

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interesting sense of geography, but, yeah, that is Midwest. But he's down there farming.

Greg Davidson: Yeah, and he was doing glass at the time or something.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, he's done different things. He did an image for this site that I'm putting together that's pretty interesting. Are you on the Internet. Yeah you have a site?

Greg Davidson: Well, the site is just under construction.

Greg Davidson: Did you say you're with somebody or are you doing this on your own?

Michael Erlewine: I'm an entrepreneur. I'm a database archivist of popular culture. I have done large sites on music and film, the All-Music Guide (allmusic.com) and the All-Movie Guide (allmovie.com). And now I am working on posters. I love posters right?

Greg Davidson: Fucking old hippies, I can't stand it.

Michael Erlewine: You must be somewhere in the same boat.

Greg Davidson: Yep [laughs].

Michael Erlewine: I mean I was a performer. I played at the Filmore.

Greg Davidson: Did you?

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, in 1967, opened for Cream.

Greg Davidson: What group?

Michael Erlewine: You never would have heard of us, called the Prime Movers Blues Band, it was from the Midwest, Iggy Pop was our drummer.

Greg Davidson: No, but I must have had posters for them. I didn't have all of

them, but I must have had all the posters for the off-shows too.

Michael Erlewine: Oh really, god, I would have liked to see all those.

Greg Davidson: Because they were really...because I remember they were on beige stock usually, but...for almost every date there was a poster. Eric King should have most of that stuff, because he got most...I mean I had, you know, probably 75 off-date posters. I mean off-numbered, un-numbered ones. I had some great stuff. I don't know if they still...there was...like the Wolfgang Grajonca poster, you know that one?

Michael Erlewine: Yeah. I do.

Greg Davidson: I don't know it's around the 100's or something, early 100's It's the same image that's on the Filmore poster and then this has got an 'A' or after it or something, and it's for a birthday party for Wolfgang Grajonca in LA I believe.

Greg Davidson: Well that was Bill Graham's name.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, right. I had one run-in with him. It was awful.

Greg Davidson: Did you ever meet him?

Michael Erlewine: Sure. You know: a business guy.

Greg Davidson: Yeah, it was interesting, getting posters. The people that were into it, into posters for the music. I was just into it for the image.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, well, me too. I'm art oriented and you've seen, you probably have the Art of Rock book.

Greg Davidson: I might have.

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Michael Erlewine: But you probably don't know theirs a second one about to come out this fall called the Art of Modern Rock. Paul Grushkin and Dennis King are doing it and that should be good.

Greg Davidson: King's not doing baseball cards anymore?

Michael Erlewine: He may still has a whole basement full of them actually, but, yeah I don't know what he is doing with them.

Greg Davidson: Oh I would have thought the Internet would have made that very easy.

Michael Erlewine: I went out and visited him. He knows a lot about posters at this point.

Greg Davidson: Well he should.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, he certainly should and he does.

Greg Davidson: You mentioned another name and I remember he called me down in LA a couple of times and he was always into handbills originally.

Michael Erlewine: Who's that?

Greg Davidson: Oh you mentioned, he's a collector and you mentioned his name.

Michael Erlewine: Paul Getchell?

Greg Davidson: Yeah, he's an attorney, or he was or something.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, he still is.

Greg Davidson: Yeah. I knew him when he was struggling through school.

Michael Erlewine: He bought stuff from you?

Greg Davidson: Yeah, but he didn't have any money then[laughs].

Michael Erlewine: Right. Well, he should now. He's a lawyer.

Greg Davidson: Yeah, but I don't have any stuff I want to sell.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Greg Davidson: But I've still got a few things. I've got a silk screen for...the Matrix, that big one that's on cloth.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, I wonder what that is? You say it's a big one by Stanley Mouse?

Greg Davidson: It's a big Mouse one with the images of one... I thought that was interesting too. So many of these are lifted from different things.

Michael Erlewine: Oh well, totally, especially Mouse and Kelley. They went to the library.

Greg Davidson: Well, I mean, actually I grew up with the image in a book I had, but the Grateful Dead poster, Skull and Roses.

Michael Erlewine: Oh yeah, Omar Khayyam.

Greg Davidson: Was lifted from...

Michael Erlewine: Totally.

Greg Davidson: From my favorite poem...book it's an illustration of The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam.

Michael Erlewine: That's right, beautiful thing.

Greg Davidson: Yeah, that's one of the few-signed posters I kept.

Michael Erlewine: Let me see if I can figure out which poster you are talking about, I'm going to quick look in the database.

Greg Davidson: It's about five feet long and about a foot and a half wide.

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Michael Erlewine: And you're sure it's a Matrix poster?

Greg Davidson: Oh no, that's one for the Western Front.

Michael Erlewine: Well then I know the one you mean. There is only one that size, a lobby card.



Western Front Lobby Card

Greg Davidson: A man with big unruly hair?

Michael Erlewine: That's it. So you said you did have a Big Brother and the holding company?

Greg Davidson: Yeah, it's a split fountain on beige paper; it's a double-sized poster.

Michael Erlewine: And it's a Mouse?

Greg Davidson: Mouse-Kelley. Image of Janis Joplin.

Michael Erlewine: Okay I'm trying to look; let me see if I can quickly see it.

Greg Davidson: Oh you know it's funny. I must like Mouse more than I thought. The Cosmic Car Show; I always liked that one.

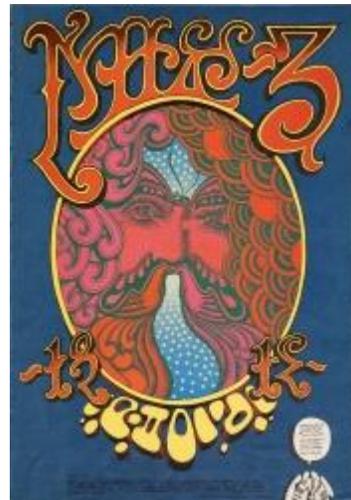
Michael Erlewine: Oh, that's a great poster. Yeah I don't think I have that poster.

Greg Davidson: That was never common. None of the ones I guess I put up were common. Well there is, there is one Bill Graham, Rick Griffin one... the Griffin-Moscoso poster for the Family Dog.

Michael Erlewine: I'm trying to remember.

Greg Davidson: The one's that got nonsense lettering on it.

Michael Erlewine: Oh yeah, that's a nice poster.



Family Dog FD-12

Greg Davidson: And I remember Rick saying, that we're laughing about how many people must have spent hours trying to figure out what it meant [laughs].

Michael Erlewine: Right. Yeah I talked, interviewed his wife.

Greg Davidson: Actually there's a guy who was sort of his businessman guy. I wonder if he's still alive?

Michael Erlewine: Businessman?

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Greg Davidson: Business manager for Rick Griffin. Was real big into orange crate labels and I can't remember his name. He was really the first person to start promoting him. This guy would have been down in Orange County.

Michael Erlewine: Oh okay.

Greg Davidson: I can't remember his name, but he wrote a few of the early yearbooks on orange crate labels.

Michael Erlewine: Interesting. It sounds like you were right there. I'll probably have some other questions to ask you at some point.

Greg Davidson: Well as long as business is slow, I've got plenty of time.

Michael Erlewine: How is business in antique lights; I know nothing about it.

Greg Davidson: Things in general haven't been great the last couple of years.

Michael Erlewine: That's true in general.

Greg Davidson: I have a house I like it. It's two and half acres on Bainbridge Isle. Lot better than living in Los Angeles.

Michael Erlewine: Is that where you are?

Greg Davidson: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Wow, so is the island connected by a bridge?

Greg Davidson: Yeah, it's a 35 minute ferry ride.

Michael Erlewine: No kidding. Wow, so that's isolated probably.

Greg Davidson: Well, it's the largest two-sided ferry in the world, big 220 cars

and 2500 passengers. It's got Starbuck latte's on it, it's not exactly...

Michael Erlewine: Oh I see. How's the weather there, what is that like in the wintertime? Reasonable?

Greg Davidson: It's probably like San Francisco in the summer [laughs].

Michael Erlewine: So kind of cool.

Greg Davidson: I mean we haven't had any snow for a couple of years, Well, we did have a couple feet of snow one year, but in the last...but haven't touched any snow this year.

Michael Erlewine: So it's probably beautiful.

Greg Davidson: Oh, right now it's gorgeous.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah.

Greg Davidson: It rains a lot sometimes. A lot of times it will rain for a couple hours and then clear up.

Michael Erlewine: I'm just in the Midwest, where there's just like big sky, nothing particularly beautiful around other than its nice.

Greg Davidson: Well, San Francisco is beautiful.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, it is, totally. I just don't live there.

Greg Davidson: For some reason I thought you were calling from San Francisco.

Michael Erlewine: Like I tried to tell you I'm in the Midwest.

Greg Davidson: Where?

Michael Erlewine: In a little town called Big Rapids; it's in the middle of the mitten of Michigan.

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Greg Davidson: Oh okay, I don't know it.

Michael Erlewine: No, no, you wouldn't. I guess I'm not unlike you that way. I'm just out there. I don't really need to be anywhere to do what I do.

Greg Davidson: Yeah, well.

Michael Erlewine: Its kind of nice just to... I don't like driving in the cities and stuff.

Greg Davidson: Your winters are a little bit harsher.

Michael Erlewine: Horrible. Yeah, no doubt.

Greg Davidson: I remember how long... I remember one year it was the end of May and it snowed or something, that was like way too late.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah that's way too late; it's doesn't happen much but it can happen. Right now, we're just finally getting some decent temperature, it's 64 here today.

ANN ARBOR REMINISCENCES

Greg Davidson: Yeah, well I hate to think what Ann Arbor's like.

Michael Erlewine: It's more south than where I am in Big Rapids.

Greg Davidson: No, I just mean in terms of the way it's grown in the last few years.

Michael Erlewine: Oh well I grew up there. Well yeah ,it's really busy now.

Greg Davidson: They were just putting in that shopping... they were tearing up ground for a big shopping center south of the town.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, but that's old stuff.

Greg Davidson: Yeah, that would date when I was there.

Michael Erlewine: What year were you there?

Greg Davidson: Well, I got my M.A. in 1973.

Michael Erlewine: 1973. I was there in town then. I moved in 1980. Yeah, a lot's happened. They've got a coffee shop on every... you know like a Starbuck every 10 feet.

Greg Davidson: Yeah my favorite place that I used to hang out and play pinball all the time, what was the name of that place?

Michael Erlewine: What part of town, on campus?

Greg Davidson: It was just off-campus.

Michael Erlewine: South U?

Greg Davidson: The part that was the main center, the main part of town.

Michael Erlewine: You mean State Street, near the State Theater, Michigan Theater?

Greg Davidson: Yeah, actually real close to there.

Michael Erlewine: I'm trying to think of what pinball. I'm not into pinball.

Greg Davidson: No, it was a coffee shop and just downstairs, they had pinball.

Michael Erlewine: Not Mark's?

Greg Davidson: Yes!

Michael Erlewine: Mark's Coffeeshouse. Gosh I was just looking at a poster that I did for Mark's two days ago.

Greg Davidson: I had my bicycle stolen from there.

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Michael Erlewine: So you remember Mark's? My god.

Greg Davidson: Yeah. Spent a lot of time in there.

Michael Erlewine: Well me too. They used to have music in the basement.

Greg Davidson: I had a great place, I bet they have torn this down too. It was a wonderful. It was at the top of this three-story Victorian that was backed up on the cemetery on a dead-end street going down to the arboretum across from the dormitories. The backyard was the cemetery.

Michael Erlewine: Okay, well the arboretum is on Geddes, that's a road, but...

Greg Davidson: This went into the back way.

Michael Erlewine: So your saying the back way into the arboretum is down below the hospital.

Greg Davidson: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: So you were down there.

Greg Davidson: And the backyard of the house I was in was the old cemetery.

Michael Erlewine: Was the way into the arboretum right near your house, I mean the back way?

Greg Davidson: You just kept going down the street, you got into the arboretum.

Michael Erlewine: You know where the peony fields?

Greg Davidson: Yeah, exactly. They still got those Victorian's there?

Michael Erlewine: Let me think...I believe they are offices now, but still there.

Greg Davidson: No.

Michael Erlewine: But I'm not certain either, I can't promise you that, I think they have a couple, there was a path that went to the peony fields, there was a Victorian right there.

Greg Davidson: Well, I bet they kept one of them; there were about four of them there.

Michael Erlewine: But the path to the peony field wasn't right by your house, or was it?

Greg Davidson: Well you had to go down the street, like a half a block down or something.

Michael Erlewine: So you were near Markley Dorm?

Greg Davidson: Yeah, I think it was right across the street from there.

Michael Erlewine: You know I think they are still there. Now I know what your talking about, so what you're saying, no there's a parking lot up there and I think all the Victorian's are there. It's kind of a little cluster. I think they are still there.

Greg Davidson: Oh that's good.

Michael Erlewine: So you know Ann Arbor. So that's where I grew up.

Greg Davidson: I was there for two years.

Michael Erlewine: I was there forever.

Greg Davidson: Yeah [laughs].

Michael Erlewine: [laughs] Played music there, yeah that was where our band came from.

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Greg Davidson: Then I went to Ann Arbor to grad school and I went to summer school during that time in Austin, Texas. I always thought Austin was...I liked Austin. I had a great time there. I thought it was kind of amusing how they thought they were the hip capital of the world.

Michael Erlewine: They do and in some ways they are one of them.

Greg Davidson: After having been to Berkeley and going to grad school in Ann Arbor, you sort of have to chuckle over that one [laughs].

Michael Erlewine: I've never been to Austin. How does it compare to Ann Arbor? I mean I love Ann Arbor and I lived a year in Berkeley in 1964.

Greg Davidson: Well it's hot and humid, but I think I prefer that to in terms of weather to Ann Arbor.

Michael Erlewine: I was in Berkeley in 1964 for the riots.

Greg Davidson: 1964?

Greg Davidson: Okay, well I was...I think I had flunked out just a couple of months before that.

Michael Erlewine: [laughs] Right.

Greg Davidson: When I was there the big political activity was...and this is Berkeley in a nutshell, the big political activity was a shop-in at the Lucky's Market as the corner of Haste and Telegraph...that later on became the one world commune or something, then a coffee shop and now it's probably a Burger King you know [laughs]?

Michael Erlewine: I used to live on Haste, just about a block and a half down from the Café Mediterranean on Telegraph.

Greg Davidson: Yeah. I lived across from one of those university parking lots, right next to a co-op.

Michael Erlewine: Well, the parking lot wasn't there when I was there, but...

Greg Davidson: There was a co-op and that probably wasn't there either.

Michael Erlewine: I know Berkeley and I know Ann Arbor well. I have never been to Austin, but I've studied the posters from there and there is quite an alternative community there, but you've actually been there.

Greg Davidson: There were some decent posters from here too, from Portland.

Michael Erlewine: Oh, you bet. Yeah, I have some.

Greg Davidson: Austin has some if I remember correctly. New York didn't have much.

Michael Erlewine: Right. Anyway, you've been around and what you've told me about this whole thing with Eric is I'm going to have to talk to him.

Greg Davidson: Say "Hi".

Michael Erlewine: I will, I will do that. What I'll do is send you an e-mail.

Greg Davidson: He must be getting a little long in the tooth. He was always an old man for me, now of course...

Michael Erlewine: How old are you?

Greg Davidson: What? I'm 57.

Michael Erlewine: Okay, well, he's 62. He and I are identical age; we're maybe a month apart.

Greg Davidson: Well when your 26...

Michael Erlewine: It can be different.

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Greg Davidson: And he always looked old for his age anyway. [laughs].

Michael Erlewine: He's healthy. He has a funny sense of humor and very exacting about things. Probably was then too.

Greg Davidson: Yeah. I learned stuff from him; he learned stuff from me. He was not into posters at all when I started getting into it.

Michael Erlewine: What year did you start getting into them again?

Greg Davidson: I don't even remember.

Michael Erlewine: I wish we could remember.

Greg Davidson: Let's see...probably 1974 or 1975.

Michael Erlewine: But he says he started collecting when they were actually happening...

Greg Davidson: Well he did, but then he got rid of them all.

Michael Erlewine: Oh okay, I didn't know that. Wow. Anyway I certainly appreciate your taking the time to talk to me and you've told me stuff that has sent me running in 10 directions trying to figure it out, but you certainly have a place at the table for these archivists and I'm going to make certain that you get it.

Greg Davidson: Well Getchell will vouch for me. I think he remembers when I was out there.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, so I will check on that.

Greg Davidson: And Eric's friend. He was always very nice. I'm just...and since he was probably the first patron of the collector [laughs].

Michael Erlewine: Right. Oh yeah.

Greg Davidson: Somebody that collected without going out and scrounging for them. He collected with a checkbook [laughs].

Michael Erlewine: No, he still is.

Greg Davidson: Yeah, well he would give you a different viewpoint, but that would definitely...last I heard he was in Oakland.

Michael Erlewine: He probably is; he's somewhere in that area I know. He and I collect some of the New Filmore's recent stuff, which is endless, endlessly going on. There's 900 pieces of it so far, if you can imagine that.

Greg Davidson: Interesting.

Michael Erlewine: Well good. It's really nice to meet you and I will let you know. I made notes here. I'll let you know, run some of these notes pass you at some point to make sure I'm not saying anything that is wrong. I do need to talk to Eric and just to find out a little bit more about how it all came together, because I'm writing an article about his.

Greg Davidson: Eric was like...I tried to...I don't know if I put the bug into him to get...I liked to have the artist sign it, where a lot of other people would actually rather the musicians sign the posters.

Michael Erlewine: I know.

Greg Davidson: Eric really was the one to take off and seriously go hunt up artist to get them to sign stuff.

Michael Erlewine: He really did; he's got a lot of them. He probably has more of that than anyone in the world, to my knowledge.

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Greg Davidson: Yeah...I'm still not sure whether most of the collector's care about that.... wouldn't rather have the artists...the musician's signatures than the...

Michael Erlewine: Not anymore, it's the artist that is worth more than the musician's... Well, depends. The nostalgia people by definition are dying away and the art stuff is just coming on, because it doesn't have a death date. People that remember these people are going away, right?

Greg Davidson: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: And so is the nostalgia part of it, which never can...

Greg Davidson: I would have thought that you know, Elvis Presley still brings a lot of money.

Michael Erlewine: Well that's true, the Grateful Dead is the main one.

Greg Davidson: See that's the one poster I really regret selling, that was part of the collection though.

Michael Erlewine: The one with...which one?

Greg Davidson: It was one just before. It was a benefit for the Mime Troupe...

Michael Erlewine: Okay.

Greg Davidson: If Eric didn't keep this one, he's crazy.

Michael Erlewine: Oh no, I don't think Eric's ever parted with anything key.

Greg Davidson: What do you mean, he sold a bunch of stuff to his friend, so he had to part with a ton of stuff.

Michael Erlewine: Okay, maybe he did.

Greg Davidson: This...on the back somebody had done...painted a poster.

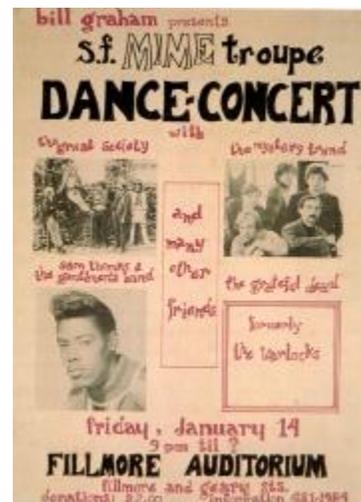
On the other side was a benefit for the Mime Troupe and theoretically it was the one that Bill Graham got the idea to open the...

Michael Erlewine: So it was an early one?

Greg Davidson: To open the Fillmore.

Michael Erlewine: Was it the one with a little drum, a little tambourine?

Greg Davidson: No, it had four photographs. The first one is great society with Grace Slick in mini-skirt and a few other people, the fourth one, this is the real reason I wish I had kept it. It didn't have a photograph; it was all block lettering it was before the psychedelic stuff.



Mime Troupe Appeal

Michael Erlewine: Okay.

Greg Davidson: Where the photograph should have been it just said, "formerly the Warlocks".

Michael Erlewine: Oh yeah, I think I know which poster.

Greg Davidson: And above that it said the Grateful Dead.

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Michael Erlewine: Wow, yeah, I know that poster.

Greg Davidson: There can't be too many, and I heard that after that, the benefit. Bill Graham picks up the money and it's in a couple of bags or something and the story was he spent all night walking around saying this could have all been mine.

Michael Erlewine: Oh really [laughs]. Oh wow...he got plenty would be my feel.

Greg Davidson: Then he opened his own.

Michael Erlewine: Well, which he kind of stole from Chet. Chet and his people were stupid enough to tell him about the Filmore and he went underneath them and booked it, solid. Took it right out from underneath them and then gave them some dates, but then began to deny them dates. So, that is what he did. But, anyway, you've given me a bunch to chew on here. I'm going to go and try to sort it out. And I'm glad that we found you.

Greg Davidson: Well talk to Eric's friend. His friend is a real straight shooter.

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Interview with Promoter Russ Gibb by Michael Erlewine

23 April 2003, sound recording.

[Russ Gibb pretty much started the dancehall scene here in the Midwest when he opened the Grande Ballroom in 1966. Gibb is also an educator and teacher, working in the public schools for most of his life. A wonderful being and kind person, it was a privilege to interview this man.]

Michael Erlewine: You had considerable experience with putting on dance events before the Grande Ballroom, correct?

Russ Gibb: Oh yeah. God, that started three or four years easy before the Grande.

Michael Erlewine: I understand that you were a schoolteacher.

Russ Gibb: Yeah, I was a schoolteacher. Well, my first thing was that I had been working at WWGTV and I knew Bob Maxwell. Previous to that I had worked at Keener (WKNR) carrying records. And so I knew a lot of the disk jockey. The one that I knew, probably the best was Snader. He did the first MTV. They had invented a video-jukebox, but they didn't call it video. It was called Moviola. And you put fifty cents in it at the time and you got a film loop on a rear projection screen. I'd seen two or three of them in various restaurants and teen hangouts, where they would take big bands like Glen Miller and Woody Herman. They had clips of them.

So, when television first started, and they didn't have tape, when I was working in it. And so, he had a TV show live, where they had Bob Maxwell, And

he would play Snader telescriptions. It would be like sort of what MTV became, that was long before MTV.

Michael Erlewine: Interesting.

Russ Gibb: They had been used for fillers in between major movies in theaters, years ago.

Michael Erlewine: Well that makes sense.

Russ Gibb: Yeah. And they'd put on some big bands, and that would attract the younger audience to the motion pictures.

Michael Erlewine: Sure.

Russ Gibb: Well he did a show, called "Man About Town," or something like that, and he would play these. So I knew Bob Maxwell, when I was teaching, and I was teaching in junior high in Howell, Michigan. Well, it was actually a junior high and a high school in the same building.

Michael Erlewine: And you taught what?

Russ Gibb: I was teaching science, and social studies. And what had happened is that they didn't allow dancing up in Howell in those days in the schools. Howell is a pretty conservative little community.

Michael Erlewine: Yep.

Russ Gibb: And in fact, with our contract.... And by the way we got paid \$2200 a year.

Michael Erlewine: Wow.

Russ Gibb: And we had to drive the school bus if the guy was sick. We had to coach one sport, and if we wanted to drink alcohol, we had to go 21 miles out

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of town and that was to Williamson, and that was written in our contract.

Michael Erlewine: Your kidding.

Russ Gibb: And we had to attend church twice a week and....

Michael Erlewine: Oh...that's unconstitutional.

Russ Gibb: Well, of course it's unconstitutional, but not back then it wasn't.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Russ Gibb: So, to make a long story short, they didn't allow dancing. So Bob Maxwell had been doing record hops along with Robin Seymour (WKMH) and those guys.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah I remember Robin Seymour.

Russ Gibb: So, I said I'd rent the ...I want to call it the Elks Club, on Michigan and Grand River Avenue. It may have been the VFW. I can't remember. But I rented it and I put on a dance up there on a Saturday, and I made more money than I made in two weeks of teaching.

Michael Erlewine: And this was roughly what year?

Russ Gibb: Oh God... in 1955 or 1956, 1957, around in there. So that was my first experience of making a few bucks. So we did that a couple times, and then, by that time Gary Stevens was at Keener, and I don't remember when that came. But I was working at Keener part-time. By this time I was teaching elsewhere, okay?

Michael Erlewine: You were working at Keener doing what?

Russ Gibb: I was doing the Sunday jocks, and I was doing record hops. So

at that point, I was looking around and I knew that I could make some money in these record hops. So, I looked around and I got Gary Stevens to agree to be a permanent disc jockey for these sock-hops.

And we put on shows. We rented a UAW hall out on Van Born somewhere. I don't know where it was, and we got it every Friday or Saturday night. And we called it the Pink Pussycat Club.

Gary Stevens named it, because he'd been to LA at that time, I hadn't by that time. And there was a movie called the "Pink Panther" or something...

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, it was close.

Russ Gibb: So he decided we would name it that, and every week he would get whomever was in town. The record promoters would bring the recording artist and they'd mime to their records. We didn't have a live band then.

Russ Gibb: And that's where it started and that's what gave me the idea that you could make money on it.

Michael Erlewine: As a young person, what kind of music were you brought up with?

Russ Gibb: I was brought up with what we called "pop" back then. Except that, I liked rhythm and blues, and in those days, there were a couple places. The Black and White thing wasn't what it was back in the 70's or 80's. They were called Black & Tan, and they were clubs where Black artists played. For instance, what is now Orchestra Hall was called then Paradise Theater. And I would go down there and I would see... I always liked what they called 'race music'.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

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Russ Gibb: And I would listen... in those days radio was everything, and I would listen late at night and I would hear stations from down south, and all over the place.

I remember going down to the Paradise and we'd see the black artists, I saw Moms Mabley. I saw Ivory Joe Hunter. I know I saw Count Basie a couple of times. He also played at the Graystone Ballroom one time.

Michael Erlewine: What year was this about?

Russ Gibb: 1948 or 1949. 1950.

Michael Erlewine: Well, I'm really glad we're getting this, because it just really shows that you didn't stumble on music, that you were into early on, and race music at that.

Russ Gibb: Oh yeah. Oh sure. In fact, I remember, that Nellie Lutcher was the first black artist that I think, in my mind, crossed the White radio...and Ivory Joe and Ed MacKenzie were playing. Ed was known as Jack the Bellboy back then.

Nellie Lutcher had a record called, "Hurry On Down to My House" and "Fine Brown Frame," and that was really one of the first black artists that I heard on what we called regular radio, on pop radio.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Russ Gibb: And then of course Chubby Checkers, and you know the whole thing.

Meeting Bill Graham

Michael Erlewine: I would like to know how you Bill Graham for the first time.

Russ Gibb: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Did you ever meet him more than once?

Russ Gibb: I met him twice, and I talked to him many times on the phone.

Russ Gibb: Well, I went out to visit Jim Dunbar; he had just gotten married. He was what J.P. McCarthy was to Detroit, in fact, Jim Dunbar is in the Radio Hall of Fame.

Michael Erlewine: So you went out...it had to be the late summer of 1966?

Russ Gibb: Somewhere in and around there, yeah.

Michael Erlewine: I would like to pin that time down. You mentioned at one point you saw the Byrd's...

Russ Gibb: We saw the Byrds' unloading.

Michael Erlewine: But it was at that trip?

Russ Gibb: Yep.

Michael Erlewine: Okay, if that's true, then it's very, very clear time-wise, which means you are a fast mover, because the Byrd's only played in June of 1966 at the Cow Palace S.F., but you saw them at the Fillmore Auditorium.

Russ Gibb: I saw them at the Fillmore.

Michael Erlewine: The first time they played at the Fillmore September 16 of 1966.

Russ Gibb: Now here's a problem I have with that. If I were teaching, and I was still teaching in those times...

Michael Erlewine: Okay.

Russ Gibb: I would have been back in school in September. But...I remember them [the Byrds] loading up. I remember their truck. I distinctly remember that

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because of the strange spelling in the word Byrd's.

Michael Erlewine: Okay, so you think you were out there earlier than September.

Russ Gibb: Yep, I think I was out there during the summer vacation.

Michael Erlewine: Well, they weren't there then. They were at the Cow Palace in San Francisco in June, but they were not at the Fillmore until September 16th. Ummm.....so that's confusing... Well, it's okay to let these things be confused, because we'll sort it out. You know Ben Edmonds, of course.

Russ Gibb: Yeah, yeah sure I know him.

MORE ON BILL GRAHAM

Russ Gibb: I had met his wife previously. She was from New Orleans. So I went out there and Bill Graham had been on his show, and gave him some free passes. Because he was plugging his show. You know Bill was an entrepreneur.

Michael Erlewine: That's right.

Russ Gibb: And by the way he was from New York and talked with a New York accent.

Michael Erlewine: He certainly did.

Russ Gibb: And, I always remember, we'd go into this place and I'm knocked out. And Jim of course knew that I had been doing other music things, sock-hops and things.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Russ Gibb: And making some money on it. So then we went out, and we go there and we get into Bill's private office, and that's when I was introduced the

first time to him. And I say, "Well I'm really impressed with this. Well, I've never seen a light show before."

And I always remember Bill Graham's first comment when I asked him, well, where do you buy these things and how do you, you know...and he said, "Where you from?" And I say I'm from Detroit. He said "How far is that from here?" I said "Oh, probably about 2000 or so miles. He says "Okay, I'll tell you what...and then he gave me the name of the guy who had built his strobe, was very helpful, and that was the beginning of our friendship.

Michael Erlewine: Did you also get a tour, like behind the stage and all that?

Russ Gibb: Yeah, yeah, oh yeah, yeah.

Michael Erlewine: So he took you around?

Russ Gibb: That's was the first time I saw a light show, where they, you know ... it was overhead projectors in those days.

Michael Erlewine: So how did this impact you?

Russ Gibb: Well, when I came back I immediately started to look for a place.

Michael Erlewine: Let's talk about that for a minute.

The Trumpet Poster



The Trumpet Poster

Michael Erlewine: Ben wrote an article on the Grande Ballroom that you might remember. It was published in Wes Wilson's publication "Off the Wall." Now I'm going to talk about that 'trumpet poster' which is called... Now what you told before is that you thought, when you finally took over that venue, you found a bunch of them laying around...

Russ Gibb: That's what I recall...

Michael Erlewine: And that you a little bit later you said that you put one up on the wall just for fun.

Russ Gibb: Yep.

Michael Erlewine: But, what Ben writes is this, and he must have talked to you, so let me read you this, just a short paragraph.

Russ Gibb: Okay.

Michael Erlewine: Okay, so he wrote the following. In it, it says, and this is you speaking:

Russ Gibb: Allright.

Quote from a 2-part article on the Grande Ballroom, by well-known music

writer Ben Edmonds, from "Off the Wall."

"Do you know anyone who can do a poster for us? You know, something wild like they do out in San Francisco." Russ Gibb was looking at the grand opening artwork he'd commissioned from a printer friend of a friend. It was dreadful.

Bill Graham had emphasized posters as the best way to reach the new music audience, but this - featuring a cornball illustration of a trumpet - looked more like an invitation to Sing Along With Mitch. So when he called Rob Tyner of the MC5, the local band he'd hired to open the ballroom, "Uncle Russ" (as the singer had dubbed him) was panicked. "

Michael Erlewine: " Now...he's taking some liberties with your emotions and stuff.

Russ Gibb: Yeah right.

Michael Erlewine: He suggests that you went out and had one printed. Is that so?

Russ Gibb: No.

Michael Erlewine: Do you remember that?

Russ Gibb: Those were found.

Michael Erlewine: What?

Russ Gibb: Those were at the Grande Ballroom when I took it over. They were in a package... They had never been used. That [poster] goes back to practically, I would say the...early...late 1940's or early 1950's style of art.

Michael Erlewine: Okay, well since it said a specific date, it said "Friday September 16."

Russ Gibb: Well, then... I guarantee you, to my recollection, that was, ee

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found that thing. There were times I couldn't remember that, you know. There were so many things, but I think back on it now, and it seems to me that we found several of them, I mean 20 or 30, I don't know... but... and we put them up just about the Grande Ballroom.

Michael Erlewine: Okay.

Russ Gibb: We were at the Grande Ballroom.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Russ Gibb: I don't think we ever distributed those.

Michael Erlewine: Let me tell you what years that could've been, just for the fun. If we look at a perpetual calendar, they could've been in 1966, of course. They could've been in 1960 or 1955, and of course they could've been earlier than that, they could've been back to 199 or 1938, 1932, or even 1927.

Russ Gibb: Okay, now 1948 and 1949, they were still doing shows like that at the Grande.

Michael Erlewine: Okay, so...

Russ Gibb: That was still a dance ballroom.

Michael Erlewine: On that trumpet poster all it says is "Grande Ballroom Opening. Friday, September 16th , and along the bottom, it says, "Dancing Every Friday and Saturday."

Russ Gibb: That's it. Now that wasn't one of our original posters. I thought it, at one time. It seems to me, somebody I mentioned...I think, yeah I can't...but, as I look at it, and think at it now, "No, because... so I don't know, you know."

Michael Erlewine: If my understanding is right, you had come back from Bill Graham and your first experience at the Fillmore knowing that there was a hip new kind of poster happening.

Russ Gibb: Oh yeah.

Michael Erlewine: And so you wanted one of those.

Russ Gibb: Well, yeah, but again, I didn't know where you got that, and it was John Sinclair who turned me onto what's his name...

Michael Erlewine: Rob Tyner... and then Gary Grimshaw?

Russ Gibb: Yeah right.

Michael Erlewine: John Sinclair was just here for a couple of days, and we went over his whole story in detail. He can't remember the trumpet poster at all, because he says he didn't know you then.

Russ Gibb: That's right.

Michael Erlewine: But what he did say, is that he was writing a column in the Fifth Estate at that point, and suggested that we look there to see if you had announced a premature opening for the Grande Ballroom. He's sure he would have written about it, because he stated that he was always hard-up for any kind music-related event in those times.

Russ Gibb: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: But I have not been able to locate those...

***Michael Erlewine:** One thing that you told me last time we talked, that was so interesting that I would like you to repeat it or go over the same area, was that John had such an influence in terms of

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advising you in how the Grande Ballroom should look and feel.

Russ Gibb: Yes, exactly. Well, look, I give John Sinclair credit. First of all, he brought me the light show. I didn't know them. ...Barry Kramer, who was sort of hip, but he was into the business aspect of it. Sinclair was doing it because of the love of what was going on.

Michael Erlewine: True.

Russ Gibb: And, quite frankly, he...many times he would say....In fact, he got me the Fugs. Sure, I didn't know about the Fugs.

Michael Erlewine: Well, he knew Ed Sanders.

Russ Gibb: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Right? Because they're both poets.

Russ Gibb: Well, exactly, and that's how we brought them.

Michael Erlewine: I mean I think the last time we talked....I hate to do this, because it sounds like I'm priming the pump, but I am trying to go back to that conversation we had. You sort of said that you owned the Grande, but you were running the concessions and stuff and John was really organizing the look and the feel of the thing and helping you find music.

Russ Gibb: Well, I give John a lot of credit on it. I was doing the books.

Michael Erlewine: Right [laughs].

Russ Gibb: And keeping the place together, but many of the band selections and things came from John Sinclair. Yeah, sure.

Michael Erlewine: But didn't at some point Jeep Holland do the booking?

Russ Gibb: Yes, Jeep helped out too. But Jeep was later. It was John at the real... at the beginning.

Michael Erlewine: I see.

Russ Gibb: Remember, as the MC5 started to get notoriety, John Sinclair became more and more involved with them and the UP.

Michael Erlewine: That's right. So now we need to go back. I'd like you to tell me about, because this is really an important event, when you went out and met Bill Graham.

Russ Gibb: Right.

Michael Erlewine: And just the whole thing. Obviously it had a huge impact on you.

Russ Gibb: Well, he had been plugging his thing. And he'd been on Jim's TV show. Dunbar had a TV show. He was on KGO, and by the way until just last year, he left it. He had been midnight man, program director...

Michael Erlewine: And where is this San Francisco.

Russ Gibb: San Francisco.

Michael Erlewine: Okay.

Russ Gibb: KGO Radio is ABC Radio there. And Jim Dunbar hired J.P. McCarthy. He became the J.P. McCarthy of San Francisco, but he hired J.P. to go to San Francisco and J.P. didn't work out in San Francisco, but Jim did. And he's now in the Radio Hall of Fame. He's done everything. He's done television. He's done interviews. He's done talk, and now he's doing jazz, because my early interest in jazz came from Jim Dunbar.

Michael Erlewine: I see.

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Russ Gibb: He and I were buddies all through high school and college.

Michael Erlewine: Wow. So you went out to visit him.

Russ Gibb: We went out to visit when he got married.

Michael Erlewine: Okay.

The Opening of the Grande Ballroom

Russ Gibb: Well, I knew there were a couple ballrooms. There was the one that, finally, Ernie Durham took over. There was on Finkle Avenue, by Livernois. I knew there was a ballroom there. I knew there was one down in what is now Mexican-town on Vernor Highway. Because remember, when I was growing up, dancing was really big, jitterbugging and things like that. And the mambo and things. So there were big bands still, sort of hanging on, and they would play. They'd play at Edgewater, the amusement park. And I knew there was the Vanity Ballroom, and I knew there was the Grande Ballroom, because I had been to all of them, as a customer. So I started to research them and I found the Grande, and it was closed. And it was being used as a warehouse, a mattress warehouse. They were just using it for storage.

Michael Erlewine: You mean just new mattresses, old ones?

Russ Gibb: Well, I don't know what they were. It was storage. The guy was renting out... Kliemann was his name. And he, when I told him that I was interested in it, that I couldn't afford it, he said "Well, I'll tell you what," he'd said, "If your interested in the building, we could give you a lease to buy thing,

where you rent and then you have a chance to buy it.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Russ Gibb: And that's when I met Gabe Glance. Because that's when Gabe... he was Kliemann's son-in-law, and he was sort of a business guy.

Michael Erlewine: Okay.

Russ Gibb: That's where we...I dealt with him, but it was really Kliemann's building...

Michael Erlewine: So you came right back from San Francisco and did this?

Russ Gibb: And I started to look around.

Michael Erlewine: How long...

Russ Gibb: And then I went down to Wayne State University and I remember I was at the Fifth Estate. It was on Holden, I think, Holden Avenue. And I went in there, because that was the college newspaper, and I knew I'd have to attract the kind of kids that I saw in San Francisco. They were younger college-age kids.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Russ Gibb: And that's when I first got introduced... I think I met Harv' Oshinski, and I think I met the other guy, can't think of his name, who ran it. And they turned me on to John Sinclair.

Michael Erlewine: I see, so you knew John before Rob Tyner or Gary Grimshaw?

Russ Gibb: Oh yes. Oh yes.

Michael Erlewine: Okay. That's an important thing that, so you met John first and John turned you on to Rob?

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Russ Gibb: To the MC5. I'd never heard of the MC5 until then but, by the way, after I talked to them...to him, he told me they were going to perform down in Wayne, Michigan, at the Wayne Civic Center, and the first time I went down there, they were all dressed in suits. They looked like the Beatles.

Michael Erlewine: Wow.

Russ Gibb: That's was...they were just getting involved with John, I think.

Michael Erlewine: Right, John Sinclair took care of that.

Russ Gibb: Yep, yep, oh yeah.

Michael Erlewine: [laughs].

Russ Gibb: ...And they changed it, but they were very nice guys, plus they were from my neighborhood, I mean downriver guys.

Michael Erlewine: Right. And did you like the music?

Russ Gibb: You know...I....to be honest with you, I didn't quite understand it. But, my business sense said this was happening.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Russ Gibb: And then I started to go and get some records that I never had before, and I remember buying English records and having to go, where the hell did I go to find them? English imports? It wasn't easy, I remember that. And I started to listen to some of the things, that's when I first heard the Rolling Stones, the Flowers album.

Now I remember also, about this time, the Beatles had been kicking their heels. The English thing was beginning to be talked about in the media and so forth and so forth.

Michael Erlewine: That's right. Now, how long do you think it took you from the time you came back from meeting Bill to put the scene together.

Russ Gibb: Wasn't long. It was pretty quick, within three or four weeks, as I recall.

Michael Erlewine: And...

Russ Gibb: Maybe at the most five weeks. Seems to me... Didn't we open the Grande in October?

Michael Erlewine: October 7.

Russ Gibb: Yeah, sure. So that was it.

Michael Erlewine: So do you recall any serious delays or was it...

Russ Gibb: No, it was pretty quick. I remember the first money I had to gather up was 700 bucks. And I gathered up 700 bucks.

Michael Erlewine: You mean gathered up, meaning, to put into it?

Russ Gibb: Put into it, yeah, because I had to give down payment for the place, and I had to...

Michael Erlewine: How much repairs and redecorating had to be done...

Russ Gibb: Well, not a lot, at the beginning [laughs]; we just cleaned the goddamned place.

Michael Erlewine: Right, so then this idea of a false or premature opening doesn't make much sense either, because they're trying to say, the people may want to say, well, you tried to open Friday, September 16th, but failed..

Russ Gibb: No, no, no no.

Michael Erlewine: You have no memory of that?

Russ Gibb: No, no, no.

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Michael Erlewine: Because it wasn't ready or the paint...

Russ Gibb: No, no, no, we cleaned it up, I remember that. The main thing was going into the 'johns'. There were a couple of 'johns', and cleaning up and worrying about the neighborhood.

Michael Erlewine: So you didn't, re-paint it or...

Russ Gibb: No. I'll tell you what we did. We got some aluminum, Reynolds-wrap paper and put that on the presidium arch.

Michael Erlewine: Mmmhmm [laughs].

Russ Gibb: And...we did paint, come to think of it. My uncle who was a painter. He just passed away about three months ago... He was a painter at Hudson's. He came in and painted the two walls on either side of the stage white, so that we'd have something to project on. That was the only painting we did.

Michael Erlewine: But, to the best of your recollection, you don't recall any delay with the opening?

Russ Gibb: No.

Michael Erlewine: And here's another way to ask the same question, is that, when you did open, like this trumpet poster, which doesn't even look like it's from the 1960's era, has no band on it...

Russ Gibb: No.

Michael Erlewine: You certainly did open with the names of actual bands.

Russ Gibb: Yeah, because John Sinclair by this time was involved with me.

Michael Erlewine: Right. So, I'm just trying to help these people research this.

Russ Gibb: Lot of things get twisted in memory, I got to tell you. But I know we didn't have a false opening. I would bet my bottom dollar on that. I know we didn't.

I do remember going out, to Arlen's Discount Store, which was a discount store at the time, and buying some toys. And also, getting something called a "Black Light."

Michael Erlewine: Yeah.

Russ Gibb: Now we didn't have the strobe right the first day.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, I believe it.

Russ Gibb: Because I had to pay 300 bucks for that, which was a lot of money.

Michael Erlewine: You bet.

Russ Gibb: And I had to order from San Francisco, and that came ... probably, two or three weeks after we opened, we got the strobe going.

Grande Artists

Michael Erlewine: Okay, cool, that's really helpful. I'd like to ask you a couple of questions about the different artists.

Russ Gibb: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: So the first artist was Gary Grimshaw.

Michael Erlewine: Oh definitely, it's definitely.... He's the very first poster.

Russ Gibb: Well, was that the 'Seagull?'

Michael Erlewine: Yeah.

Russ Gibb: Yeah, sure.

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Michael Erlewine: And so, do you recall meeting him or anything about him, or what was it like to work with him. Was he easy to work with?

Russ Gibb: Yes. He's very gentle.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Russ Gibb: He's a very mild, quiet, a decent, decent human being. That's all I can tell you about Gary. In fact, I could have...I gave him money for those.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Russ Gibb: I could own all the rights. I never did. Even when he wanted to republish, I said "What the hell. He's a young artist. He's struggling.... Life has been good to me, why should I...."

Michael Erlewine: And he is a very fine person.

Russ Gibb: Yes, exactly. You betcha. And he was always a gentleman to work with. Sometimes, he wasn't as prompt as I'd like because, I think he got high.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, I'm sure he did. [laughs]

Russ Gibb: But....you know, I mean I began to understand that... philosophy a little bit.

Michael Erlewine: Now speaking of high, were you into that a lot? Did you get high?

Russ Gibb: No, because I had to count the cash.

Michael Erlewine: So you weren't into smoking pot.

Russ Gibb: No, no, no, no.

Michael Erlewine: Did you ever take acid?

Russ Gibb: Nope.

Michael Erlewine: So you just... Were out of that whole thing?

Russ Gibb: That whole scene is... I just sort of looked at, on.... And in fact I got frightened, because so many artists I met, like Janis Joplin, Keith Moon ...and some of these other guys, they were dying around us at that time.

Michael Erlewine: Your right. Yeah, I remember...

Russ Gibb: Yeah, and so I never really had that kind of interest in it.

Michael Erlewine: I remember meeting Janis Joplin at the Grande Ballroom, sitting around where the performers sit, on like a little circular couch.

Russ Gibb: Yep, yep. Yeah, sure.

Michael Erlewine: And she was sitting drinking whiskey.

Russ Gibb: Yeah, whiskey, Southern Comfort and tea. We always had to get it for her. In fact, one time, I had to take her down to Wyoming and Michigan Avenue to the clinic there, to a doctor, and have throat treated.

The other story about Janis. I had to drop her a couple of times, downtown, by Wayne State University in an apartment where she knew this guy, a guitar player, and everybody says she was a lesbian, but she had a friend, a guy friend... who played guitar down there. And I remember twice driving here down.

Grande Handbills

Michael Erlewine: Yeah. Now, another thing that I'd like be clear about, that keeps bubbling up is why you switched from posters to handbills?

Russ Gibb: Costs.

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Michael Erlewine: Okay, so costs, but the last time we talked to you, you also said because there was...

Russ Gibb: They were easier to get out....

Michael Erlewine: You said something about the kids could distribute them.

Russ Gibb: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. We had a pass... some guys trying to get from me and offering money for it.

Michael Erlewine: What, your free ticket?

Russ Gibb: Yeah, yeah, yeah...you get a free ticket to the Grande? And Gary Grimshaw drew those.



Good for one free trip

Michael Erlewine: Yeah I know he did, and it says "Good for one free trip."

Russ Gibb: Yeah, right.

Michael Erlewine: I have an image of it. I don't have a real one.

Russ Gibb: I have a real one.

Michael Erlewine: Ah...

Russ Gibb: Even though I must say the one that I do have, my dog chewed a little bit, put a hole...

Michael Erlewine: [laughs] that's great.

Russ Gibb: I don't know how he got it. Of all the goddamned things for him to chew when he was a puppy.

Michael Erlewine: Well, I've got images of some of these, because I can't afford to have all the real ones.

Russ Gibb: That's when we really started to pass out the handbills, because I'd give the kids a pass to the Grande, to pass them out, and we got a lot more coverage. If you put up a poster, a lot of people didn't want to put it up anywhere...you know. The main stores wouldn't put them, maybe a record store would or a head-shop.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Russ Gibb: But that was about it.

Michael Erlewine: So it was the cost of the posters and the idea that if you went to cards...

Russ Gibb: Yeah...now the card idea, was... it seems to me, and again I think it was John Sinclair, who said we could mail them out if we had cards, because the first ones I don't think had anything on the back of them.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, that might be.

Russ Gibb: Then later on he printed a post-card on the back. I mean, Gary Grimshaw did.

Michael Erlewine: That's right.

Russ Gibb: So, there was a cost thing and a convenience thing and to spread the word, because John was always telling me that we had to...and I remember him distinctly telling me this. He said, "Russ, you got to let people know on the West Coast and the East Coast." You know, because we were feeling like orphans in the middle.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Russ Gibb: ...that people would be sending these out all over and word was

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that it worked. Because people were collecting them all over the world.

Michael Erlewine: So the cards just seemed like a good thing.

Russ Gibb: Oh yeah, oh yeah.

Hendrix-Toronto Experience

Michael Erlewine: Let's just go over your famous story of the Hendrix/Toronto, where you actually made a trip there?

Russ Gibb: Yeah, yeah. You mean about the "Free?"

Michael Erlewine: Yeah.

Russ Gibb: Well...[laughs]. Well we had been looking for a place in Toronto. You know, we had been taken around. I'd been looking at the... We opened up a place and I can't remember if that was before or after Cleveland, but we were beginning to expand our horizons. We said "All right, let them have New York. Let them have L.A. Goddamned it, we'll start going in the mid-west."

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Russ Gibb: And, so...we put him [Hendrix] up in the Gardens, as I recall. I can't... I think that's where we played.

Michael Erlewine: Okay.

Russ Gibb: And we got up there and all of a sudden there's all kinds of tickets. I mean, more than we sold.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Russ Gibb: And then one of the underground papers popped the story that if you ... they had a fine line, and it says "Free Means Free Everything."

Michael Erlewine: Ah ha.

Russ Gibb: And they had printed that in one scratch on one of the lines, and you

had to magnify it. Christ, I don't know how many times. You could do it on the computer easy today. Back then it must have been ... they had to work at it.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Russ Gibb: And they, they forged hundreds of tickets and gave them out.

Michael Erlewine: Do you have any of those?

Russ Gibb: No.

Michael Erlewine: I'd love to have just a picture of one.

Russ Gibb: It would be a collector's item if I did...

Michael Erlewine: So what did you do? Was there anything you could do about...

Russ Gibb: No, no, no...there was nothing. Actually, yeah... .once we were aware that something was going on, and I forget how we were told, because later on it was in the paper, and you could archive that, somewhere in those papers in Toronto, they did a story on it. And it says "free everything."

And it seems to me, we were able, somehow, I can't remember if it was the paper or the thing....and we did get a magnifying glass and we could magnify it, so we could read it.

Who-Toronto Card

Michael Erlewine: Really. Now what about the "Who Toronto?" What was that? There was a Who Toronto card?

Russ Gibb: No, that happened.

Michael Erlewine: It did. I guess something must have happened to the cards, because there are just a few in whole world.

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Russ Gibb: No, no, that happened....

Michael Erlewine: You don't know why the cards disappeared?

Russ Gibb: No I don't. It's like the mystery of the David Bowie card, when he changed his name to "Ziggy Stardust." We had passed out, I don't know, maybe couple hundred of them.

Michael Erlewine: Mmmhmm.

Russ Gibb: And then we get a telegram, and it says he's stopped using his name, he's changed his image. He's now "Stardust," "Ziggy Stardust." And we pulled back those cards. Wish I had them. And those were done by Donnie Dope.

Russ Gibb: You ever see that card?

Michael Erlewine: I may have seen a picture of it.

Russ Gibb: It has him standing looking like a hippy with bell bottoms and, you know, very. He looked like he belonged in a disco, and then there's all kind of little, and if you look very closely at those flowers, there little faces in them, that was Donnie's.

Michael Erlewine: What about the things you did in Cleveland and....

Russ Gibb: Well, the Cleveland thing was really incredible, because they had a black mayor there at the time. And we couldn't believe the handouts that were being passed out. The mayor himself never did that, but... the police, there was a lot of corruption.

Michael Erlewine: Oh really.

Russ Gibb: Well, there was a lot of, you know, cross my hand with silver. Now that one, we didn't stay there very long. No.

Michael Erlewine: What about Cincinnati?

Russ Gibb: Cincinnati, that was just a big pop concert.

Michael Erlewine: And same with St. Louis.

Russ Gibb: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Michael Erlewine: I'm still trying to find one of those posters, or either of them. They're pretty hard to find.

Russ Gibb: You know I gave a lot of them to Ben. I don't know if he ever told you that.

Michael Erlewine: Ben Edmonds?

Russ Gibb: Yeah. I gave literally boxes of posters to him. He'd cut some kind of deal with the guy who was from ArtRock or something.

Michael Erlewine: Mmmhmm.

Russ Gibb: And my deal was that he would set up a scholarship for kids with that money. The guy sent me a check for 1300 bucks.

Michael Erlewine: Is this Ben Edmonds or Phil Cushway?

Russ Gibb: Yeah, Ben was the one who cut the deal.

Michael Erlewine: Oh I see.

Russ Gibb: Ben came here in his car and picked them up and they got to California some way, and then I get a check for 1300 bucks. And I was insulted. I never cashed it. I still have it somewhere.

Michael Erlewine: But are those the ones that ended up with Phil Cushway?

Russ Gibb: I don't know what his name. Yeah, it was some kind of deal.

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Michael Erlewine: With ArtRock?

Russ Gibb: Ben set it up.

Michael Erlewine: The ArRock thing?

Russ Gibb: Yeah, right, right, right. Well, ask Ben about it, because I was furious, I know I never cashed it.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Russ Gibb: I remember I was so insulted, 1300 bucks or something. I think, wait a minute I gave him 1000's of dollars, I'm figuring that, at that time, I thinking well maybe it was \$50,000 or \$60,000 it would be worth, he'd set-up a fund for kids and...

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Russ Gibb: Never happened, so what can I say.

Michael Erlewine: That's terrible. Any special stories about any of the artists?

Detroit Riots

Russ Gibb: Yeah well, you know, the guy that I used on my theme song, the folk-singer. He played the Grande a lot for me.

Michael Erlewine: Early in the Grande or later?

Russ Gibb: Many times, and when they had the riots in Detroit in 1967, he was with me, and Carter Collins, the drummer, the Black drummer were staying with me.

Michael Erlewine: Are you thinking of Tim Buckley?

Russ Gibb: Tim Buckley.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Russ Gibb: And he had played that night, and we were on the roof of the Grande and it wasn't far from Twelfth

Street, where it all started, and we remembered hearing sirens. It must have been around one-thirty. It was a hot muggy night.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Russ Gibb: One-thirty, two o' clock we were up on roof of the Grande, a bunch of us. And we decided we'd have a picnic the next morning, and we went out to Kensington, and we hired, you know, the Grande cops to get a little area, clear an area for us, so we wouldn't be bothered if the guys wanted to smoke.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Russ Gibb: We went out there and on our way back, we saw smoke coming from...and we were coming in Grand River Avenue. And at Greenville, we were turned back, and of course then we turned the radio on and we find out that...you know...a riot is going on, and of course, Carter was worried about his drums and I was worried about some of our equipment there.

So, they had been staying at my house, Carter and Tim Buckley, and we decided we would go into the city. Now we were being told on the radio: you can't go in the city. Stay away, blah, blah, blah. So what we did is, while we were driving here, in Dearborn, Tim and I were in the front seat and Carter, the black guy, was hiding in the back. When got over to around Joy Road, Carter drove the car and Tim and I jumped in the back.

Michael Erlewine: [laughs].

Russ Gibb: And we got to the Grande, and there were already people rioting, breaking things, and we pulled up around the side of the Grande, got out,

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and we ran in and we got some of our equipment out. Carter got some of his drums, and then we're loading it up, because they thought we were shopping too. And I will always remember, Carter, grabbing a couple of the young black youngsters who running by, and said, "Hey, how come you didn't burn here?" They burned all around; they never touched the Grande. And the kids said, "Hey man, you got music. You're cool." I'll always remember that. And they never touched the Grande.

Michael Erlewine: Well, that's a great story.

Russ Gibb: And always remember that, and...that's how we got to the Grande, and of course a day later they brought in tanks and guns to quell the riot. It was Sunday, I guess, I don't know...

Interview with Randy Tuten by Michael Erlewine

[Randy Tuten is a poster artist for all seasons, working equally well in any and all styles, his own or others. Tuten does it all – draw, design, use color. You name it. I greatly enjoyed interviewing this (purportedly) reclusive artist in his home in Half Moon Bay. Tuten was anything by reclusive and his work is classic.]

May 8, 2001
El Grandada, CA
(Near Half-Moon Bay, CA)

Early Times



Randy Tuten, May 2001

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Michael Erlewine: What I really want to know, and I'm sure you've been asked a thousand times, is how did you get into it, where did you start? Your rep is that you have more chops than a lot of the artists. How did you get them?

Randy Tuten: Well, how I got started was I was just a fan of posters in general.

Michael Erlewine: Right. Where did that come from and from what age?

Randy Tuten: Well, from very early. I liked movie posters a lot. I was enthralled by movie posters, and then I started to see some art-type posters, and then I started seeing the rock and roll posters.

Michael Erlewine: What years are we talking about, I mean roughly.

Randy Tuten: We're talking about like, you know, late 50's early 60's. I just I like posters. In high school I used to ...

Michael Erlewine: And you're from like L.A. area, right?

Randy Tuten: Well, I was born in San Francisco. My mother and father moved down to L.A. in the late 50's.

Michael Erlewine: And your birthday is what?

Randy Tuten: September 28, 1946, in San Francisco.

Michael Erlewine: Ok then. Where did art come into your life? Even before posters, I mean were you drawing as a kid?

Randy Tuten: Well, I was drawing as a kid. I used to draw, just kid drawings.

Michael Erlewine: Cartoons or?

Randy Tuten: I really wouldn't call them cartoons. They were just like, you know, cars, and tanks, and boats, and that kind of stuff. You know, when you're a kid, you start... It's like Crayola drawing, very much like Crayola drawing. You draw the sun coming up, with the little beams coming out, and trees and birds, or you know, a tank battle or whatever it is, battleships, battle or trains, or whatever,

Just kid drawings and that transformed into... I used to hang out with my friends, and go to ice skating rinks or roller-skating, or whatever the social thing was... And I wouldn't literally partake in the social aspect or the physical thing. I would sit around and draw cartoons of my friends ... doing the thing.

Michael Erlewine: And this is what age now roughly? Is it high school yet or?

Randy Tuten: Probably junior high school, somewhere like that.

Michael Erlewine: And in high school, did you keep doing this?

Randy Tuten: In high school, I used to decorate people's binders and do car drawings. Actually, I was doing posters for friends that ran for political office in high school, you know, like class president or cheerleaders. They used to all run for the cheerleaders, and the student body would vote whomever they liked in, you know. And so I used to do posters and signs. Actually, in high school, I was a pretty bad student when it came to history and math, so my art teacher got me to do those signs for the history and math department, which got me passing grades in those subjects.

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So I just kept on drawing. And I just kept doing that. Then I started listening to music and started noticing album covers and then, when the San Francisco scene came along, I started noticing...

Michael Erlewine: You were in San Francisco then?

Randy Tuten: Well, I used to come to San Francisco a lot.

Michael Erlewine: You were in L.A.

Randy Tuten: I was living in L.A., but I used to come up to San Francisco. I don't remember how old I was. You can figure it out.

Michael Erlewine: But you didn't paint cars like Mouse did, and flame jobs?

Randy Tuten: Not professionally, but I did like, for the fun of it. I would do a friends car, but that was later on.

Michael Erlewine: Do you know Mark Arminski? You probably know Mark.

Randy Tuten: I know Mark, yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Mark is painting a truck that's in his garage. It's just incredible. It's the, whole thing, I mean not striping, but the whole thing is...

Randy Tuten: Yeah, the whole thing. Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: How did you get engaged in the 60's thing? What artists were of interest to you? I mean how did you get into it?

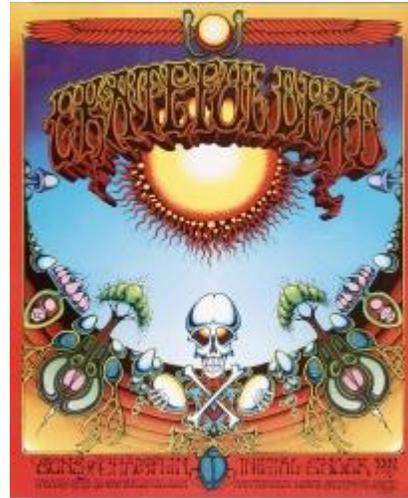
Randy Tuten: Obviously, Stanley Mouse, and Alton Kelley, and Rick Griffin had probably the most influence.

Michael Erlewine: And you met them, I mean early on?

Randy Tuten: I didn't meet them early. I met them later on, but I used to see

Rick's stuff in the surfer magazine, cause I surfed in Southern California, when I was down there.

Michael Erlewine: Oh really, and what are some examples of the Rick's stuff that you personally like? What do you think is his best stuff? I mean people like the Aoxomoxoa?



Rick Griffin's Aoxomoxoa

Randy Tuten: Yeah, Aoxomoxoa is beautiful, but the Aoxomoxoa poster from Hawaii is actually better, but you know always, each to his own. I mean Rick actually thought that the Jimmy Hendrix eyeball was an albatross around his neck, cause that's all people ever wanted to talk about.

!P CP005895 " Rick Griffin's Hawaiiin Aoxomoxoa"

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, very recognizable.

Randy Tuten: And so, they'd always want him to paint that or draw that.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Randy Tuten: So, he always felt that was an albatross around his neck. But what pieces of Rick's did I think? All his stuff is great. The heart and torch in

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hand for Big Brother is incredible. I used to have that art work.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, that's wonderful.

Randy Tuten: But I traded it somewhere along the line.

Randy Tuten: Yeah, and so those guys influenced me, but there were record cover things that... I mean I like some of the R&B boxing poster style stuff too, just the block lettering stuff. I always liked that stuff, so there's a vast array of poster designs you can apply to things.

Michael Erlewine: Did any of the artists take you under their wing? Who befriended you, if any?

Randy Tuten: Yeah. Nobody befriended me really.

Michael Erlewine: Was there a mentor among the group?

Randy Tuten: No. I mean I had a few mentors, but they were just all in my mind.

Michael Erlewine: (laughs) Ok.

Randy Tuten: Certainly no one came along and helped me.

Michael Erlewine: Right, and did you ever become friendly, I mean, you met all of them eventually and

Randy Tuten: Well, I feel like I'm friends with Stanley Mouse and I was certainly friends with Rick Griffin and friends with Alton Kelley...

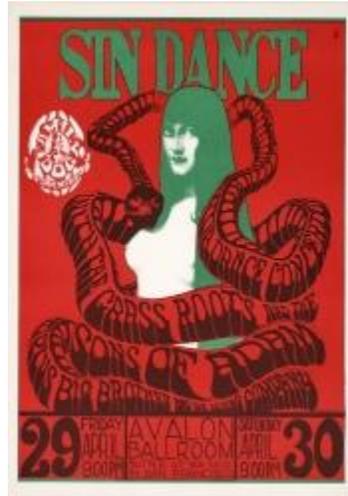
Michael Erlewine: What about Wes Wilson? Did you meet him? Did you get along with him?

Randy Tuten: I got along with him Ok. I was never really a big fan of Wes' work. I liked a lot of his stuff and his best

pieces I think are the Paul Butterfield Blues Band with the hand on the head. And the Lenny Bruce, I think, is a just a really incredible design and there was something...oh, the "Sin Dance."



Butterfield Blues Band FD-003



Sin Dance FD-006

You know there's certain pieces that are more commercial. You know Wes always liked his paintings, always thought his paintings were the best thing about him. I always thought his paintings were lackluster, compared to some of the posters that he designed. Yeah, I like a lot of his posters.

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Michael Erlewine: How did you get out of the scene? You did a lot with Bill Graham, but you didn't do much with Chet Helms. Is that right?

Randy Tuten: Well, you know, when I first came back to San Francisco, in January of 1967, on a permanent basis, I tried to work for the Family Dog for a year. This is kind of a known story; it's been published before. Jaxon, who was the art director of the Family Dog at the time, a cartoonist guy, and an artist in his own right, was the art director there and I always tried to work for them for a year, and they just constantly rejected my efforts.

Michael Erlewine: And you were doing your kind of stuff then?

Randy Tuten: It really wasn't my kinda' stuff. It was just like a mish-mosh, I would describe myself as a mish-mosh of different successful styles over the years.

Michael Erlewine: You're very flexible.

Randy Tuten: Yeah, whether it be like when you when you want to use a graphic woman on a poster. It's hard to beat a Vargas-type-looking girl. You know, that's just some gorgeous looking stuff. And so I would certainly use a Vargas type style to depict a woman.

Michael Erlewine: No, you're very good. One of the things that I learned putting my database together is when I finally got all these images and I was ready to sort them, and I'd never been able to see a whole groups of things and then I went through your group of things and I was saying " Wow I didn't realize how many different styles that you did, like superb work in. it's just that's 'that' style and that's really good. So I don't

think anyone else has as many style as you've done, to my knowledge.

Randy Tuten: Yeah, the thing that I really like the most is lettering,

Michael Erlewine: Really?

Randy Tuten: That's really what I like. A lot of the times people will be after me to do a poster for them, for no particular thing, just a poster, a nice looking poster. Well, I have a difficulty doing just a nice looking poster, because it's not an advertising thing. I always felt that I was an advertising artist.

Michael Erlewine: Right, and what was your particular interest in letters? What type of letters do you lean toward?

Randy Tuten: There's not any one particular type of lettering that I lean toward... whatever looks good. Whether it be a western style or psychedelic style or exploding lettering or melting lettering or whatever works on the poster.

Michael Erlewine: What venues are you doing things for now? I know you've kept busy. You're stuff still just keeps appearing.

Randy Tuten: Well, I'm working for the Rolling Rock people, back in Pennsylvania now. I'm doing a lot of album covers, I still work for the Grateful Dead occasionally. I still occasionally do some stuff for Bill Graham, but when they SFX people bought the Bill Graham company, that, along with Bill's death, kind of changed everything.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, I think so,

Randy Tuten: Not immediately, but certainly...

Michael Erlewine: They bought up everything in our area as well. What are the areas that you feel have never been

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covered about your life, your art, you know when people... I know that interviews have been done and stuff. I've read some material on you. What stuff do you feel is not covered and you know what questions should I be asking that I'm not? I don't know you as well as some of the other artists.

Randy Tuten: I wouldn't know how to answer that right off the bat here. What things about me are not known, is what you're saying?

Michael Erlewine: Yeah or ought to be more out, better understood?

Randy Tuten: Well, you know, for a long time I always felt that artists that were painters or poets, that kind of stuff was kind of like a cerebral side of the art world, and that I really viewed the commercial advertising side as a different side of the art world. But over the years, a number of people have changed my opinion about that.

Michael Erlewine: I mean like how do you feel now?

Randy Tuten: It's Ok for other people to call me an artist, but I've never felt like I was an artist myself.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, part of my function I hope is to help people to understand, you know. We talked about the memorabilia art before. Memorabilia's been covered. It's not like I deny that. I think that a lot of the stuff is more affordable; affordable, appreciable, collectable art, that you know, as far as I'm concerned is dirt-cheap. Just from the collector's point of view.

Randy Tuten: I guess what I'd have to say about that is I've never felt like that I was someone who did collectable stuff.

I'm someone that does advertising, a commercial artist, if you will.

It's like the things I work on are fairly selective. Obviously, you don't see me doing stuff for a lot of punk bands or you know new-wave music, just cause I don't feel that comfortable around them. Not that there's anything wrong with them, but I think they'd probably be better served by getting some other graphic artist to do something for them.

Michael Erlewine: Someone that's in synch with them.

Randy Tuten: You know someone like Frank Kozik's style, or like a lot of these new bands and artists, nowadays. They want this flash; they want to make some kind of a statement, rather than just being ...I guess I would probably describe my stuff as... I like to do stuff that looks good, but is in good taste.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, well I think you, of all the artists I've had these discussions, you are most consistent, over the length of your career. You're still producing top rate art, some of the other artists are and some of them are not. Some of them peaked or whatever. You haven't really had a peak. Your work is just very steady.

Randy Tuten: Consistent, it's called. (laughs)

MUSIC FAVS

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, well that's hard to find and interesting. What kind of music do you like at this time in your life?

Randy Tuten: Well I like everything, I certainly like early jazz. I mean early like New Orleans... Louis Armstrong, Cab Calloway, even swing, Benny Goodman, Glenn Miller. I certainly like folk music

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from the 50's. I certainly like surf music a lot from the 60's. I always thought that surf music was kind of simple and easy, but it is actually so simple, that the people that do it, have to be more precise.

Michael Erlewine: I saw Brian Wilson, when he came back on that short tour. I saw his first performance of that tour. It was a really awesome experience,

Randy Tuten: Brian Wilson. I don't really view him as a surf musician. He's kind of like... when the Beatles did Sgt. Peppers Lonely Hearts Club. It was completely different; every time the people would write the Beatles off, they'd invent something new.

Michael Erlewine: They did.

Randy Tuten: Not new, but just different. It was new too, but it was different and, you know, excited the people too -- excitement kind of thing.

Michael Erlewine: Indeed they did.

CONSISTENT

Randy Tuten: So, I'm always looking to make my stuff better, if that's what you're asking.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, I think that you succeeded by doing that.

Randy Tuten: Any artist that thinks, commercial art and fine art, and I'm talking about painters. Generally, when painters make a name for themselves, it's not permanent, but it's more consistent, more famous. I mean that's loosely based, you know. When I say famous, I'm not talking about "stars in your eye" or that kind of thing. Established. I guess "established" would be a better word. Commercial artists kind of gotta' do it every day. Because

when you're a commercial artist, if you don't do anything for 10 years, nobody knows about you.

Michael Erlewine: I just had the opportunity to photo-document about 1,000 pieces, many of Gary Grimshaw, from the collection at the Bentley Historical Library. In fact, I don't know of any artist that's done more work than he has, because in the mid-west, they didn't get any of the ambiance of the whole scene, in terms of money. He had to work, always. And he worked mostly for the community, the alternative community, and there're just thousands, hundreds and hundreds, of pieces, not all of them are great, of course, but most of them are very interesting.

But not every artist has done this much stuff. I mean, out of all the artists here, the big name ones like Stanley Mouse and so forth have done a lot of work, but not at the quantity level of Gary Grimshaw, I mean in terms of sheer output.

Randy Tuten: Well, I guess you're right. Mouse does a lot of variations. In other words, in the 50's, he was doing T-shirts and car things, you know, so he wasn't always a poster artist. It's like he's an artist more so, than a poster artist. Whereas, I feel I'm just a poster artist, rather than just an artist.

COMPUTER OR BY HAND

Michael Erlewine: Now, do you work with the computer or do you work by hand?

Randy Tuten: Generally, I work by hand. Sometimes, I'll do it by hand and get it into the computer, and then play with it there, like Jim Phillips in Santa Cruz.

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Michael Erlewine: Yeah Jim Phillips is such a nice guy.

Randy Tuten: He's a very good artist,

Michael Erlewine: That he is.

Randy Tuten: And he does the computer stuff, but he does it by hand, and then scans it in there, so it still has that look.

Michael Erlewine: Are you Mac or PC?

Randy Tuten: I wouldn't care, probably Mac. Right now, I just operate on a PC.

Michael Erlewine: And what applications?

Randy Tuten: But when I do large posters or large format things, it would be PhotoShop, I guess is that what you are asking?

Michael Erlewine: Do you work in Adobe Illustrator?

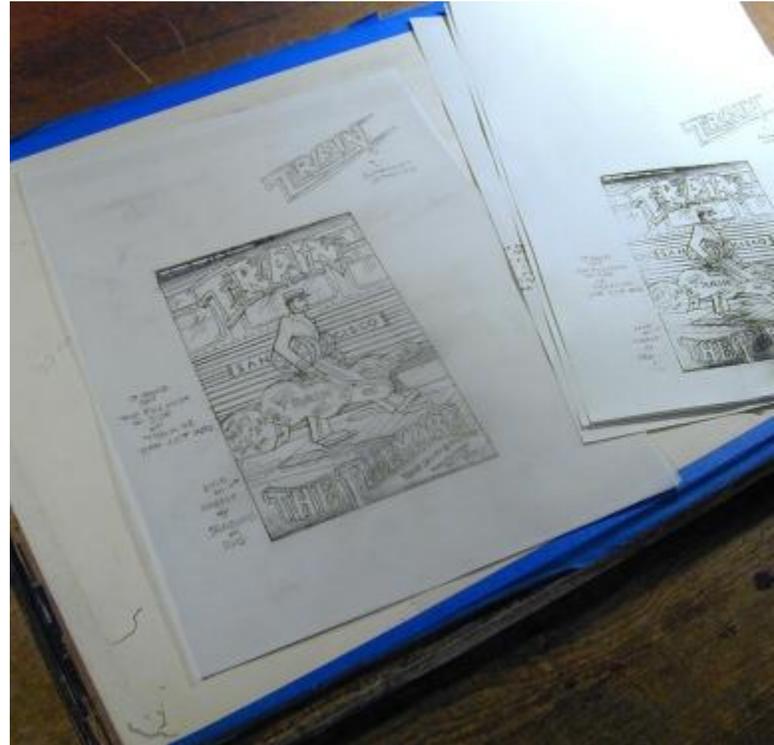
Randy Tuten: I know illustrator, but you know, I'm better at just... There are better technicians out there with the computer as a tool, than I am, so I can tell someone what to do on the computer.

Michael Erlewine: I see what you're saying.

Randy Tuten: Yeah, in other words, artists like Jim Phillips in Santa Cruz has taken a long time to learn how to work with this tool. You know, I'm not sure I want to take three years out of my life to learn how to function with a new tool, especially when I use all the old traditional methods.

Michael Erlewine: You're right; it is a transition. Would you be willing for us to show me some things that you're working on? Or just we'll walk around and talk about some stuff?

Randy Tuten: Sure, yeah. Ok here's something I just designed for the Fillmore people. They asked me to do a poster for Train, for the Fillmore. This is just a rough and it's essentially a bell captain, a porter, if you will.



Tuten Sketch for a Poster

Michael Erlewine: And what is this done with, just pencil or?

Randy Tuten: This is just a rough pencil sketch.

Michael Erlewine: And then from this you'll do what?

Randy Tuten: From this I'll probably paint it with airbrush.

Michael Erlewine: Really.

Randy Tuten: I airbrush it. When you airbrush things, it's not necessarily all airbrush. Just, like in the early days, people would ask me what medium I would like to work in. Well you, know, if

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scrambled eggs look good on the canvas, you use that. If Crayola looks good, you use that. If airbrushing looks good, you use that. A lot of time, just paint and a brush, just like what they did for a thousand years before computers came along. You stick the brush in the thing, you just paint it.

Michael Erlewine: So this is very tiny, but then you'll scale it up.

Randy Tuten: Well once the Fillmore folks OK this, then I'll refine it and get the large version going.

Michael Erlewine: And, do you do it at a ratio of one-to-one, or do you do it larger and reduce it or how does that work?

Randy Tuten: I generally like to work a little bit larger and then reduce it, just like by an inch or two, because all of these things have to fit on a scanner, now-a-days. Everything's gotta' be scanned on the computer.

I have a little bit of a problem with the world in general because... it's just like when the united states thought that everyone would be traveling around by airplane, and they let their train system go downhill, and the Europeans did not.

Michael Erlewine: That's right.

Randy Tuten: And now their zipping. European trains are zipping around at 200 miles per hour, and we're still going 60 miles per hour and they're even falling off the tracks.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, they are.

Randy Tuten: So you kinda' need every element, and so back to the question: you need a camera; you need photographs; you need airbrushing touch ups; you need airbrushing; you

need computers; you need scanners. It's all got to work in conjunction. Cause, when the power goes out, and it will... Actually, I know people that now -- art departments -- and the Bill Graham art department is a very good example of this. If the power goes out, they don't grab a paper and a pencil. They actually call the electrician. Yeah, so everything stops, when the electricity stops.

Michael Erlewine: Well, they should have a generator, right.

Randy Tuten: But you know, the daytime is light and paper and pencil have been around for a long time. Before that, there was the chisel and stone.

Michael Erlewine: So this is actually a drawing then. Is this a copy of something or is that an actual drawing?

Randy Tuten: This is actual drawing, yeah.

Michael Erlewine: It is actual drawing. OK, cool.

Randy Tuten: And this is just a rough drawing, just rough idea.

Michael Erlewine: You take this in to them or you fax it to them?

Randy Tuten: I will fax it to them and see if they like any part of this, and they generally do. All the stuff I've done over the years, probably only about 20 things have been rejected.

Michael Erlewine: Really, and how far ahead is this? Give me an idea of a time frame you have to work in. So this is this May?

Randy Tuten: So I will fax this to them; they will run it past the people that are in charge of all of these decisions, and then they'll get back to me and they'll

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say: "Yeah, we like this, but we don't like one particular part of it. Can we do something with that?" Then I'll fudge with it a little bit.

In other words, once they OK on the basic rough design, which this is one of, they will give me the OK. And then I'll do a bigger version from this.

Michael Erlewine: The final one?

Randy Tuten: And it'll start to be the final one. But then I'll work out certain problems, like when Rick Griffin and I worked together on three of four projects. Rick couldn't do anything unless he knew what all four corners were going to be.

RICK GRIFFIN'S LAYOUT METHOD

Randy Tuten: And it'll start to be the final one. But then I'll work out certain problems, like when Rick Griffin and I worked together on three of four projects. Rick couldn't do anything unless he knew what all four corners were going to be.

Michael Erlewine: What's that mean?

Randy Tuten: That means he wanted to know exactly what the poster was gonna' look like in the end, before he could start on it.

Michael Erlewine: And how did he do that?

Randy Tuten: Well, I mean it's very difficult. I generally start up at the top or the bottom and work my way up or work my way down or work my way from right to left or left to right. And you just figure it out as you go along, kind of.

Michael Erlewine: But he wanted to have the whole thing in his mind?

Randy Tuten: Rick liked to have the whole thing in mind. Like when these designs I do, they're essentially in my mind. I see them, but I can't certainly convey it to people, as to what I'm seeing

Michael Erlewine: Right, so this is for a few weeks from now.

Randy Tuten: A few weeks from now, Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: What is the time frame of something like that? You're given... how many days would it take you to make the final one, roughly?

Randy Tuten: Well, in the old days, we used to do these things overnight, believe it or not.

Michael Erlewine: Grimshaw said the same thing. That's hard to believe.

Randy Tuten: It is hard to believe, because nowadays, I just couldn't do it, but things have gotten much more technical. It's not as simple as the 60's were.

Michael Erlewine: So you'll do a full scale one, with color, and then they'll scan the thing. You have to get it to them.

Randy Tuten: The full scale one I do in color is the final; this is the rough. I've been doing this for like 30 years or so now

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Randy Tuten: A lot of the time, people will like to see a color rough and, occasionally, I will do a color rough, but in most cases I just do a black and white rough, with indications of color, written indications of color.

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And they'll just have to take my word for it.

Michael Erlewine: That one is going to be nice.

Randy Tuten: It's gonna' be nice; I'll make it nice. Well, you know, about 90% of the time... maybe not that much... maybe 70-90% of the time, the things come out real nice. Frequently, I'll be disappointed in them, but I've learned to just keep my mouth shut about my expectations in the thing.

Michael Erlewine: And they don't necessarily even notice what you're disappointed.

Randy Tuten: No. Yeah, they wouldn't. In the early days, Bill Graham used to ask what I thought of my work and I would go "Well, this is wrong, that's wrong, this didn't come out right, this is the wrong color." Well, after about a month of this, he stopped asking me.

Michael Erlewine: (laughs)

Randy Tuten: Cause, obviously, I didn't know what I was talking about. So I should just keep my opinions to myself, and just do the work.

Michael Erlewine: And try to improve it.

Randy Tuten: And try to improve it, yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Well, that's cool.

Randy Tuten: I mean you never... you never stop trying to improve it.

Michael Erlewine: And what is this piece about?

Randy Tuten: This is a lettering logo for a restaurant down here. It's particularly good food and the chef, whom I'm privileged to know, owns and operates the place. There are certain chefs in the

world that get interesting tastes. It's not just typical food. It's good food, but there are certain tastes that you cook things with, that make the things better, taste better.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Randy Tuten: Certain chefs in the world have the knack, you know

Michael Erlewine: That's right, and this is what you've actually drawn all that out.

Randy Tuten: That's all drawn out, yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Wow, that's a lot of work, and you have curves and things to use to do that?

Randy Tuten: Well, you use French curves, yeah. I mean there's no substitute for a hand done piece. In other words, computers are incredible tools and computers can do some incredible things, but a computer ... I can actually rule, if you need two lines parallel and running around a page, that faster than a computer can do it.

Michael Erlewine: Really.

Randy Tuten: With some of the basic things, the computer makes it more complex than it is.

Michael Erlewine: It's complex, no doubt.

Randy Tuten: Whereas, with very complex things, the computer actually makes it simpler.

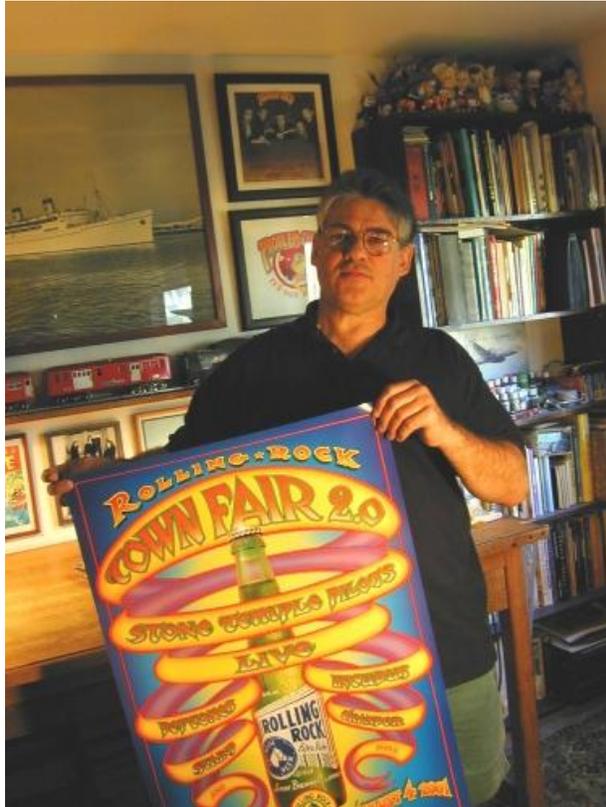
Michael Erlewine: That's right.

Randy Tuten: So the computer is good, but it is strictly a tool to be used in the right way. You can't use it for everything. Some of these people now a days

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design things on computers and they look like they're designed on computers.

Michael Erlewine: Right, what is this? This is a finished piece of some kind.



Tuten Sketch for a Poster

Randy Tuten: This is a piece I just finished for Rolling Rock Town Fair 2.0, a concert they're giving back in Pennsylvania... the Stone Temple Pilots and a band called "Live" and "Def Tones" and "Incubus."

Michael Erlewine: It vaguely reminds me of the Bob Fried piece of that skeleton with the ribbons coming down both sides.



Grateful Dead Bob Fried Piece

Randy Tuten: Yeah, ribbon is always good. I mean these people had a number of designs that I did for them, and this was the simplest of the lot.

Michael Erlewine: Did they approve this? They saw roughs on this?

Randy Tuten: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: And they're happy with it.

Randy Tuten: Yeah. With this, I did black and white roughs, with color indications, written color indications, and first that's how we get started. A client has to have some direction about where we're going. See you know if we're on the same page or not.

Michael Erlewine: Is this all hand done?

Randy Tuten: That's hand done and then scanned into the computer, and then colorized, and airbrushed on the computer.

Michael Erlewine: I don't know that much about airbrush, so with airbrush you use a computer to airbrush?

Randy Tuten: Yeah.

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Michael Erlewine: Ok. Now I am with you.

Randy Tuten: Rather than using an actual airbrush with compressed air, with paint spraying on the canvas or the paper.

Michael Erlewine: Right, so you use Photoshop or something like that?

Randy Tuten: Exactly, and this was such a big project... like this poster was 36x24 inches... to actually paint or airbrush this, you know, bigger size, would have been a headache. There was also a banner for this and it was 6 feet by 3 feet.



Finished Posters on ROMs

Michael Erlewine: So these are big files then.

Randy Tuten: These are big files. Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: And then what you write them to ROM?

Randy Tuten: Well, we put them on a CD.

Michael Erlewine: So you make a CD.

Randy Tuten: Yeah. You can't see this, but there's the banner, the 6x3 foot banner of the same thing. Here's the poster.

Michael Erlewine: Let me see the banner for a second.

Randy Tuten: Now this was a thing called a case card, 25" x14".

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Randy Tuten: And this was the Rolling Stone ad.

Michael Erlewine: So you put out nice colors. You make it look nice.

Randy Tuten: Yeah, it's all the professional thing. You are supposed to be a professional in this world,

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, well it looks good.

Randy Tuten: You know it's not about your... just mad hippie artist.

Michael Erlewine: No, not anymore. Right.

Randy Tuten: You get stoned, drunk, whatever, hippie artist... just painting things for fun. You're supposed to be professional at it.

Michael Erlewine: I know. I used to do the posters for our band, so I'm a little bit of a poster person, but not much of one. So that's cool, that's very interesting

Randy Tuten: So that's just the process. You know, first you do something. First people contact me, and

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then I'll generally do just a little thumbnail sketch, just a very rough sketch, to see what direction they'd like to go with this.

MUSIC FAVS MORE

Randy Tuten: You asked me about what kind of music I like. I like all kinds of music, obviously rock and roll, jazz, blues, rhythm & blues are great, blues... Straight blues are terrific.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, I'm a big blues fan.

Randy Tuten: Even show music, even classical music

Michael Erlewine: Really.

Randy Tuten: Classical music is great stuff.

Michael Erlewine: What kind of classical do you like?

Randy Tuten: Well, Mozart, Beethoven -- all that kinda' stuff. Sounds just great.

Michael Erlewine: What about reading? What do you like to read?

Randy Tuten: It can be anything from pirate/adventure stories to true life... pirate stuff to mysteries, to Ian Fleming, to James Bond to Charlie Chan, some science fiction, generally mysteries, and that kind of stuff.

Michael Erlewine: What about movies? What kind of movies do you like?

Randy Tuten: Oh, all movies, as long as they're good and have interesting stories...



Tuten's Leghorns

Michael Erlewine: Can I get a picture of those guys? I mean that's great.

Randy Tuten: That's all right, my chickens.

Michael Erlewine: Maybe I'll turn that light on the chickens.

Randy Tuten: Foghorn Leghorn.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, I know.

Randy Tuten: And Charlie McCarthy

Michael Erlewine: Yeah Charlie, I used to have one of those.

Randy Tuten: Actually that's just very temporary. That'll be going away.

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Tuten's Fridge

RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY



Randy Tuten

Michael Erlewine: Where do you stand with religion and all that kind of stuff? What do you do for philosophical, spirituality? Any comment?

Randy Tuten: Sure, I always have a comment about everything. (laughs)

Michael Erlewine: Great.

Randy Tuten: Where do I stand on religion. Well religion is great.

Michael Erlewine: (laughs) That's a good one. Well, that covers it, you know.

Randy Tuten: Yeah. When I was a young man, I went with different churches, with different friends, and different girlfriends, and with my mother and father. My father was a Southern Baptist and my mother was a Catholic. One of my girlfriends was... I didn't know it at the time, but her parents were John Bircher's.

And so I went to that church, and from what I gathered from all of this religion and churches, they're all saying the same thing, but they're all saying it in they're own way. So what kinda' struck me about religion was it was almost like you don't have to be a member of somewhere to be religious. You don't have to be a member of a particular organization to be religious.

Michael Erlewine: That's what I got out of it.

Randy Tuten: That people get together because it makes them feel good.

Michael Erlewine: Good comment.

Randy Tuten: But I never felt a need to go get religion from an organization.

Michael Erlewine: Amen.

Randy Tuten: Cause they generally try to make some money out of it somewhere. (laughs)

Michael Erlewine: Absolutely.

Randy Tuten: I think the fact that the Catholic church doesn't pay land taxes or something like the property taxes, you know. There's something wrong

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with that. You want a religion, that's great, but you're supposed to foot the bill, just like everyone else foots the bill.

Michael Erlewine: How do you feel about getting older? You know you're gonna' die sometime. Any comments on that?

Randy Tuten: 100 Years on this planets is more than enough..

Michael Erlewine: (laughs) OK, that's great.

Randy Tuten: I really do. I would hate to die and then go wherever I'm going, and then have to go and get an apartment and get the P.G. & E. hooked up, and get the telephone hooked up, in the next life. I would feel cheated. So I hope the next life, and personally I don't believe there is a next life. It's just this life and then you're dead.

Michael Erlewine: And what then though?

Randy Tuten: You're just through, and someone else comes along. Next civilization, or the next person, or well...

Michael Erlewine: You don't believe in a continuity of consciousness?

Randy Tuten: You know I do. I certainly am open to all those things. Rick Griffin really was a cosmic guy. He thought about all this stuff entirely too much, so if you asked him a question, it might be an hour before he got back to you with the answer.

Michael Erlewine: What was he thinking?

Randy Tuten: Well, there is just so much to think about in this world. You can't know. Reincarnation could be something that actually happens, and it could not. So you don't know unless you

head out that way. You can't come back, once you head out that way. It's that way for a reason.

Michael Erlewine: And Griffin was into these kind of questions?

Randy Tuten: Well, Rick was just into everything. You know whether it be a party or women or religion or good art.

Michael Erlewine: He was into Theosophy at one point, and then he had a conversion and re-found Christianity. Did you know him during that period?

Randy Tuten: Oh, absolutely.

Michael Erlewine: What was that like?

Randy Tuten: It made no difference.

Michael Erlewine: What does that mean?

Randy Tuten: Well, that's what people perceive, that it was a big thing for him, but it was just another thing for him to think about. Something else to think about how the world is. It's like the age-old question "Why? Why are we here? Why am I here? Why is everyone here? What are we doing? Where are we going?" There are really no answers. We just keep on going and keep on doing it.

Michael Erlewine: I would agree with that.

Randy Tuten: Yeah, if you stop and ask yourself "why" too many times, you actually find yourself wasting your time, so you just cruise along. You just get down the road.

Michael Erlewine: And how long have you been down in this area of the country, near Half Moon Bay?

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Randy Tuten: Oh, just for the last year and a half.

Michael Erlewine: And this is comfortable? You're happy here?

Randy Tuten: I'm happier than I've been in awhile.

Michael Erlewine: I mean this is beautiful...driving along the Pacific Coast.

Randy Tuten: Yeah, this area, Half Moon Bay and the Pacific can be fogged in, but here where I am, it's like a little farm belt, a little banana belt, if you will. They grow vegetables in this area, and it seems like a lot of the time, when those two other places are fogged in, it'll be sunny here, like it is today. Sunny, and blue skies at night. Now, it's not always that way, obviously, but a lot more than people think. But maybe we shouldn't tell anyone that it's nice down here, they'll all be coming down here. (laughs)



Tuten and His Drawing Board

Randy Tuten: See, so I'm not the mean guy everyone portrays me out to be, huh?

Michael Erlewine: No, I don't think so. Well, I never thought so anyway. I talked to you on the phone a few times.

Randy Tuten: But I don't mind people thinking that about me, cause then they won't bother me as much. There are a lot of people out there that want things for nothing.

Michael Erlewine: This is true.

Randy Tuten: And I don't blame them. I want things for nothing, but that's not how it is.

Michael Erlewine: There are a few artists, and you're one of them that, from my point of view, haven't gotten enough credit and attention. Bob Freid is another one that I'm working on too.

Randy Tuten: Well, you know credit's a funny thing. Credit and fame and all that stuff is a funny thing. You're not supposed to think about that.

Michael Erlewine: No, but just for justice.

Randy Tuten: Well, there probably isn't a lot of justice in the world. You go look at people who are politically oppressed. There's certainly no justice there.

Michael Erlewine: Right. Amen.

Randy Tuten: And so the fact that we get away with what we do is some kind of justice right there. The fact that I get to work at home and work for myself, that I don't have anyone telling me what I can or can't do, is certainly, certainly important.

Michael Erlewine: And I've done the same thing, worked out of my home all my life, even when I had businesses, my office was at home.

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Randy Tuten: A certain amount of freedom comes with all this stuff.

Michael Erlewine: Now did you know Bob Fried? Did you ever meet him? I knew that he was an incredible designer and he had a really good balance to all his stuff. It not only looked good, it was balanced. All his stuff had a lot of balance to it.

VICTOR MOSCOSO

What do you think of Victor Moscoso's art? He's someone else who's had quite a bit of commercial, not commercial, but formal art training.

Randy Tuten: Well, Victor's right in his approach to everything, but sometimes he can be... for lack of a better term... hard headed, stubborn.

Michael Erlewine: This I've really heard. I've heard a lot of stories about Victor; I'm going to go see him this week.

Randy Tuten: Yeah, he's very stubborn, and you know he's certainly right, but there's a point where you can take it to far. All these guys, like me, and everyone else. It's not a political office we're running for. We're not trying to win a political, you know, who's the most popular contest. We're just doing some work here, and trying to make a living out of it.

Michael Erlewine: This is where you are unusual. You seem to have very consistent. You kept going. You're still doing work as good as you ever did, as far as I can tell.

Randy Tuten: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Are there any young artists that you see coming up that you

admire, that you think, that you enjoy? Is there anyone that affected you?

Randy Tuten: Well, yeah. There's one painter out there called Randy Chavez that does nice stuff. There's a couple of guys that I like. I've looked at their stuff. Well, that's kind of interesting. So there's always new guys on the horizon, but that's what it's all about, you know. It's like the old leaves on the tree, you know. They die and they fall off the tree and then some, next year, some new leaves come out.

Michael Erlewine: And the old leaves... sounds like the movie "Being There." Do you know that movie?

Michael Erlewine: Of the original SF artists, which have affected you?

Randy Tuten: Well the same three guys that I mentioned: Rick Griffin, Stanley Mouse, and Alton Kelley. I have the highest regard for those three guys.

Michael Erlewine: That's great to hear.

Randy Tuten: Period.

DEALERS

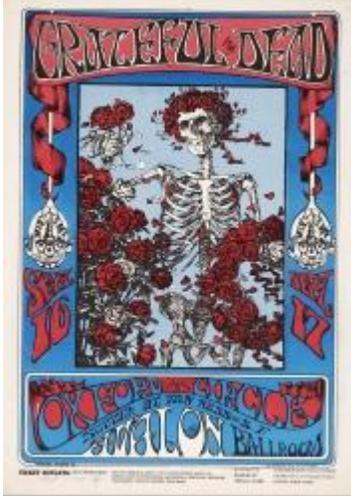
Randy Tuten: There's nothing wrong with the dealers, but it's like antique-furniture dealers. They'll give you about, you know, 25% or 1/3 of what it's actually worth and then they want to make some money on it. So I have nothing against dealers, other than they're dealers. Yeah, I mean essentially dealers are... how should I say put this? Dealers are always shortchanging the artist. They're looking to make some money.

Michael Erlewine: Well my friend Mark Arminski is someone that I see, because we're in the same area. He is trying to do less with the dealers. I mean he and I

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have talked about it. He wholesales too much of his art.

Randy Tuten: And then the dealer sells it, and then you're out of the picture.



Skull and Roses FD-26

Randy Tuten: Well, see part of the problem is like you know, the Kelley/Mouse posters "Skull and Roses?" You know a lot of the posters they do nowadays, especially a lot of the Bill Graham posters are designed on a computer, strictly on computer. They don't have the same impact as let's say "Skull and Roses" or "The Flying Eyeball" or even my "Avocado" Led Zeppelin poster.

Michael Erlewine: So you feel that, this is... I mean you're opening up a can of worms there. I don't know if I could put it into words, but you're suggesting that hand done things have some eccentricities and that computers don't have their own kind of eccentricities...

Randy Tuten: Absolutely.

Michael Erlewine: Really, some people would argue with you about that.

Randy Tuten: I know.

Michael Erlewine: They would think that you could set the slip of the hand or the movement or the..

Randy Tuten: Some computer things look phenomenal. But in general, when it's designed entirely on the computer... and a lot of these people that have computers are not necessarily artists...

Michael Erlewine: Well, that's true.

Randy Tuten: I'd say that's where the problem arises.

Michael Erlewine: Some artists out there do use computers well, though.

Randy Tuten: Usually everybody wants to be an artist. Everybody likes to be an artist

Michael Erlewine: True.

Randy Tuten: Everyone feels good about being an artist. The problem about being an artist is you really have to give up all the parties and all the good times and everything and just stay home and do work.

Michael Erlewine: True of anything, right.

Randy Tuten: It's like people nowadays really want everything. It's hard to get everything.

Michael Erlewine: Well, it's no substitute for passion.

Randy Tuten: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: And what I try to teach my kids... I have home schooled them for the most part. To begin to find what you're interested in.

Randy Tuten: Right, find something you like to do and do it.

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Michael Erlewine: Right. Like I never got out of high school. I so wanted just to go out in the world and get started.

Randy Tuten: You know, for as long as I can remember, people have been telling me 'No', I can't do that.

Michael Erlewine: Well, me too.

Randy Tuten: I don't buy that.

Michael Erlewine: Personally no, I don't either. I mean I've always done... Yeah, I was a musician way back then. I played at the Fillmore, the Matrix, and so on, when we came out in 1967. We opened for Cream. Mike Bloomfield was a friend of mine. He put us up at the heliport in Sausalito.

Randy Tuten: Yep, I know the place. Quicksilver Messenger Service used to practice there all the time.

Michael Erlewine: Well we practiced and slept there. We played around there at a rib joint, just to make meals. We didn't have any money or anything. Anyway it was fun.

Randy Tuten: Having money is over rated.

Michael Erlewine: It's nice.

Randy Tuten: It's not why we're all here. That's not why we're doing what we do. Obviously the money's important to pay the bills, but it was never really part of the whole thing. It's not supposed to be part of the whole thing. But unfortunately this world is very commercial. That's what everything is translated to.

Michael Erlewine: Real estate out here in California is amazingly expensive.

Randy Tuten: I don't own anything.

Michael Erlewine: I don't know about down here, but up in San Francisco.

Randy Tuten: Well that's essentially the reason I moved out of San Francisco. Not only is it so expensive... Policemen I know, all unanimously agree that San Francisco was never designed for this many cars, for this many people. So essentially, I think it's over populated. There are too many people. All the problems in the world are caused by too many people. But everyone looks for other solutions for all these problems.

Michael Erlewine: Now I'm from the Mid-west, I couldn't sleep last night, because I was still on my old schedule, so I was up at 3 AM. But I was driving across the bridge at 5:30 AM.... I thought I'd come over and look at some sights, but the bridge was bumper to bumper almost the whole way at that time in the morning! I couldn't believe it.

Randy Tuten: Yeah, there's just too many people. And you know, the gas prices should be more, but the money for the gas prices should be... Like in Europe, they use the gas money to fix the highways. They don't do that over here. So people over here are essentially spoiled, when it comes to buying gasoline. It should be \$3-4 dollars a gallon. If they'd used the money to fix the roads, but you know...

But also the worst thing about San Francisco is the parking. When you live up there, your life is literally ruled by a parking place. There are people that own houses that are actually putting the garages ... they're shoveling out into the earth, putting the garages under their existing houses.

Michael Erlewine: You mean there are no spots available?

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Randy Tuten: There's no room.

Michael Erlewine: That's wow, that's amazing.

Randy Tuten: There are people that are spending millions of dollars to put a garage under their house. That's kind of a waste of money.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, well, I just got here yesterday, so I was parking in Berkeley. Even there, there's no place right? It was packed. I had to go round and round, and finally found a little parking lot, You know it costs 6 bucks to park there for a couple hours.

AMOUNT OF WORK

Michael Erlewine: How about the amount of work you have coming in?

Randy Tuten: Ok, I always have enough work to do. I always have too much work to do.

Michael Erlewine: Well some of the artists, the older ones don't have enough work.

Randy Tuten: First of all, when you're doing this kind of work, it seems like a lot of people won't go back and do basic stuff. It's like a carpenter that hates to do picket fences. You know, but sometimes you just have to go back and do that kind of stuff. It's like where you came from. You can't forget where you came from.

Michael Erlewine: Good point.

Randy Tuten: You can't stop doing one thing, because you don't think it pays particularly well or you're tired of it, or you think it should be... you want to move into a new art-type field or something you know/

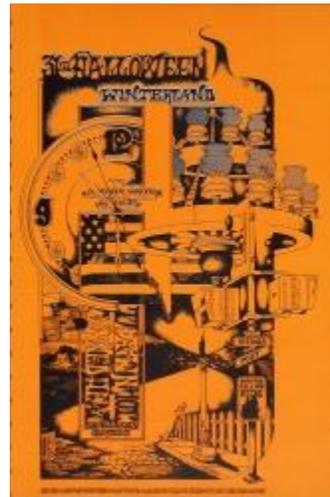
Michael Erlewine: So it's the 'commercial' part of commercial art.

Randy Tuten: So you do what jobs come up. If they don't pay, maybe what you think, you just shut up and do them.

Michael; That's why I admire early Grimshaw, because he did so many different things, you know, topless bars, anything.

Randy Tuten: Yeah, it's like the Nike adds on TV. "Just Do It." You just be quiet, shut up, and just do it. No one cares about what I think politically, or religiously, or philosophically or anything else. Just do the work is what they care about.

Randy Tuten: This is like the first poster I did. It was for the "Family Dog".



Family Dog Poster

Michael Erlewine: Right. I've got that one.

Randy Tuten: Then, oh well, anyway, I was telling this story earlier. I tried to work for the Family Dog for a year. I took stuff there, and showed Chet Helms stuff and wanted to do stuff, because Mouse and Alton Kelley and Rick Griffin were doing all their posters,

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and so I figured... Actually, what got me into posters was I used to see all these great posters by all these people, and then I started seeing some sub-par posters and I said "Well, anyone can do these."

Michael Erlewine: (laughs) Right.

Randy Tuten: Well, not anyone can do them, but a lot of people do them that really have no business doing posters.

Michael Erlewine: Right, yeah, that's true

BILL GRAHAM

Randy Tuten: So anyway, after about a year at the Family Dog, I got pretty disgusted with everything, and I went to see Bill Graham, and within five minutes he hired me to do four posters.

Michael Erlewine: Really?

Randy Tuten: And he wanted me to do posters from then on out.

Michael Erlewine: And what was that about, did he just like you? You got along? What was it?

Randy Tuten: He liked my style, that's all. We didn't necessarily get on in the early days. We had a lot of conflicts and yelling matches, face to face, which is fine. And then towards the end of his life, we actually got on better, because I understood where he was coming from. He just wanted a good looking product. And if there was some turmoil involved with it, he usually blew off steam and then went on about his business.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Randy Tuten: So after awhile, I learned that if you have all the answers for Bill Graham, no problem. In other words, it's like doing your homework. You don't

know the answers for the test, if you don't do your homework ...

Michael Erlewine: There's gonna' be some yelling, right?

Randy Tuten: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Well, that's cool.

Randy Tuten: So you're just supposed to know what you're talking about.

Michael Erlewine: That's a good sign.

Randy Tuten: Or don't say anything.

Michael Erlewine: Right. You can't argue with that.

Randy Tuten: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: And these are great. Are these your personal copies? Do you have a history of your own work?

Randy Tuten: Well, I've got a large history of my own work. These are the posters that I've done. Not all the logos or the point-of-purchase things or album covers or any of that kind of stuff. These are just the posters I've done.

Michael Erlewine: What kind of album covers have you done?

Randy Tuten: Well, I just did a couple things with the Grateful Dead. I just did a "Stoned Immaculate" for Electra Records for music of the Doors. And I just did a nice Grateful Dead package for the Fillmore East, "Live at the Fillmore East." And then I just did a thing with the "Persuasions sing Grateful Dead," and all these other new bands like Stone Temple Pilots and Creed and all these bands that are doing the Doors music.

Michael Erlewine: You did a great old Doors poster; I'm sure it's in there somewhere, which I really love.

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Randy Tuten: All the Led Zeppelin things that came along, I ended up doing. It was a fluke. It wasn't designed that way. And then Rick Griffin did all the Jimi Hendrix stuff, but that was just a fluke.

Michael Erlewine: Serendipity.

Randy Tuten: Yeah, that was just a fluke of the scheduling. No one designed it to do that way.

Michael Erlewine: Cosmic humor.

Randy Tuten: Kind of.

Randy Tuten: Actually this Chuck Berry 'hamburger' poster... At the time Chuck Berry was doing that song, "Play with My Ding-a-ling," which I thought was the stupidest song of all time.

Michael Erlewine: (laughs) Right, well yeah, pretty dumb, but funny.

Randy Tuten: Considering all the songs that he did that never really made it to the charts, that one went to number one. That's kind of how silly humanity is, you know. So I did this poster with the hamburger because Chuck Berry, I thought, was a hamburger for doing this, like an egomaniac, and obviously Michael Bloomfield had quite the ego too.

Michael Erlewine: Ok, I knew Michael.

Randy Tuten: So, essentially, I did this poster with the hamburger for those two reasons.

Randy Tuten: Now there's another story about this thing. I was sitting in Bill Graham's office with Bill, and we were talking about this hamburger poster. He was asking me what I thought of it, and how I liked it, and all that stuff, and the door files open and Nick Gravanites came storming in holding one of these

posters, yelling that his name was not big enough on the poster.

And Bill just looked at me and put his finger to his lips like "shhh!" and he and Nick Gravanites yelled for about, you know, like maybe a minute, and then Gravanites just stormed out of the office, and we kinda' had a chuckle about it.

Michael Erlewine: And yeah I know this guy also. Pointing to Mark Naftalin's picture.

Randy Tuten: Yeah, Mark Naftalin.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, so he's still in the area here.

Randy Tuten: Remember East-West? Boy, it's probably one of the greatest records of all time.

Michael Erlewine: I just sent to Mark Naftalin (a couple years ago) recordings I made of the Paul Butterfield Blues Band in Chicago doing East- West, the title song, at Poor Richard's. And then Naftalin published it. He made a CD of it and other versions of that cut. Anyway, I knew all those guys a little, so that's the kind of music I really loved. The Butterfield Band turned me on.

Randy Tuten: You know, as far as rock & roll music, it's really the stuff from the 60's that I still listen to, you know, like Buffalo Springfield, the Doors. I love Chambers Brothers, Lee Michaels, H.P. Lovecraft ...loved HP Lovecraft.

Michael Erlewine: Yup.

Randy Tuten: So that obscure stuff is kind what I still like.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, sure. Me too.

Randy Tuten: You know, a long time ago Bill Graham and I were talking and he said "You know there's gonna' be

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more music in the future, but it's not gonna' be more necessarily good music. You're not gonna' get more good music along with more bad music. In the future, the bad music will always outrange the good music."

Michael Erlewine: Well, that's the truth.

Randy Tuten: So in the 60's it was like, you know, maybe 20 bands, and they were all fairly good. Nowadays there's probably 2,000 to 10,000 bands and probably only, maybe 2500 of them are good.

Michael Erlewine: If that many. For my taste, I don't get into too much new music.

Randy Tuten: Let's say like out of 20,000 bands maybe 2500 of them would be interesting.

Michael Erlewine: And maybe 20 of them I might like to listen to.

Randy Tuten: Yeah, I mean you can go into a record store nowadays, and you can kind look at what's being released. There's so much stuff out there. I'm not a big fan of Rap music though.

Michael Erlewine: Me neither.

Randy Tuten: Rap music essentially is poetry, you know.

Michael Erlewine: Right, it's true. Yeah, I'm a blues and jazz guy.

Randy Tuten: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: And old rock & roll, I like old rock.

Randy Tuten: So, I did movie "Performance" from the 60's (late 69'), Ry Cooder did the music for it. On that album there was a thing by the Last Poets and it was the earliest version of rap music, but it was poetry.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, did you know John Sinclair? He does poetry and music.

Randy Tuten: Oh yeah, I don't know him, but I know of him.

Michael Erlewine: He has a thing called the 'John Sinclair and the Blues Scholars', and it's fun. It's actually... I thought it was going to be horrible, poetry against blues, cause' I'm kind of a blues expert, a little bit, and it was actually good. Sinclair is a real blues scholar.

Randy Tuten: No, you never do. You never know where you're gonna' find good stuff.

Michael Erlewine: It's true. (laughs)

Randy Tuten: It's just, you know, it's the right timing. Timing is pretty important in this world. Actually timing is probably more important than probably any other single thing there is. There's an old saying, "No amount of planning can take the place of dumb luck."

Michael Erlewine: Right, (laughs) that's a good one.

Randy Tuten: That's really true. You know, if you're in the wrong place at the wrong time, you've got no chance at all

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, that's true,

Randy Tuten: Period. And the Janis Joplin poster, [# BG165]? Bill actually called me up when he saw this. He actually called me up at 9 A.M. in the morning, after I'd been up all night working, and he yelled. He said " You ruined my fuckin' poster!" and then hung up.

Michael Erlewine: But he didn't say why, what was?

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Randy Tuten: Well, the lettering. The lettering was too hard to read. I don't normally do that kind of psychedelic lettering.

Michael Erlewine: But he should have been used to it by then.

Randy Tuten: It's certainly no harder to read than some of the other Wes Wilson posters.

Michael Erlewine: Wes' right. Well, no kidding. It's nice; it's beautiful.

Randy Tuten: And then Jim Marshall called me up later on in the afternoon and said he was mad because his picture wasn't used big enough for him.

Michael Erlewine: Oh, I mean, that's just like we did it with the All-Music Guide, with all the reviews. No artist is EVER happy.

Randy Tuten: Yeah, yeah. And the BG-169. That was the famous band concert where Robbie Robertson had stage fright. And the show was like delayed for 2 hours. Bill Graham had to go hire a hypnotist to hypnotize Robby Robertson, so he could go on stage and play. Now, Robby Robertson and other members of "The Band" had been playing with Ronnie Hawkins and all sorts of people, for like over ten years, so he had no reason to have stage fright. It was just because it was the first time it was his band, The Band. The Band was quite something else, cause you know these rock and roll guys would, like Led Zeppelin, would show up and rock everyone's socks off. Well these guys would come out of the woods and do the same thing, knock your socks off. They were stunners. Because they, they would just annihilate

you, overwhelm you with what they were doing.

Michael Erlewine: That's cool.

Randy Tuten: And you wouldn't expect it. But that's why The Band's second album is called "Stage Fright."

Michael Erlewine: Oh, I didn't know that.

Randy Tuten: Yeah, that's where that title came from.

Randy Tuten: And my Led Zeppelin avocado, BG-170 poster.

Michael Erlewine: Where did this come from?

Randy Tuten: Well actually, in college, when I went to college for awhile, the art teachers would give you certain projects to do, and one of the projects that was handed me was to come up with a menu design for a restaurant. But what I came up with was for the "Avocado Club."

Michael Erlewine: So, you had this around...

Randy Tuten: Well, the design was around, was done in college and then one day Bill had given me the job for Led Zeppelin, and I was just really tired of using blimps and stuff, and seeing blimps used by... It was like too obvious, too obvious a thing to use for a Led Zeppelin poster, blimp. Duh. So I thought, well, why don't we just put the crazy avocado with eyes, with the green... Actually, at one point I tried to sell Bill on a whole series of crazy fruit posters.

Michael Erlewine: (laughs) He wouldn't go for it?

Randy Tuten: Well, not back-to-back. Like, one a month, you know, for like six

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months. Have an orange with all orange, and then have an apple, and a banana, and a pineapple -- all that stuff. But he loved this poster.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, it's cool.

Randy Tuten: But he didn't go for the whole fruit idea.

Michael Erlewine: Right, it's great lettering, and that was just all done by hand.

Randy Tuten: Yeah, these were all done by hand, and they were all done by hand in mechanical and actual physical artwork.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Randy Tuten: That's the problem with computers. You don't get a physical piece of artwork. You don't get a painting. You get a file.

Michael Erlewine: No original art, Right?

Randy Tuten: Yeah, you get a file. I like the fact that original art, most of the time, looks better.

Michael Erlewine: Absolutely. Dennis King was showing me some of his Derek Hess originals. Unbelievable.

Randy Tuten: Oh yeah, Dennis has got a gorgeous collection of original artwork.

Michael Erlewine: Yes he does.

Randy Tuten: Denis has got...you know the famous poster I did for Led Zeppelin, with the big space blimp in outer space? He's got the original art for that.

Michael Erlewine: Oh really?

Randy Tuten: He's got the original art for the Janis Joplin, PG-165, Dennis King has got a beautiful collection.

Randy Tuten: But he's paid for it, over the years, you know. You give up a lot.

Michael Erlewine: Now this is interesting. Yeah, this is a great poster.

Randy Tuten: The doors, yeah BG-186. And they wanted me to use the Doors logo, and I said " Let me do some other kind of lettering," just cause the logo was so... it's recognizable and it's famous, but you know, it's used all the time for the Doors.

Michael Erlewine: And you made this whole thing right?

Randy Tuten: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: I mean that's to me one of your best posters.

Randy Tuten: It was just a press, a PR photo, and I just put in some like acid-melty lines, kind of a thing.

Michael Erlewine: But isn't it beautiful?

Randy Tuten: Well, yeah.

Michael Erlewine: I mean do you like it too? I mean you did it all, but is this a favorite of yours? Or it doesn't matter from one or the other?

Randy Tuten: I've done too many things to have a favorite.

Michael Erlewine: Ok, well this is one of my favorites.

Randy Tuten: Yeah, it's certainly a good looking item, and you know over the years, it seems... sometimes when you do things simple, leave things simple, you get a better breed. In other words, trying to make things complex and tricky and ...

Michael Erlewine: I know, and this is probably one of the reasons I like Gary

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Grimshaw, cause Grimshaw is not afraid to use solid color.

Randy Tuten: Yeah, just basics, using space, balance

Michael Erlewine: Loading things in color.

Randy Tuten: It's like the Bob Fried thing, it is balanced. You know, it's gotta' have the balance, Rick Griffin had that also.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, he did. Here is another one that's also very nice

Randy Tuten: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Are you, so you just kinda' had a thing with The Doors.

Randy Tuten: That's BG-219. A pretty rare poster.

Michael Erlewine: This is beautiful, elegant.

Randy Tuten: And that's BG-277, the Airstream trailer one.

Michael Erlewine: Ahh, it's neat. I mean isn't that lovely?

Randy Tuten: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: I don't know much about it, but I know what I like.

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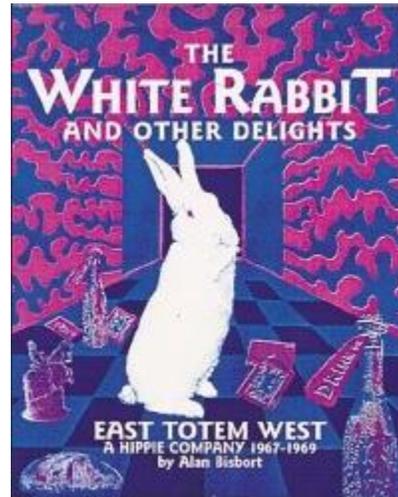
Randy Tuten: And it murdered the poster. But the BG-281.

Michael Erlewine: You got some tomatoes in there.

Randy Tuten: The "Rascals" with the tomatoes. But I designed this poster with the tomatoes for one simple reason, the red that they would print, would probably be a tomato red. It would never be a true blood red. It was always that kind of a warm red.

And so I designed this poster to utilize that, that red, but they were in such a hurry, they had to print it black and white, because they needed it fast.

Randy Tuten: This is just some miscellaneous stuff. I worked for this one company, Direct Productions, did about probably 25-30 poster designs for them. People just don't know about that one.



Bob Fried Memorial Boogie

Randy Tuten: This was the "Bob Fried Memorable Boogie." And, you know, it's Mouse, Kelley, Wes Wilson, Victor Moscoso, and myself.

Michael Erlewine: And what did you do on it?

Randy Tuten: I did this lettering right here...

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Michael Erlewine: Oh, "Winterland."

Randy Tuten: And, I did that lettering, "Memorial Bob Fried Boogie."

Michael Erlewine: Well ok, cause that looks like you.

Randy Tuten: Yeah, this is Wes Wilson right here...

Michael Erlewine: Wes did the middle.

Randy Tuten: Kelley, I think, put the collages together around all the outside.

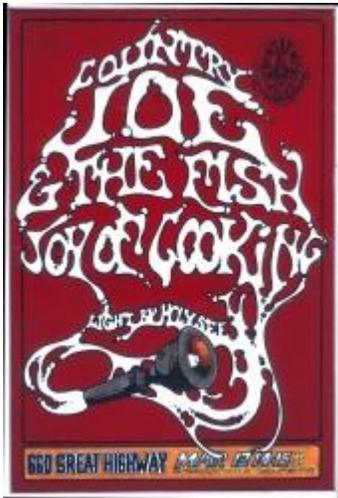
Michael Erlewine: And Victor Moscoso did some of the coloring?

Randy Tuten: And Mouse had something to do with it, and Victor has something to do with the coloring.

Michael Erlewine: That looks like Victor...

Randy Tuten: And if you notice, the shadow of the bird on the bottom lettering, people never notice that.

Randy Tuten: That was the older book of all the stuff, and this is the newer book of some of the newer stuff.



Joy of Cooking

Randy Tuten: We used to smoke pot in the old days.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, (laughs) me too.

Randy Tuten: And we used to use a tuba mouthpiece, with a 30-caliber shell casing, with the back cut off, with an extension on the tuba mouth piece, so it was like fuel injection. And you'd roll a big joint and stick it in the other, and you'd blow on the tuba mouth piece. So the white thick smoke would come out of the other end.

And that's where this design came from. I freshened up the design, took out the tuba mouth piece, and put in a genie's lamp with hieroglyphics, buying a ticket, the Fillmore, and walking up the stairs, getting the apple, dancing and listening to music.

Michael Erlewine: I like the lettering, I think its so nice.

Randy Tuten: And so, this finally came to pass

Randy Tuten: Now this is a good example of the art, you see this color right here? When you put a piece of artwork in the computer to separate it, the computer has difficulty telling orange and red apart. And so you literally have to go into the computer and tell it to take the magenta out of the orange, cause it will turn orange into a red, that warm red I was talking about. A computer can not distinguish between orange and red.

Michael Erlewine: Interesting. I didn't know that.

Randy Tuten: Oh yeah, and so in this poster, these are clearly orange on the art.

Michael Erlewine: Absolutely.

Randy Tuten: And because there's so much red on this It, actually seeped into

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that color. But also, the pink lettering had more of a frosty feel to it, opposed to some of this stuff closed up pretty good.

Michael Erlewine: That's nice, that's one of my favorite ones, I don't know why it just makes me feel... it's a fun one.

Randy Tuten: Oh, the EmmyLou Harris poster, and she actually signed one to me. She said that it was the nicest poster her name had ever appeared on.

Randy Tuten: And there's that Vargas girl. I actually did this in black and white, and Jim Phillips in Santa Cruz colored it, I went down there we worked on it one night. This was a gorgeous poster, Pete Townsend, you know.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah that's a beautiful poster

Randy Tuten: You know, the Bill Graham people wanted something psychedelic, and I said, well, Pete Townsend is not exactly Mr. Psychedelic. He's kinda' like a Bob Dylan -- voice of the conscience from the 60's, on the English side. So I said, you need something a little bit classy for him. And so, then I designed this thing and then they said now give him a gold suit, and I said well he's not exactly Elvis Presley either. So they were real nervous about this, and then when Pete saw this, he loved it. And then the Bill Graham people were fine with it.

Michael Erlewine: And this. You've done this kind of thing. It's very rich and beautiful.

Randy Tuten: A lot of times, there's no time to develop a really interesting design, so a lot of the time, you just use a color combinations, and nice lettering,

and just some basic design element that has nothing to do with the band. See, that idea is to.. the poster thing was always supposed to be where you stopped people, because it's a nice looking poster, to read the poster.

So over the years, people have gotten more in a hurry, and you have to read posters in a hurry. Well, that's the wrong attitude, you know. You make it's nice enough where people stop and they'll say " Well, what is that? Let's look at this." A good example the Skull and Roses, you know. It is still a great looking poster, 30 years after the show. And it's hard to beat.

Michael Erlewine: And this is classic. It's really nice.

Randy Tuten: Oh the Pete Townsend came out absolutely gorgeous. Yeah, and it wasn't bright colors. It was just gold and like three different blues.

Michael Erlewine: Well it's, you know, UK right? Well those guys are pretty cool, and here you go again. This is that same effect and it's very effective.

Randy Tuten: Yeah. When in doubt, you just do nice colorful things like the Joan Osborne poster a design on it aimed towards her.

Michael Erlewine: I don't think anyone does this effect better than you do. It's really gorgeous.

Randy Tuten: Well, thank you.

Michael Erlewine: Absolutely, and Gary Grimshaw has done a couple of things similar, but these are all wonderful.

Randy Tuten: Bammy Awards in San Francisco. See, now here's another good example. This is clearly red fading to purple, with orange around it. The

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original art, you can see that easily. On the printed one here, it came out fairly bad print job.

Michael Erlewine: Hmm. Still looks pretty nice.

Randy Tuten: It looks good, but you know all those things make a difference.

Michael Erlewine: So, you just seem to have a real knack for this group of colors. I mean these are effective, but this is like really, really special.

Randy Tuten: Through art history, the most popular colors are, have been yellow, red and orange.

Michael Erlewine: I love oranges and reds and yellows.

Randy Tuten: People tend to over the years, advertisers want something bright. It shows up, so the first reaction is orange red and yellow -- circus colors. Green is probably the least used color.

Michael Erlewine: I love green. I wear green. It's my favorite color.

Randy Tuten: Well, green is a great color, but you've got to use it right or else it'll come out bad. I'll show you an example of a bad poster. You saw these, the three of them?

For Joe Walsh, I didn't know what to do, so we just did ... since he's kind of a crazy guy, we just did kind of a crazy-watercolor poster.

Michael Erlewine: This is such a gorgeous thing.

Randy Tuten: The only time Bob Dylan and his son's band, the Wallflowers, played together. I went to the show. I thought they would at least come out and do a song with each other.

Michael Erlewine: But they didn't?

Randy Tuten: But they didn't.

Michael Erlewine: I saw him recently, Bob Dylan, and he was good,

Randy Tuten: Oh yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Cause some recent years, he has been not so good.

Randy Tuten: Now the fact that he won the academy award, I think is just spectacular.

Michael Erlewine: Did you see that?

Randy Tuten: Oh yeah, it was great.

Michael Erlewine: He turned into a regular person, after he got the award.

Randy Tuten: The highlight of the show.

Michael Erlewine: Amen. It was so great! And the shots they had of his eyes were just too much. Right?

Randy Tuten: Yeah

Michael Erlewine: I just laughed! Here we are again. Here are the same colors. This is just so rich. I've seen all these. These are great. Yeah, this might be one of my favorite posters of all time.

Randy Tuten: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: This is one you know.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, well this is that same thing we were looking, the same color. Here you've done it. You've laid this back. You know, it's not so out-front, but its so... I'll say this is one, when I brought my music company AMG down to the Ann Arbor offices, I put it in the main room, where we met, on the wall -- framed and matted. It's just so great. I thank you for that. That's just so great!

Randy Tuten: You're welcome.

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Randy Tuten: I can, you know what I've never sold one of these posters, cause who would care about Eastern Acoustic Works celebrates 20 years at this point.

Randy Tuten: Tom Waits poster, very popular poster.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, oh it is.

Randy Tuten: Wherever he goes, it rains piano keys, cause he's a piano player.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah (laughs) right.

Randy Tuten: I did this for the Playboy Mansion for the Brian Setzer Orchestra.

Michael Erlewine: Wow, that's neat.

Randy Tuten: it came out pretty good. Hugh Hefner actually called me up and wanted twenty of them. So they're selling.

Michael Erlewine: And there's that ribbon effect again. See it works very nice.

Randy Tuten: Yeah, anytime you're dealing with a whole lot of lettering, you can use a ribbon, and this is for a school, so you use balloons. This is the Santana, BGSE #23

Randy Tuten: Here's the album cover I did for the Persuasions. And it's a little crate. This whole thing is reproduced on a little crate, and if you go small enough it's reproduced again.

Michael Erlewine: Now that, a computer does that, cool that's great.

Randy Tuten: And that was the album cover for the Grateful Dead. They actually used tie-dye thing and they tried to use some computerized font over the tie-dye, and it did not work. It just all melted together, so when you're using tie-die, you've got to use some lettering

that's not rigid, that's floating. So you get that feel.

Randy Tuten: And that was the Stoned Immaculate cover. They used a Rick Griffin image and I just did...

Randy Tuten: So, I'm always looking to make my stuff better, if that's what you're asking.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, I think that you succeeded by doing that.

Randy Tuten: Any artist that thinks, commercial art and fine art, and I'm talking about painters. Generally, when painters make a name for themselves, it's not permanent, but it's more consistent, more famous. I mean that's loosely based, you know. When I say famous, I'm not talking about "stars in your eye" or that kind of thing. Established. I guess "established" would be a better word. Commercial artists kind of gotta' do it every day. Because when you're a commercial artist, if you don't do anything for 10 years, nobody knows about you.

Michael Erlewine: I just had the opportunity to photo-document about 1,000 pieces, many of Gary Grimshaw, from the collection at the Bentley Historical Library. In fact, I don't know of any artist that's done more work than he has, because in the mid-west, they didn't get any of the ambiance of the whole scene, in terms of money. He had to work, always. And he worked mostly for the community, the alternative community, and there're just thousands, hundreds and hundreds, of pieces, not all of them are great, of course, but most of them are very interesting.

But not every artist has done this much stuff. I mean, out of all the artists here,

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the big name ones like Stanley Mouse and so forth have done a lot of work, but not at the quantity level of Gary Grimshaw, I mean in terms of sheer output.

Randy Tuten: Well, I guess you're right. Mouse does a lot of variations. In other words, in the 50's, he was doing T-shirts and car things, you know, so he wasn't always a poster artist. It's like he's an artist more so, than a poster artist. Whereas, I feel I'm just a poster artist, rather than just an artist.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, he did. Here is another one that's also very nice

Randy Tuten: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Are you, so you just kinda' had a thing with The Doors.

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Michael Erlewine: Yeah, I can see that.

Randy Tuten: And it murdered the poster. But the BG-281.

Rick Griffin

Randy Tuten: I didn't meet them early. I met them later on, but I used to see Rick's stuff in the surfer magazine, cause I surfed in Southern California, when I was down there.

Michael Erlewine: Oh really, and what are some examples of the Rick's stuff that you personally like? What do you think is his best stuff? I mean people like the Aoxomoxoa?

!P CP005808 " Rick Griffin's Aoxomoxoa"

Randy Tuten: Yeah, Aoxomoxoa is beautiful, but the Aoxomoxoa poster from Hawaii is actually better, but you know always, each to his own. I mean Rick actually thought that the Jimmy Hendrix eyeball was an albatross around his neck, cause that's all people ever wanted to talk about.

!P CP005895 " Rick Griffin's Hawaiiin Aoxomoxoa"

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, very recognizable.

Randy Tuten: And so, they'd always want him to paint that or draw that.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Randy Tuten: So, he always felt that was an albatross around his neck. But what pieces of Rick's did I think? All his stuff is great. The heart and torch in hand for Big Brother is incredible. I used to have that art work.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, that's wonderful.

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Randy Tuten: But I traded it somewhere along the line.

Randy Tuten: Yeah, and so those guys influenced me, but there were record cover things that... I mean I like some of the R&B boxing poster style stuff too, just the block lettering stuff. I always liked that stuff, so there's a vast array of poster designs you can apply to things.

Michael Erlewine: Did any of the artists take you under their wing? Who befriended you, if any?

Randy Tuten: Yeah. Nobody befriended me really.

Michael Erlewine: Was there a mentor among the group?

Randy Tuten: No. I mean I had a few mentors, but they were just all in my mind.

Michael Erlewine: (laughs) Ok.

Randy Tuten: Certainly no one came along and helped me.

Michael Erlewine: Right, and did you ever become friendly, I mean, you met all of them eventually and

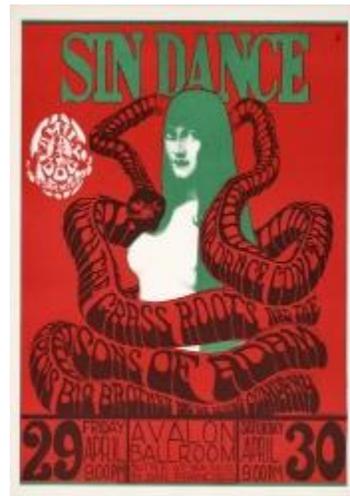
Randy Tuten: Well, I feel like I'm friends with Stanley Mouse and I was certainly friends with Rick Griffin and friends with Alton Kelley...

Michael Erlewine: What about Wes Wilson? Did you meet him? Did you get along with him?

Randy Tuten: I got along with him Ok. I was never really a big fan of Wes' work. I liked a lot of his stuff and his best pieces I think are the Paul Butterfield Blues Band with the hand on the head. And the Lenny Bruce, I think, is a just a really incredible design and there was something...oh, the "Sin Dance."



Butterfield Blues Band FD-003



Sin Dance FD-006

You know there's certain pieces that are more commercial. You know Wes always liked his paintings, always thought his paintings were the best thing about him. I always thought his paintings were lackluster, compared to some of the posters that he designed. Yeah, I like a lot of his posters.

Michael Erlewine: How did you get out of the scene? You did a lot with Bill Graham, but you didn't do much with Chet Helms. Is that right?

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Randy Tuten: Well, you know, when I first came back to San Francisco, in January of 1967, on a permanent basis, I tried to work for the Family Dog for a year. This is kind of a known story; it's been published before. Jaxon, who was the art director of the Family Dog at the time, a cartoonist guy, and an artist in his own right, was the art director there and I always tried to work for them for a year, and they just constantly rejected my efforts.

Michael Erlewine: And you were doing your kind of stuff then?

Randy Tuten: It really wasn't my kinda' stuff. It was just like a mish-mosh, I would describe myself as a mish-mosh of different successful styles over the years.

Michael Erlewine: You're very flexible.

Randy Tuten: Yeah, whether it be like when you when you want to use a graphic woman on a poster. It's hard to beat a Vargas-type-looking girl. You know, that's just some gorgeous looking stuff. And so I would certainly use a Vargas type style to depict a woman.

Michael Erlewine: No, you're very good. One of the things that I learned putting my database together is when I finally got all these images and I was ready to sort them, and I'd never been able to see a whole groups of things and then I went through your group of things and I was saying " Wow I didn't realize how many different styles that you did, like superb work in. it's just that's 'that' style and that's really good. So I don't think anyone else has as many style as you've done, to my knowledge.

Randy Tuten: Yeah, the thing that I really like the most is lettering,

Michael Erlewine: Really?

Randy Tuten: That's really what I like. A lot of the times people will be after me to do a poster for them, for no particular thing, just a poster, a nice looking poster. Well, I have a difficulty doing just a nice looking poster, because it's not an advertising thing. I always felt that I was an advertising artist.

Michael Erlewine: Right, and what was your particular interest in letters? What type of letters do you lean toward?

Randy Tuten: There's not any one particular type of lettering that I lean toward... whatever looks good. Whether it be a western style or psychedelic style or exploding lettering or melting lettering or whatever works on the poster.

Michael Erlewine: What venues are you doing things for now? I know you've kept busy. You're stuff still just keeps appearing.

Randy Tuten: Well, I'm working for the Rolling Rock people, back in Pennsylvania now. I'm doing a lot of album covers, I still work for the Grateful Dead occasionally. I still occasionally do some stuff for Bill Graham, but when they SFX people bought the Bill Graham company, that, along with Bill's death, kind of changed everything.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, I think so,

Randy Tuten: Not immediately, but certainly...

Michael Erlewine: They bought up everything in our area as well. What are the areas that you feel have never been covered about your life, your art, you know when people... I know that interviews have been done and stuff. I've read some material on you. What stuff do you feel is not covered and you

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know what questions should I be asking that I'm not? I don't know you as well as some of the other artists.

Randy Tuten: I wouldn't know how to answer that right off the bat here. What things about me are not known, is what you're saying?

Michael Erlewine: Yeah or ought to be more out, better understood?

Commercial Artist

Randy Tuten: Well, you know, for a long time I always felt that artists that were painters or poets, that kind of stuff was kind of like a cerebral side of the art world, and that I really viewed the commercial advertising side as a different side of the art world. But over the years, a number of people have changed my opinion about that.

Michael Erlewine: I mean like how do you feel now?

Randy Tuten: It's Ok for other people to call me an artist, but I've never felt like I was an artist myself.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, part of my function I hope is to help people to understand, you know. We talked about the memorabilia art before. Memorabilia's been covered. It's not like I deny that. I think that a lot of the stuff is more affordable; affordable, appreciable, collectable art, that you know, as far as I'm concerned is dirt-cheap. Just from the collector's point of view.

Randy Tuten: I guess what I'd have to say about that is I've never felt like that I was someone who did collectable stuff. I'm someone that does advertising, a commercial artist, if you will.

It's like the things I work on are fairly selective. Obviously, you don't see me doing stuff for a lot of punk bands or you know new-wave music, just cause I don't feel that comfortable around them. Not that there's anything wrong with them, but I think they'd probably be better served by getting some other graphic artist to do something for them.

Michael Erlewine: Someone that's in synch with them.

Randy Tuten: You know someone like Frank Kozik's style, or like a lot of these new bands and artists, nowadays. They want this flash; they want to make some kind of a statement, rather than just being ...I guess I would probably describe my stuff as... I like to do stuff that looks good, but is in good taste.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, well I think you, of all the artists I've had these discussions, you are most consistent, over the length of your career. You're still producing top rate art, some of the other artists are and some of them are not. Some of them peaked or whatever. You haven't really had a peak. Your work is just very steady.

Randy Tuten: Consistent, it's called. (laughs)

MUSIC FAVS

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, well that's hard to find and interesting. What kind of music do you like at this time in your life?

Randy Tuten: Well I like everything, I certainly like early jazz. I mean early like New Orleans... Louis Armstrong, Cab Calloway, even swing, Benny Goodman, Glenn Miller. I certainly like folk music from the 50's. I certainly like surf music a lot from the 60's. I always thought that

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surf music was kind of simple and easy, but it is actually so simple, that the people that do it, have to be more precise.

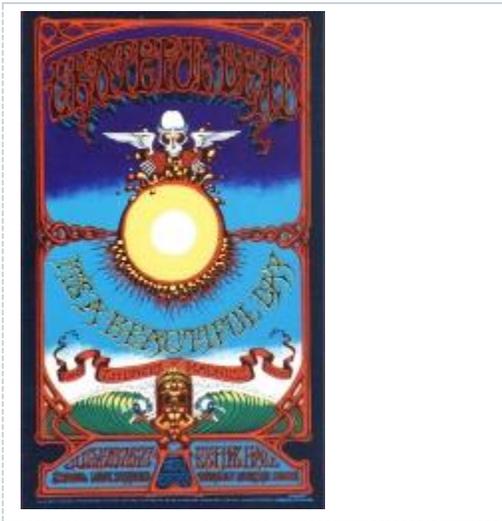
Michael Erlewine: I saw Brian Wilson, when he came back on that short tour. I saw his first performance of that tour. It was a really awesome experience,

Randy Tuten: Brian Wilson. I don't really view him as a surf musician. He's kind of like... when the Beatles did Sgt. Peppers Lonely Hearts Club. It was completely different; every time the people would write the Beatles off, they'd invent something new.

Michael Erlewine: They did.

Randy Tuten: Not new, but just different. It was new too, but it was different and, you know, excited the people too -- excitement kind of thing.

Michael Erlewine: Indeed they did.



Rick Griffin's Hawaiian Aoxomoxoa

Interview with Stanley Mouse

by Michael Erlewine

Stanley Mouse Interview

Tuesday, May 8th, 2001

Mouse Studios

Sonoma, California

[Stanley Mouse is one of the legendary San Francisco artists, although his roots are in Detroit. Some of the most known and loved S.F. posters bear the Mouse signature or that of his co-designer Alton Kelley. Mouse is a superb draughtsman and painter as well - very sophisticated and subtle.]

Raised in a Family of Artists

Michael Erlewine: And just so I get it right, birth date and year?

Stanley Mouse: October 10, 1940.

Michael Erlewine: How did you get into, like you know how did you, were you always doing art as a kid, did someone influence you? How were you inspired? How did it happen?



Stanley Mouse with Painting

Stanley Mouse: My dad was an artist, he worked for Walt Disney as an animator, worked on "Snow White."

Michael Erlewine: Really.

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Stanley Mouse: And so I grew up around the dinner table drawing pictures with him, and cartoons, and when I was about five ... I remember him saying "Look, he can draw a perfect circle!" (laughs)

Michael Erlewine: And you carried it on into school?

Stanley Mouse: Yeah, in high school ... in grade school, I drew all over my books, and I was the class, you know, cartoonist.

Michael Erlewine: Where did you go to high school?

Stanley Mouse: In Detroit. I started off at McKinsey High and quit, and then went to art school for a year, and then finished at Cooley High.

Michael Erlewine: And school, was that worth while?

Stanley Mouse: Let's back up.

Michael Erlewine: Sure

Stanley Mouse: Grade school is where I got my name. One of my friends used to call me "Mouse 'o Miller." And I used to call him, "Puss," "Puss-nuts Posney," I think.

Michael Erlewine: And your given name was?

Michael Erlewine: Stanley Miller.

Stanley Mouse: And so anyway, I said "I kinda' like the 'mouse' part and I told him to drop the 'o' and, you know, the 'Mouse' is cool. And ever since then, I started signing, you know, writing things as 'Mouse,' and it caught on everybody knew me as "Mouse," instantly, in grade school.

And then in high school... well, the first high school I went to was kind of a

rough high school, and I didn't like it at all, except for the hangin' out at the hangout across the street, and the hot rods, and stuff.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Stanley Mouse: But I went to art school in 1956, in downtown Detroit, at the Society of Arts and Crafts.

And it was in an old building, way, way down town. And I would drive down there, in the depths of winter, (laughs) to downtown Detroit. And I excelled in life drawing.

Michael Erlewine: Really! So you, you can draw people and things?

Stanley Mouse: Yeah, and I think that's where first I was turned on to Art Nouveau shapes, because Art Nouveau is based on human body, and also on flower shapes, nature, nature shapes.

But more so the human body than anything. And then, after going to art school for about a year, and it was right after the Korean war and our school was full of a lot of soldiers, who didn't go to the university because they weren't smart enough, so they went to art school, and they got a free ride. And so it was full of those guys, and it wasn't that much fun.

Michael Erlewine: They weren't really artists.

Stanley Mouse: No, they weren't, and they made noises at the model, and the model would jump off her stand and walk out of the room. And get pissed off. Anyway, I wanted to go back to high school, where there were people my age and stuff, so I picked Cooley, which was the next school out from me, and it was a very Ivy League school. The

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hangout had half greasers and half Ivy League kids.

Michael Erlewine: Well, that's the way it was in Ann Arbor too.

Stanley Mouse: And I would stand in the middle and work both crowds. (laughs)

Michael Erlewine: I was in the middle, but not working the crowds.

Pin-Stripping, Flame Jobs, and Monster Cars

Stanley Mouse: (laughs) I became the school cartoonist, and then in my last year, I started painting T-shirts at car shows and at the fair, and I became immediately, instantly famous. And rich. Like I'd have ads in Rod-Custom Magazine, and I'd get a hundred dollars every day in our mailbox, which those days was like getting a thousand dollars a day in our mailbox.

Michael Erlewine: That's amazing. And what would you do for that?

Stanley Mouse: I'd paint T-shirts and silk screen T-shirts and ...

Michael Erlewine: Really, but you weren't painting vehicles or anything.

Stanley Mouse: No, at first I started off pin-stripping cars and ...

Michael Erlewine: So you did do that.

Stanley Mouse: Yeah, and flaming them and stuff. But then, when I got an airbrush, I started, you know, spraying cars with flames and stuff. And I liked the movement of the spray gun, and then I got hold of an airbrush, and I saw them painting shirts on the West Coast

in these hot-rod books, and so I got a T-shirt and painted one. And all the kids in the neighborhood brought their shirts down, and I painted them. And it just went on. It was a rage. It was big.

Michael Erlewine: How did you get from that, into the music business?

Stanley Mouse: Well, so for the next eight years, my parents went to work for me, my mother ran my mail order and my dad managed me on the road. And we went to hot rod shows every weekend. And during the week I went to art school.

Michael Erlewine: Wow.

Stanley Mouse: And in art school, they try to teach you that kind of abstract stuff. I could never figure it out, but I was always interested in life drawing, and excelled in it.

Michael Erlewine: Well, that's great.

Stanley Mouse: And then after about 8-10 years of painting like that, actually my painting got so good, you know people said that, it looked like advertising art, it could be used as advertising art. And here I was painting \$6 T-shirts, where I coulda' been doing, you know, big time art. And so, I started kinda' looking and searching for some, you know, the next step, and a few friends of mine saw me searching, and then they said " No you're, you're looking for something."

To the West Coast

Stanley Mouse: And when psychedelics came in, there was this whole explosion of ...

Michael Erlewine: And what year are we talking about?

Stanley Mouse: 1963

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Michael Erlewine: Ok, Psychedelics in 63' were out in the West Coast.

Stanley Mouse: Sandos Acid. And it was pure. It was great.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, it was good.

Stanley Mouse: Not like the bathtub acid they did here.

Michael Erlewine: Don't know. I haven't had it, I don't think. I don't even drink anymore.

Stanley Mouse: I don't either.

Michael Erlewine: I don't even drink caffeine.

Stanley Mouse: The worst thing I do is I do cokes, and coffee.

Michael Erlewine: I gave them up, because I can't sleep.

Stanley Mouse: Yeah, so then the war started and it was, you know, I wanted to be in the anti-war movement, and so and a lot of people said.

Michael Erlewine: And you were living where then?

Stanley Mouse: Detroit.

Michael Erlewine: Did you know Gary Grimshaw at all?

Stanley Mouse: No this was...

Michael Erlewine: Or he's a little younger.

Stanley Mouse: And so, a lot of Detroiters moved to San Francisco, and I got word back that there was a lot happening in San Francisco, and I really always liked San Francisco, because I'd been there painting shirts and stuff at car shows, so got in my Porsche.
(laughs)

Michael Erlewine: Really.

Stanley Mouse: I had a brand new Porsche and drove to San Francisco. And when I got there though, I moved to Berkeley first... I actually got a little place in Berkeley.

Michael Erlewine: And this is what year?

Stanley Mouse: 1965. And I would sit there and paint T-shirts out there and a lot of people were having parties in San Francisco and the parties were getting and bigger and wilder and wilder. A lot of psychedelics and bands playing at the parties like the "Charlatans ."

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Stanley Mouse: And this is just pre-dancehall. And then I got drafted and I went back to Detroit, and I got out of the draft by taking mass quantities of acid and going in on my induction day. And they sent me away. I was, you know everybody in there tried to be insane,

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Stanley Mouse: I was the only person who was totally sane. But anyway, I got out of the draft and made a bee-line back to San Francisco. I got a drive away and they said "All we have left is a drive-away hearse." and I said "Perfect."

Michael Erlewine: You're kidding.
(laughs)

Stanley Mouse: So, I slapped a "Make Love, Not War" sticker on the back window, and drove to San Francisco. I got there the night of the acid trips.

Michael Erlewine: Really?

Stanley Mouse: And but we were so... It was me, my old lady, and the dog, and we were so tired of driving all that way, and we didn't go in. We should have,

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and we really didn't know what it was at the time.

All we knew ... there was a party going on. And what happened is, when I was gone, they went into the dancehall thing. The parties got so big, they started dance halls. And then they started doing those posters, and I saw, you know, Wes Wilson's posters, and I went "Wow, I can do that!"

Michael Erlewine: So his were the posters that kind of rang a bell for you? Or those were just the first posters you saw?

Stanley Mouse: Yeah, well it seemed like there was an art movement. When I was there in 1965, I'd see in people's houses... It was called, I think they called it "Funk Movement," and Wes's early posters were definitely derived from the funk movement.

Michael Erlewine: How would you describe that?

Stanley Mouse: Well, you know his first ones, like the Paul Butterfield poster. People were doing art. It was like it came out of the North Beach, kind of beatnik scene.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, that's kinda' where I started.

Stanley Mouse: And it was that kinda' rounded shapes and real funky looking, and collage stuff. And so it came out of there. I don't know how. He just pulled it out of that. And then he adopted that German lettering thing, after awhile.

But then, at first it was those letters were blobs. And I said. "Wow, I can do that," and you know, bells went off in my head, you know. I was looking for something new. And there it was! And

something drew me out there. And that's what it was.

Michael Erlewine: The hearse thing was a wonderful embellishment, right?

Stanley Mouse: (laughs) Yeah.

Michael; Incredible fact.

Stanley Mouse: And yeah, I almost got run off the road a few times like, in Arizona and stuff. People were pissed off about that.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah!

Stanley Mouse: So I got a little place and next door to me moved in Bob Siedeman. I didn't know he was living there in the apartment next to me on 17th Street. And also Ida Griffin.

Michael Erlewine: Really.

The Firehouse

Stanley Mouse: And then my landlord came into me and said " You gotta' move, cause' I want to move in here." And I said " I'm not...", I said "Well find me a place to move to!" and he said " What do you want?" and I said "A fire house" and the next day he came up with a firehouse!

Michael Erlewine: Really?

Stanley Mouse: And that's a great landlord, and he's got a gallery now in Carmel. And so I moved into this firehouse, and there's a nice place for a studio upstairs. And Alton Kelley came over with Chet Helms. And I knew Kelley from my first time I came there. He knew all the Detroit people.

Michael Erlewine: So you were already friends. That was one of the questions: How did you guys hook up? You have made some wonderful stuff together. No

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other combination has been as powerful.

Stanley Mouse: Well, when I first met Kelley, he was like ... he was real interesting. He was on Pine Street in this empty house, and there was a heap of trash in the corner, and he was sittin' on top of it, and he was like the guru, and you know, he had all these people sittin' around him (laughs) and he was talking to them all, and there was a little AM radio going on, a real nasty-sounding AM radio in the corner. And I said " This guy is really far out!," you know, and then we were kind of friends. He came over.... My Porsche broke down, and he was working on trying to fix the rear end on my Porsche. We would see Ida Griffin walk in the house next door. Then Kelley came over with Chet Helms and I guess Kelley was the art director for the Family Dog.

And they asked me to do a poster. Chet said "What kind of stuff do you do?" and I said, "Well cartoons and stuff," and he said "There'll be no cartoons here."

(laughs) And that's probably one of the reasons I never got into Zap Comix, you know, because I didn't wanna' be known for cartoons...

Michael Erlewine: interesting.

The Stacks of the San Francisco Library

Stanley Mouse: Some kind of psychic thing happened, and I thought I was too sophisticated for cartoons. But what happened was, as I was doing the posters.... because I came out of Detroit, and wasn't sophisticated at all, and came out of hot rod monsters... There was so much happening, every day was like a year. And I quickly... real

fast I became, every day, I became more and more sophisticated, and then Kelley and I would go to the library and would just scour through all the art book in the San Francisco Library.

And they had these stacks in the back. You could go in and couldn't take books out, but they had all the old books, art books, and we'd just scour through them all. And just doing that, our art education became so amazing. I looked at the Art Nouveau and the Art Deco, and all that stuff. Nobody knew that stuff then. Nobody did it even. And Kelley's apartments were always really tastefully done. He really had a certain taste. He did the ultimate hippie kinda' ah trip. He really had good taste and I thought, well you know, with his kinda' taste and my hand, which was really at it's apex at the time, from drawing some near a millions miles of drawing on T-shirts and airbrushing, that I thought there was a really cool combination. I always liked... I guess it might be one of my Libra traits, that I always like to paint with somebody else.

Michael Erlewine: That's amazing to me.

Stanley Mouse: When I used to paint shirts, I even had a friend that used to work for 'Big Daddy' Don Garlitz . He started working for us, and we'd work together and bounce back a lot on each other, you know. We'd feed each other ideas and stuff.

Michael Erlewine: That's very unusual. Most people are too proud to share anything like that.

Stanley Mouse: (laughs) Kelley was you know a great layout and he had really fine taste, and so we start doing these posters which were instantly really far

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out and sophisticated. And it was an amazing thing, you know, like it was that moment in time where like you keep saying that it was the apex and it was... it felt like, you know, we were flowering and it was really neat.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, I remember that.

Stanley Mouse: And then we were doing a poster every week. And my old lady said to me... She got mad at me, cause' she said "Let's go out. You can paint. You can do other stuff. You don't have to do these posters!," but I knew I was on to something that was bigger than both of us, and she threw an ink bottle across the room and it (laughs) got all over everybody and all our art. I think she left.

The Scene Winds Down

Michael Erlewine: How did that whole psychedelic era poster era end for you? I mean how did you move beyond it into, that must be interesting for each of you guys. Was it painful or was it just a natural transition?

Stanley Mouse: Yeah, it was natural. The scene went up and then I got a shop on 8th street, called "Pacific Ocean Trading Company" (POTCO). It was a poster shop, plus we sold, you know, anything. It was like a little head shop, poster shop -- T-shirts and stuff. And we just watched the whole summer of love go down, from there. And then I moved. And the firehouse... the Diggers asked if they could fix a car there, cause' it has a big garage. Also "Big Brother and the Holding Company" used to practice there and Chet brought over Janis Joplin. And she auditioned for the band one afternoon, and they came up after and they said "What do you think?" I

said "it's either great or horrible." (laughs) It was one of the two.

Michael Erlewine: (laughs) right.

Stanley Mouse: And then that night police showed up at the door and said we've got reports of a woman screaming in here.

Michael Erlewine: (laughs) That's really funny.

Stanley Mouse: (laughs) And then the Diggers came in and they asked if they could fix a car in there, and I said "OK," and then pretty soon, there was two cars, and then three cars, and then there was about ten cars, you know. I'd come, wake up one morning, come downstairs, and they'd say "Who the fuck are you?" and so I went "Oh, it's time to move. They just took over my place."

Michael Erlewine: So you moved out?

Stanley Mouse: So I moved out, yeah. And the "Grateful Dead" had just rented the house across the street from me on 7th and Ashbury, and they put their offices in there, and upstairs at the top floor, there was like a little garret and some nice rooms. And I moved in there. They let me move in there and have my studio, and we did some work in there, and it was a lot of fun. And then I guess the, what happened, the scene just dissolved. It just got bad, and Martin Luther king got shot, and it got dangerous to walk down the street. It was, really, you know ... racially it was really a lot of strife and drugs had, because of the media, and all the drugies from all over the country merged there and the drug scene got really outrageous and bad. And heroine took over the street,

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Speed and the flower children or the long hairs, Victorian hippies (laughs)... Well, they weren't hippies. The hippies came later. It was the hippies that were the people who came, I think, that they got named hippies, but it started as poets, musicians, and writers and artists, and having a lot of parties and everybody had long hair. One time, we were walking down town San Francisco and Alton Kelley said to me...our hair was blowing in the breeze and he says. "You know, there must be 500 of us here." (laughs) God, within a year, there was like 50,000 hippies running around.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Stanley Mouse: But then it got different, you know, and everybody... We started off dressing in Victorian clothes from the... San Francisco was pretty pristine then, and the thrift shops were full of Victorian goodies, and you know. So we all dressed really fancy, and by the time all the hippies took over, they were dressing in army clothes.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Stanley Mouse: (laughs) And so it really changed, and then that was the hippies, I guess. And then it got so bad, I think, let's see then, I moved out to somewhere in San Francisco and they burnt down our house (laughs). It was Kelley's house. Some of the neighbors didn't like the hippies in the neighborhood.

Michael Erlewine: Did someone burn it down?

Stanley Mouse: Yeah, they burnt down the house.

Michael Erlewine: Wow.

I Just Lived in a Room by Myself, and I Started Reading Eastern Religion Books

Stanley Mouse: And burnt us out, and then we went to live on Sutter Street. It was real nice, and I just lived in a room by myself, and I started reading Eastern religion books, and sitting in a room by myself. And it was really a glorious time. I felt like I was... I really felt holy. I felt, like when people came to visit me it, was like they were all holy. It was a real nice thing.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Stanley Mouse: And I would still smoke pot. (laughs) Actually the pot really helped the meditation. Sometimes, when I really couldn't get anywhere, I'd take a little toke and it would put me right over the edge and take me out into..... I was meditating and had a meditation injury. I was meditating and I felt there was like a hundred piece orchestra playing in my head, and then I saw these golden gates, and I figured they were the gates to heaven and I got really excited and I tried to leap up to my easel, from a total deep meditative state, cause I wanted to capture it, and I tore both my knees.

Michael Erlewine: Really! You're kidding.

Stanley Mouse: Yeah, it was lotus position (laughs) and so for all these years I've been suffering, yeah.

Michael Erlewine: You're supposed to float up right? You're supposed to just levitate.

Stanley Mouse: Yeah right! I should have levitated to the easel.

Off to England

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Stanley Mouse: And then the thought is that a phone rings and it's Eric Clapton and he says "Stanley, do you want to come to London and paint my Rolls Royce and so I said "Yeah." I went to Detroit and I went to the state fair, again, painting T-shirts. I made enough money to fly to England and I lived there for a year. I never did paint his Rolls Royce. He smashed it before I got there and he got busted. He was running from the police. We were at the end of the scene. I went to London.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah. I mean how does one extract ones self from something like that!?

Stanley Mouse: It was a slow process of the scene dying and everybody spreading out and doing other things. And like I went to London and did some work for Blind Faith. I did some lettering for their debut poster in the park and part of it ended up on their album cover, some lettering on the alternative, when the album cover got banned.

And Bob Siedeman did the album cover. And I did some little work for the Beatles and then Woodstock happened and Kelley was doing signs at Woodstock, so I flew back and joined him in Boston. He was living in Boston, and I stayed there for a while, and then I ... we kind of were running around and we did a Jimi Hendrix album cover, just before he died, that never came out.

Michael Erlewine: Are you still in touch with him?

Stanley Mouse: Yeah

Stanley Mouse: And we were living in Boston and then we, then in 1972, we both got together in Marin county and

started Monster Company, it was a T-shirt company.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah I know it, I have one of your calendars.

Stanley Mouse: Yeah, and then started a studio and started doing some really great posters and album covers, real lavish airbrush stuff, and I brought the airbrush back.

And then, after about 1979, I kinda' got fed up with the whole scene. It was the coke era. I had a building in San Rafael that I rented to a whole bunch of artists and it just turned into a big coke party place.

Michael Erlewine: Sounds like another firehouse!

Stanley Mouse: Yeah sort of. Then I said I'm getting out of here, and they said: "You can't leave," cause' I was the guy holding the rent, you know, paying the rent, when they couldn't. And I said: "Watch me," and I moved out of town. I moved up here to Sonoma and settled down and had a family.

Michael Erlewine: Really.

Stanley Mouse: We moved to Sante Fe, New Mexico for a couple years, Lake Tahoe, and then came to Sonoma. And Alton Kelley moved up to Petaluma. We still do a couple things together.

Michael Erlewine: You still do.

Stanley Mouse: Yeah, we did a album cover for the "Grateful Dead" a couple years ago, and we did a poster of ourselves.

Michael Erlewine: I saw that one of yourselves. It's nice. Did the Hendrix cover that never came out ever?

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Stanley Mouse:We made a T-shirt out of it. It was the scarab with the wings and later on we turned the scarab into the "Journey" thing.

Family

Michael Erlewine: What did your dad think, when you were so successful? That must have been a great trip.

Stanley Mouse:Well, he would say, " I taught him everything he knows"

Michael Erlewine: (laughs) Oh, of course!

Stanley Mouse:He was very proud and because having a family and trying to make money, you know, during the war and that he, he never really got to follow his art thing through, and so he kinda' lived that through me, I think. And also, he supported me, like really supported me. He didn't tell me to go out and be a lawyer.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah that's cool.

Stanley Mouse:I never did have a job. Both my parents are really supportive and believed in me. It was cool.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, my dad came (towards the end of his life) and worked for me, also. That's why I asked. But he wanted to come right in my little office, which was about as big a tea cup, and have his desk in there with me, and he did, for quite awhile --a number of years or so. It was funny. He was a business person. He was the controller for the university. Ferris State college, if you know where that is.

Stanley Mouse:Ferris. All right. That's where all the partygoers went to.

Michael Erlewine: It was a drinking school. That's right.

Stanley Mouse:Yeah, and after, when I moved out here too, I left my parents kinda' with nothing, you know. I kinda' left them too, and soon as I started doing the posters, I sent posters back to them, And they immediately started up a poster shop, and it turned into like a head shop, and it ran for 30 years. It was like Detroit's, you know, biggest head shop, you know, the longest lasting one.

Michael Erlewine: Really, what was the name of it?

Stanley Mouse:The "Mouse House."

Michael Erlewine: Wow. Of all the things you've told me, the little bit about your parents is the most interesting. I mean not that the rest isn't but I think that's really something wonderful.

Stanley Mouse:Yeah, it is wonderful.

Michael Erlewine: That kind of support.

Stanley Mouse:So I went to Bill Graham during that time and I asked him asked: can I send some posters home to my mom? So got me, put together a bunch of posters for me and then he docked me.

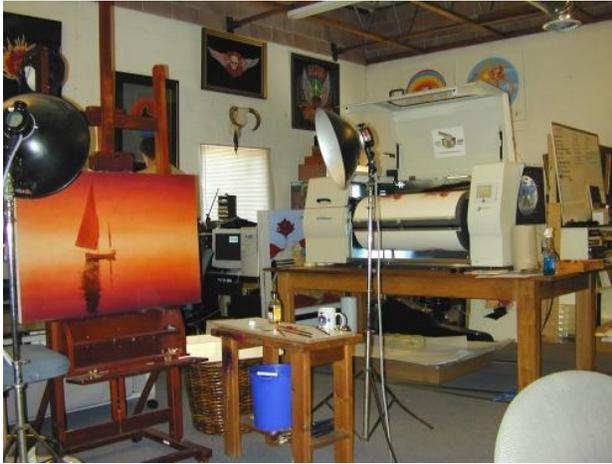
Michael Erlewine: Really.

Stanley Mouse:Instead of paying me a hundred dollars on the next poster, he'd take off 25 dollars on every poster I did for him, to pay him back the posters he sent to my mom. (laughs)

Michael Erlewine: I met him once. He and I had a shouting match about amplifiers, the time I played at the Fillmore. One of the things I'd like to ask about is how you became such a technical artist, you know skill in drawing and various techniques?

Technical Stuff

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Mouse Studio - Paintings and Presses

Stanley Mouse: I always liked gismos and mechanical stuff, you know. And I always did things with wheels on them, being from Detroit. Airbrush was always like a mechanical device.

All the time when I was painting like, you know, when Kelley and I would do those real lavish airbrush paintings, we'd do a red background. You know, it took us a long time to do it, and I said "God, I'd love to see it with a blue background," and there was no way, unless you paint it all out white, and then paint the blue, in which it was a, you know, monstrous two-day job. And so, as soon as these came along, they'd say "Oh, you can press a button and change the background color." (laughs) I want that!

Michael Erlewine: Right. What do the other artists think when they visit here. Don't they want to do something similar, or they're not interested.

Mouse, Well, a lot of people aren't.. I mean, I'm not that technically inclined you know. Like I'm totally dependent on the printer technicians...

Michael Erlewine: No, I mean you're technically in a sense that you make

sure that you have it. It doesn't matter whether you service it. You have all the tools. Why don't some of the other artists have these too?

Stanley Mouse: I'm always into photography too.

Michael Erlewine: I know a little bit about it photography, have a view cameras and things. I see you've got a killer one there and this thing, so...

Stanley Mouse: Yeah, this is the one I wanna' put a digital back on. This is really far out.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah I've got a small one. It's very elegant, a Linhof.

Stanley Mouse: Yeah, that's what I got. I've got some. Where's my Linhof?

Michael; Yeah, that's amazing! I've never seen one of those. Now what is this?

Stanley Mouse: Serious. And I'm gonna' put a digital back on it.

Michael Erlewine: And what do those things run? Those are great!

Stanley Mouse: Digital backs? \$25,000.

Michael Erlewine: You know what size is that?

Stanley Mouse: It just like a scanner

Michael Erlewine: So you just dispense with that whole step?

Stanley Mouse: Yeah, it's like you enter the artwork by camera, and then it gets hooked to the computer and it just feeds the information right through the computer.

I started by copying my artwork. I got a little speed graphic and then I started going through camera swap meets and just dealing Leicas, Nikons, and just,

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you know, and sorta' like hung on to the view camera here. I got Leicas and a Hasslblad...

Michael Erlewine: Well, a lot of this stuff floats up on Ebay.

Stanley Mouse: Yeah

Retro Hot Rod

Stanley Mouse: The best thing is that it's coming around again, some of my hot rod stuff.

Michael Erlewine: You're kidding?

Stanley Mouse: People are really wanting it.

Michael Erlewine: Really!

Stanley Mouse: Yeah, it's the kinda' retro-nostalgic

Michael Erlewine: So what do you offer? How does that appear?

Stanley Mouse: Well, we are coming out with a whole web site,

Michael Erlewine: Are we talkin' T-shirts? What?

Stanley Mouse: When Big Daddy Roth died. So, it's like when Rick Griffin died they said "Now you're #1"

Stanley Mouse: I license out a lot of stuff, I think, in T-shirts and models, I've got some of these classic models coming out.

Michael Erlewine: You've made a real business of this. I mean this is being successful.

Stanley Mouse: Well, still struggling, but it's on the verge.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah well, the little I know, this is the way I would do it. I mean, this is very efficient way to do the whole thing. And I was talking to David

Singer. I think more people should go to these kind of one-off poser printings.

Stanley Mouse: They will. They will. I mean if they can run an ink-jet printer, then they can run this.

Mouse and Kelley Book

Michael Erlewine: There's a book you did with Kelley. Then there's a book, "Freehand." Are both of these still available or not?

Stanley Mouse: "Freehand" you can still buy in book stores, if they have it in, or order it from the publisher. The other one, the first one, never did make it to the bookstores, because the binding was faulty.

Michael Erlewine: So there were no copies, or there were some?

Stanley Mouse: So they sold them all underground, to rock and roll houses, like Phil Cushway, and so forth.

Michael Erlewine: But can you get them, are they available?

Stanley Mouse: I can give you one.

Michael Erlewine: Oh you don't have to do that but I'd like to get one or buy one.

Stanley Mouse: And what they did is they told me they shredded them all, and they sold them underground to everybody.

Michael Erlewine: Right. Typical.

Stanley Mouse: So they didn't have to pay me any royalties.

Michael Erlewine: That's disgusting.

Stanley Mouse: Yeah. Now I have to buy them, when I want them.

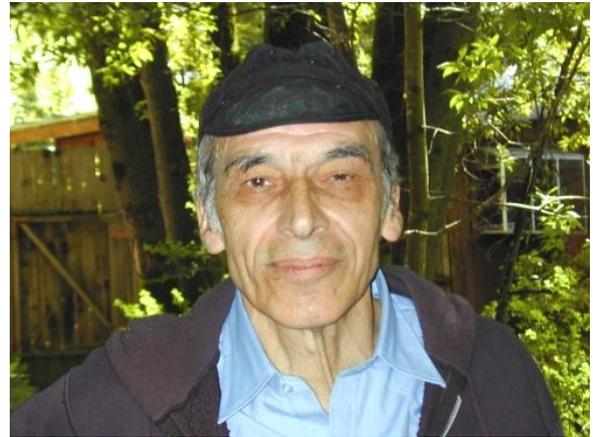
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Interview with Victor Moscoso

by Michael Erlewine

[Victor Moscoso is an original and independent all the way around, both as an artist and a person. He was seminally creative back in the day and continues to be in the present. You can never put Moscoso in a box. Don't even try. Just enjoy his creativity and incredible poster work.]

Background



Victor Moscoso

Moscoso: Yeah, let me, get the meter going.

Moscoso: Ok. There we go. Now you got your tape. I've got my tape. You got.... See, the reason I had to do that, is because I....

Michael: You want stereo!

Moscoso: No! I'd say, "Ok, I'll do the interview but, you gotta' send me a dup!"

Michael: Well, I could do that too.

Moscoso: Well, one out of twenty people would send me a dup! I figured: fuck this man, you know. I'll just get my own tape and I'll do it, that way they got their tape, I got my tape. They're both the same tape, you know, and then they

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don't have to bother with sending me a dup and that's it. Job is done!

Michael: Well, I'll send you the transcription.

Moscoso: Oh! That'll be excellent.

[Victor has a photo of Rick Griffin, on the other side of his worktable]



Victor in his workshop, with Rick Griffin photo

Moscoso: Ok. Anyway, when I was doing the cover to Zap Comix #13, which was a tribute to Rick Griffin, you know, I talked to the photograph and said, "Ok, Rick, I'm leaving now. [Laughs]. If you feel like [laughs] ... if you feel like doing anything on the drawing while I'm sleepin', go ahead. You know. Feel free!" [Laughs].

He didn't, you know, so I had to do all the work. But the poster that he has under his foot there is the probably the most influential poster that Rick did on my work, because at that time, in October of 1967, Gail and I went to New York. I'm from New York, you know. And I figured, well, being a New Yorker, you know, the only place to make it is New York. So I figured, now, with this portfolio, you know, of what they did... I

had been in Life Magazine and all that, I figure I'll go to New York and I'll make it. All right, so I went to New York, you know, and then I realized that not only had I already made it, but I wasn't a New Yorker anymore... you know. Cause' you scratch New York on a psychedelic surface and there's New York, man ... the gray battleship, that it looked like when I came over the Brooklyn Bridge.

Moscoso: You know, I used to run over the bridge. It's higher than the cars, so you can see the whole lower Manhattan, and it was always gray. It was always gray, and to me it looked like a battleship. I expected it'd pull out any moment, you know, and the skyscrapers were these huge gun turrets, you know.

Anyway, so while I was there, I ran into most of the people that I had looked up to, you know, high school, college buddies of mine, have gone in totally different, you know, just totally different and they weren't droppin' acid they weren't smokin' dope, except for this one guy, Pablo Ferro. So Pablo Ferro is doing the titles to "Doctor Strangelove," the refueling sequence... [singing] "Try a little tenderness." And the atom bomb sequence, which is, [singing] "We'll meet again, don't know where, don't know when..." I thought it was Stanley Kubric. It fit so well. It was Pablo Ferro. Pablo, meanwhile, is collecting my posters. He's got them all over his place, but he can't read my name. [Laughs]. He said, "You did these?" I said, "You got my posters all over the place." He said, "I didn't know you do these, man." He says, "Well would you do a Christmas card for me, a poster Christmas card for me?"

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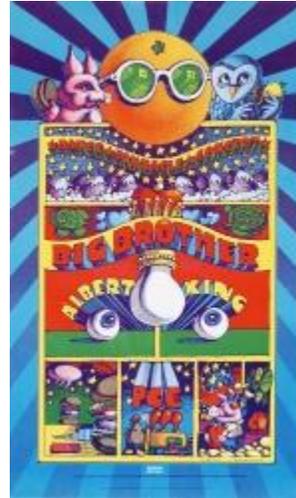
Neon Rose # 22

So I said, "Sure." Now, I had just seen Antonioni's "Blow-Up," and I don't know why it was, but when I came out of there, I understood how to make a film. So, from that point on, I figured, Ok, I want to go into filmmaking. So, because Pablo Ferro was into filmmaking, that was my first sequential poster, There's six panels: one, two, three, four... It tells a little story.

All right. All the principle photography was shot. That's Pablo there. Gail is flying out of the violin case, you know. Pablo's cousin and brother come in from the side, drop the flowers into the violin case. Had all the photography done and had the thing laid out, you know. All I had to do was "do the poster," Ok?

Well, I was living on Church Street, just near the Mission Dolores, just above the Mission Dolores, Church and Liberty Streets. And I open up the door and what do I see? That poster. Rick had come and slipped the poster underneath my door. I looked and I said, "Holy shit!" He too was doing a serial poster, you know, but it was a cartoon. Mine was photographic, because of the Antonioni film and being live action, I thought I'd

go in that direction. Well, that changed me around, so that was what happened and then we started working together and then I started going into cartooning, which I had purged myself of when I was, quote, a "fine arts painter." Anytime any cartoon influences came up, I got rid of them.



*Big Brother at Shrine Auditorium
1968-05-02/04*

Well, when we got together, eventually we ended up with, let me see, the Pinnacle Poster with Big Brother and the Holding Company, Albert King, and P.G. & E. (Pacific Gas & Electric), with the orange with sunglasses. An owl eating... This is how we were gonna' represent L.A. [Laughs]. I think it was an owl eating a taco and a pig eating a burrito or something like that. I mean this is L.A. But at the bottom of it, there were three panels. There were three panels that Rick had drawn and then we add color, together. And we came to the conclusion that we should do a comic-magazine book, you know.

This is before even saw a "Zap". All right, so we started doing it, started doing these things. I had made a template, so that both Rick's work and

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my work would be in the same template, same shape, and then we would just randomly get them together and then color them in. And do what... Actually, what we had in mind was something like the "Man from Utopia," or something that Rick did later, like a magazine. Well, then we saw Zap #1 and R. Crumb invited Rick and I into a....

Rick said, "Well, we're already working on a book, you know, Moscoso and Griffin," and Crumb said, "Well fine! You know, just put this stuff in." And since Wes Wilson was doing his stuff himself and since Crumb was doing his work by himself, Rick and I separated our work to be individual, but if you look at Looma Tunes and you look at the other one, you see the panels are exactly alike, you know. And they could be interchanged, you know. But we separated them at that point, and it was ... that was the poster that started it.

Michael: Hmm. Yeah, I know that poster.

Moscoso: In the same way that Wes' poster for Paul Butterfield and then Stanley Mouse and Alton Kelley's poster for "Zig Zag," you know, influenced me, you know. I mean when I saw Mouse and Kelley do "Zig Zig," you know, it's like ... it just about knocked me down on the sidewalk. And the thing about it ... it was like I said to myself, "It's so obvious."

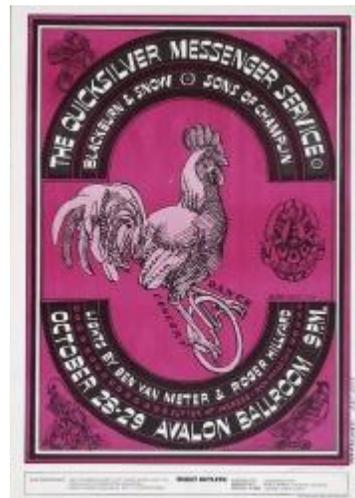


Zig-Zag Man

Moscoso: It's so obvious. What it is that you're not getting. I felt like the "Ballad of the Thin Man," you know?

Michael: Right.

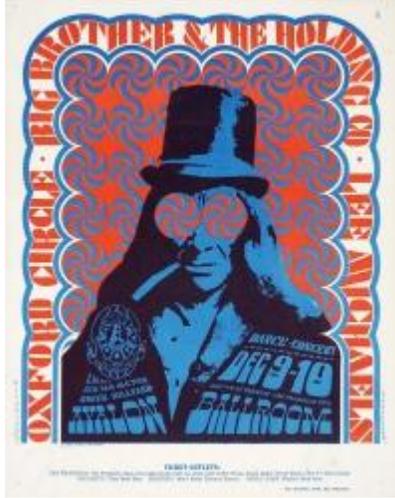
Moscoso: Mr. Jones, something is happening and you don't know what it is. And all the college that you had is gettin' in your way! So I benched myself for five fucking months. I didn't do another poster until ... I think it was either "Chicken Dance," the chicken on a unicycle which was, "Eehhh'." At least I got on base, you know. It was a single, you know.



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Chicken Poster

The flower one, "Ehhh." Another single, you know, But then came the "Man with the Spiral Eye Glasses." Bam! Off the back wall deal. A triple.



Man with the Spiral Eyes

Ok, finally I was in the ballpark, you know. And at that point, then I started progressing very rapidly. And one of the ways that I did it was by reversing all the rules I ever learned in school.

For instance, I had been told that lettering should always be legible, so I turned that around to say: Lettering should be as illegible as possible. Another rule was that a poster should transmit its message quickly and simply. So, I said: A poster should hang you up as long as possible. Another one is: Do not use vibrating colors; they're irritating to the eyes. So I said: Use vibrating colors as much as possible. After all, the musicians were turning up their amplifiers to the point where they were blowing out your eardrums. I did the equivalent with the eyeballs.

So I reversed everything that I had learned, and once I did that, then it fell into place. Then everything I'd learned in

school began to work for me. I could pick a vibrating color like nobody could. You know when I had that conversation with Wes Wilson and he says, "Oh, I use vibrating colors all the time." I said, "Wait a minute. No you don't." Just 'cause you use a green and a red doesn't mean they vibrate, if the value of the green is like 20% and the value of the red is 80%. Uh uh!!

They both have to be ... the value has to be equal and the intensity has to be equal in order for them to vibrate. It's not just using colors from the opposite of the color wheel. The intensity has to be equal. The value has to be equal, so that your eye cannot tell which one is in front of the other. Fucks with the eyes. Your eyes are limited. Your eyes are limited. That's why you can see motion pictures. Motion picture don't move. They're just a lot of still pictures. However, because of our limitations of our eyes, it appears to move. See?

Anyway by then, by that time, you know, I started getting ... then my schooling stopped getting in my way, and I started being able to use what I had learned in school. I was a very good student, you know, and, to this day, I have not been invited to give a talk, a seminar, or anything at High- School Industrial Art, Cooper Union, Yale University, or the San Francisco Art Institute. I'm in the Louvre, man (laughs). I'm in the Library of Congress, you know. I'm in the Victoria and Albert Museum. I'm in all these places, man, and these people don't like me. Well, one of the reasons they don't like me is because we bypassed their entire, quote, "fine art structure."

We didn't need art critics. We went directly to the people. After all, these

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were advertisements. Nobody took them seriously at first, and then, in fact, we didn't take them seriously later either. They were still advertisements, you know. We just got better at it because we were competing with each other. And I guess the schools don't get it. They still don't get it, because you still have to go through their channels, their bureaucracy, their point of view, their bullshit, basically is what it is. Their academy.

They're all academies, Academies are good for teaching you certain tricks, you know. You pick up certain craft, although I don't buy throwing plastic casts all that much, really, you know. I mean that's ahh.... But, hey, it's a discipline, you know. And I don't like what's going on in our schools today. In our schools today, we never teach craft.

There's a woman that I know who is putting on this piece where she manages to vomit blue. Wow ... man! Now how much did that cost? Can I hang it on my wall? I mean what the fuck? What is this, you know? Hey look at me, look at me! That's what it is. There's no craft. Is there a craft in vomiting blue? How do you learn it? You know there's a craft in learning how to draw a figure. All right, there's a craft in learning how to use color.

Michael: It's true.

Moscoso: What's happened is things have changed to such a point, you know. I don't get it all, you know. I mean, I know what I like and I like what I know, basically, you know. But I don't get it. I don't get these performance pieces where you put a foot of dirt in an art gallery and that's art.

Michael: But that's not new; they were doing that in the 1960s too.

Moscoso: It's still there. That gallery is still there. Now how do they make money? Do they sell the dirt? [Laughs].

Michael: No idea.

Moscoso: Do they charge admission? Can you walk on their artwork? I mean you can walk on ... on Pompeii, you know, they had and all of these mosaic floors that you walked on. That's art. I guess you can! Anyway, I don't get that stuff. I think it's all a bunch of crap, really. You know it's a place where somebody with no talent can come up with an idea and get recognized for 15 minutes or whatever.

Michael: Right, but there is a lot of that.

Moscoso: Yeah, that seems to be the case.

Michael: Not just in art, it's also in music.

Moscoso: Yeah. John Cage putting on six different radio stations.

Michael: I remember. I mean in, in the early and mid 60s, John Cage would come to Ann Arbor to work with a local group called "Once Music," happenings. And I lived in the same house with one of the musicians, who later became a really well-known avant-garde composer. We just shared a house so that, it was just like ...

Moscoso: Where was this, in New York or ...?

Michael: Ann Arbor. And so they would put on events, like playing one note on a piano for some number of hours. I'm trying think, that would be an event, and there'd be a hall and there'd be somebody playing one note.

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Moscoso: That would drive me fucking crazy! I mean it's like dropping one drop of water on your head every second, man.

Michael: Well, I think I understood what they were trying to say. You know, it's like watching the movie "Fargo." After five minutes, I got it. I could appreciate what they were doing, but I didn't need that much of it.

Art as Entertainment

Moscoso: See, I see myself as an entertainer.

Michael: Tell me more about that.

Moscoso: I see myself as a graphic entertainer. I'll give you a story. For example, the child-learning experts said children can only learn certain things at certain ages. Along comes "Sesame Street," and all of a sudden children were learning earlier than they're supposed to. Why? Because "Sesame Street" was entertaining. Entertainment means to entertain, that means: Get your attention and hold on to it. Now how do you do that? Not through pain, because with pain, you'll want to walk away. See, playing that one note over and over again is painful.

Michael: No, but there's an element, you'll have to explain to me, that about your work, at least for me. One loves it. I can see your work; it is immediately identifiable right ... anywhere. And there's an emotional element that maybe you're addressing and I'm not getting, where there's an actual ... it's not simple. I think of entertainment as ... with maybe the best entertainment, I could agree with that, but there's something ... It does an imprinting or something. There's something ... there's

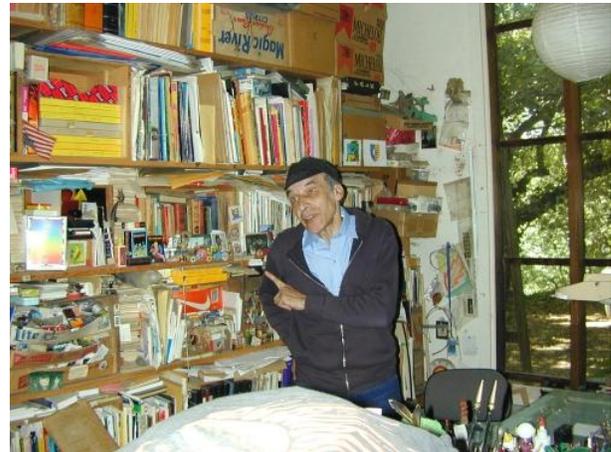
some kind of appreciation of your work that I don't think of it just as entertainment, you know. You love what it does to you. I do, and my whole family does.

Moscoso: Well, that's entertainment.

Michael: Well Ok, in a deeper sense of that word.

Moscoso: Yeah, you know, that's entertainment. Looking upon a beautiful woman, like ... I was just thinking of Pret-a-Porte, Sophia Loren is doing a strip for Marcello Mastroianni, just before the fool falls asleep, man. Now that's entertainment. [Laughs].

Michael: I understand, yeah.



Moscoso: *Now That's Entertainment!*

Moscoso: Wow!

Moscoso: You know. Forget Marcello! [Laughs]. I thought he was very good, you know. But Sophia Loren doin' a strip is entertainment. More in that area, you know? Something that catches your attention, holds on to your attention, and is pleasing to you.

Michael: Yeah.

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Moscoso: That pleases, that you find ... See that to me is entertaining. See? Otherwise you walk out.

Michael: True.

Moscoso: You know, I go into a movie that I don't find entertaining, that I find boring, that I find predictable, that I find poorly made ... I walk out! A piece of artwork, whatever. It doesn't matter, see? So, it's one engaging the viewer. First of all, I'm the first viewer, it's gotta' be entertaining to me. See?

Michael: Amen, that's really the truth.

Moscoso: If it doesn't entertain me, I can't expect it to entertain anybody else. If it entertains me, there's a chance that it will entertain somebody else, and, in fact, that has been what has happened, you know. That goes down to, you know, that fact that you enjoy looking at that piece or listening to the piece.

The Impressionists

Michael: Well, there's a mystery in it or something in there for you.

Moscoso: Oh, well, there's a mystery. Of course there's a mystery, because everybody is different. And I don't care what it is ... In a way, the artist is the worst guy to ask. I once read a letter by Cézanne. Ok, in his book "Letters from Artists." It was at the end of his life and he says, "I am a failure." He's writing to his buddy. "I am a failure, I have tried to accomplish..." and he goes into what he was trying to accomplish. I read that thing three or four times, what he was trying to accomplish. I couldn't make heads or tails of what he was trying to accomplish.

However, when I look at his still life paintings, and I see those oranges painted like beautiful, seductive nudes.

Then I look at his card players and they look like wooden sticks, you know, and I think, "Well, I can't really say that you're a failure, Paul!" [Laughs].

Michael: Really!

Moscoso: You know, anybody that can do still life like that ... ain't a failure. How can you call yourself a failure? It's expectations. That's where it happens. If you expect certain things to happen and they don't happen, you're disappointed. Expect nothing and you won't be disappointed.

Michael: It's true. Yeah, Cézanne is one of the people I used to really read about a lot. He was obsessed with people stealing his ideas, if you remember.

Moscoso: What are you gonna' do. Put it in a closet?

Michael: No, it was beautiful. My mother was an artist and she particularly loved Matisse. I was raised on an enormous amount of Matisse,

Moscoso: Oh, he's excellent. His "Red Studio," man, knocks me out, man. All these portraits of his lady friend, beautiful.

Michael: Yeah, he was great.

Moscoso: Yeah, Picasso was great too. In fact, Picasso ... one thing he doesn't get credit for, one of his greatest pieces, was the bicycle seat and the handlebar for the horns. That was the first junk art ever made. Nobody gives him credit. He gets very little credit for that. You know, before all the other guys came along, who did the junk pieces and stuff like that from the junkyard? Picasso was the first at that, you know. Yeah, those guys were good. I find them very entertaining. [Laughs].

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Creative Process

Michael: Well, yeah, I think it's wonderful what you say, and I agree just in my own life and other areas, the idea that in any kind of creative process, the artist ... I know when I've done creative things, that I try to take the thing that is the most moving to me ... that even I can't figure it out, but I'm just attracted to it. And I put that in the center of the stage of the piece, for my own entertainment and it lasts the longest.

Moscoso: Ok.

Michael: If you understand that.

Moscoso: Yes, Carl Jung would say, "I really like the artist." He said it's one of the few people ... one of the few professions that deals on a daily basis with this unconscious. All right, Freud didn't know shit about all this. He was an uptight, puritan schmuck. He analyzed himself. Falling teeth in a dream is masturbation? Give me a fucking break already, man! Where did you get that one from? Maybe for you falling teeth in a dream has to do with masturbation. For me falling teeth would have to do with death. It's obvious. And what I liked about Jung was that he said only the dreamer can interpret. Only the dreamer can interpret, so the artist is having a dialog with his unconscious. It works perfectly with the muses coming down from Mt. Olympus.

All right? It just shows up there. What do you mean it just shows up there? And I've heard many artists say that. It just shows up there. And I've participated in that, where I watch things appear before me. I'm drawing them, but not consciously. I've done some of my best work without having a preconceived notion of what I was going to do. What's

going on there? It's your unconscious talking to your conscious that's holding the pencil. That's the mystery.

And everybody has a different subconscious, because we're all coming from a different place. Even right now, we each occupy a different position. Not only are we bringing our different backgrounds in here, but also we're actually occupying different physical space. We are each seeing a different picture.

Michael: Right, but it's from that subconscious that the future will come, and that's why, when you are creative, at least when I'm creative, the more I can get into that, that piece, whatever it is will last, in time, longer. I mean it'll fascinate me, entertain me, to use your word ...

Moscoso: Mmm hmm.

Michael: ... For a longer period of time, before I outgrow it and I have to find a new ... Shakespeare's words have transfixed, hypnotized generations without being unraveled. People haven't seen through them, because that was how powerful they were and still are ...

Critics

Moscoso: Well, I would say this: Everybody has their own interpretation of Shakespeare. I went to see "Romeo and Juliet". Some girl, when her boyfriend couldn't make it, said, "Do me a favor. Come see 'Romeo and Juliet with me'." So I took a bottle of brandy with me, you know. I would make it entertaining, you know. And I always thought of him as stodgy and all of that, because of schools. Fucking schools turn you off, man. Art schools turn you off of art. And when the line ... when

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Juliet is gonna' go and visit Romeo to have a liaison with him, her nurse, her lady in waiting says, "I will pray for you today, my lady, for tonight the burden will be on you." It cracked me up, man. I didn't know he was funny.

He was writing for the whole strata of society, from the penny pit to the boxes up on top, man. So, the upper class is gonna' have a different interpretation than the lower class.

Michael: But he did something to the language that you just pointed out that affected everyone.

Moscoso: Oh, it certainly did. But interpretation is constantly changing. I once saw a chart of "Whistler's Mother," the painting, and what point it occupied in the, quote, "art world." And, you see, it goes up. At one point, it was considered very valuable. Then it went down 'til it was like kitsch, you know. And then it went back up again, you know. And if you look at art history, I mean Raphael at one time was THE guy. After all the Pre-Raphaelites, figure painting stopped. It was Raphael. You know, give me a break there. How bout Rembrandt and Vermeer? They were pretty good too, you know. Art is whatever you want it to be, to anybody. In other words, it's everything to everybody. There is no one interpretation of art. Anybody that says that don't know what they are talking about and your interpretation of a piece is as valuable or is as right or is as true as anybody else's. I don't care what school they went to. In fact, when I was at Yale, I went to an art history soiree, where all the art historians were getting drunk and one guy came up to me and he says, "All art historians are frustrated artists." [Laughs].

So what's a frustrated artist, you know, who's passing judgment on artists, gonna' do? Well, my favorite story is when some one of the artists got a bad review from, was it Greenburg or one of the guys doing the abstract expressionist days. I forget his name. Anyway, it happened at the Caesar Bar in New York. Because the artist that had gotten a bad review, he kicked the critic's ass that night. [Laughter]. I wish I'd been there, man.

But see, that's because the critic at that point had that kind of pull and the posters bypassed it completely. That's why the museums don't like me or that's why the San Francisco museums don't like me.

Michael: You mean the critics didn't even look at it?

Moscoso: No, they didn't consider it at all.

Michael: It happened in music too. There's a whole branch of jazz called "Soul Jazz" that was completely ignored by the bop-oriented critics, who just considered it like the lowest ...

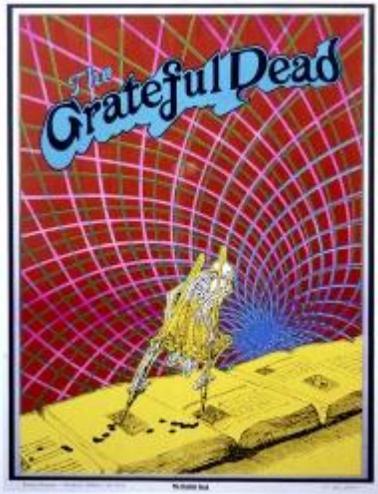
Moscoso: Yeah, you get that. A critic's job is supposedly a guide for the uninitiated. My feeling is this: Fuck the critic. All right? I can figure it out for myself. See and that's what the posters did. There was no critic. You didn't have to explain these things. You didn't have to say, "Okay, the Bob Fried poster, where the skeleton ... that means." Hey, it means whatever you wanted to mean, you know. I like it 'cause it's pretty. I like it cause it's got a skeleton and I'm a Grateful Dead fan and therefore I want it. You know. It's anything to anybody, you know. Anyway.

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Bob Fried's Translucent Poster

Michael: Well, this poster to me has one of the most sophisticated concepts that ever got into psychedelic posters, that particular one. Perhaps it is because I'm an astrologer and I sort of study time, and for me this poster is about time. It might be not to you.

Moscoso: No, you're absolutely right. I mean, I didn't see it that way. I saw it as an alms to the Grateful Dead.



Bob Fried's Grateful Dead Poster

Michael: Well, that's cool. It is a Grateful Dead poster.

Moscoso: Which is what he was trying to do. Grateful Dead stuff sold well. That's why Bob did this.

Michael: Did Fried want this as celluloid, a translucent thing?

Moscoso: Oh yeah. It's was supposed to go in windows.

Michael: It's interesting.

Moscoso: Yeah, it was like a stained glass window, which makes lots of sense, because look at how much brighter the colors get when you hold them up to the light. See, with a poster,

the light bounces through the inks, hits the white paper, and bounces back. With a stained glass window, the light comes right through it into your eye. No reflective light. It's straight light into your eye. That's about as bright as you can get.

Michael: Yeah, it's beautiful.

Moscoso: When he gave it to me, I didn't put it up on the window. You know, the artists were giving each other posters all the time, you know. We'd go down to the print shop, there'd be stacks of posters, and we'd, you know ... I'll take some of these and you take some of those, you know.

Eric King: Very few of these survived, because most people did put these in their windows. Most of the people did destroy them.

Michael: I think you could back-light it, framed.

Moscoso: You would have to use something like a cold light, fluorescent light.

Eric King: Anything that generates heat is gonna' damage the thing.

Moscoso: And put it ten feet away. [Laughs].

Michael: Well, I think you might be able to have small fluorescents ...

Moscoso: And you only put it on for two minutes a day. That's it, man, you know, because light eventually ... See, these are dyes. These are dyes, these are not pigments.

Eric King: I have it framed on top of a white sheet.

Moscoso: You're probably better off.

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Eric King: That's as close as it comes. I just don't want to risk the thing deteriorating on me.

Moscoso: Because light will fade it. Do not put it in your window.

Eric King: We know from experience that this thing is extremely fragile, because I've seen them, after very limited times, that this thing deteriorates very quickly.

Moscoso: And light will make the plastic fragile too.

Eric King: That's what I'm saying.

Moscoso: So that it gets brittle and cracks.

Eric King: Yes, both. And that's why I have it on the far wall of a room that gets not much light, and if I want to show it to somebody, I turn the light on.

Moscoso: Right. Turn the light on and then take the light off.

Eric King: It jumps, because the light will pass through and you can see the white through it **Moscoso:** Yeah, and it will bounce off the white ...

Eric King: And it will bounce. It's close. It's not like the effect you get when you hold it up to a window.

Moscoso: Right, but it's pretty close and it's a lot safer.

Separate the Artist from the Person

Michael: Right, but I know Bob Fried's work pretty well. You knew him as a person. I never met him, but to me he's very subtle, for me. He does gestures more than a lot of you. Not this one, particularly, but a lot of things, like the Euphoria poster. Just very gentle. Was he a gentle person?

Moscoso: The man was an asshole when it came to printers. Yeah, printers hated him. He was a real bully when it came to the printers.

Michael: But how did he do this very gentle ... His stuff is not is not ...

Moscoso: Separate the man from the art.

Michael: Yeah. You have to.

Moscoso: I mean Richard Wagner, all right, who wrote some of the most beautiful melodies. Fuck him, the ring cycle, man. That's boring.

Michael: It is boring to me too.

Moscoso: But he wrote some beautiful melodies. He was an asshole. The client would take him in. He'd take the guy's money, fuck his wife, and then leave. He would go to another client and do the same thing. Not a nice guy.

Now, if you're gonna' judge him as a person and judge his art likewise, you're not going to be able to enjoy some beautiful music.

Michael: Absolutely.

Moscoso: So what you gotta' do is you gotta' separate the artist, you know. A person said that to me, he says, "Oh, any good artist is a good person." Uhh-uhh, uhh-uhh. I mean, they can be assholes. I mean Sarah Vaughn, the great Sarah Vaughn ... Harold Jones, a drummer who lives down the street here, said she'd cancel a tour and ask for the advance back that she had given to musicians, after tying up their time. Now here is a woman that came outta' the ghetto and she's treating her musicians like niggers. Not very nice, but she had a great voice. And she was

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an excellent musician. I got to hear her and she was ...

Michael: Well, her early stuff is incredible.

Moscoso: Yeah.

Michael: It's some of the best there is.

Moscoso: Even when she was old, she was good.

I mean, it was like she was like an opera singer. She had that kind of control over her voice, you know. So you have to separate that, you know. What do you mean, that taking back the advance you gave to your musicians after you hung them up?

You know that's bullshit. But you can't let that get in the way of the art. If you do, you're shorting yourself.

Michael: I don't know graphic arts that well, but I've interviewed maybe a hundred or close to that ... of blues and jazz artists and most of the great ones, you know. Some of them were wonderful people and some of them were, as you point out, real assholes.

Michael: But the music was good for all of them.

Moscoso: Right. That's why you're attracted to them, not because of their personalities. After all, what do you know about a musician's personality or an artist's ... What do I know about Rembrandt's personality or Vermeer's personality? It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter, you know, because it's the work that I know, and people come up to me and they say, "Hey, I know you." Well, they don't know me, but they know my work. But, yes they do know me, because I'm in my work. Yes, you do know Bob Fried. He's in his work. I

mean, not the personality, not the good parts/bad parts, but the part that created this, which is him. You know, based on all that has come before. I mean nobody invents art. It gets handed down to you. I mean we are speaking English. Did we invent English? But we each speak in our own voice. And we can each write in our own language.

Art as Decor

Eric King: It is one of the things that the people who own them frame it. I mean, that's one of the reasons this thing is as valuable as it is. People collect posters and stick them in portfolios. There are posters that become décor. People do not buy this poster to put in a portfolio. They buy this for the décor of their houses. That's what makes it so valuable. I mean, that's why some of the best things that you've done, Victor, people do not buy them to put in portfolios. They buy them to put on the wall of their home.

Moscoso: Well, originally, they were stapled. That was one of the nice things, man. I'd go into a stranger's house, somebody who I'd never met ... I mean somebody who I'd just met, never seen before, you know. I'd go into that house and the whole wall would be covered, not just with my posters, but, you know, everybody's. But there is my work.

Michael: That's great.

Moscoso: You know, his was the real museums. Talk about museums without walls, you know. That Malraux coined. That was great. These walls without museums. [Laughs]. You know, and I'd go in and I say, "Oh ...Cool man. Far out."

Watching Art on the Street

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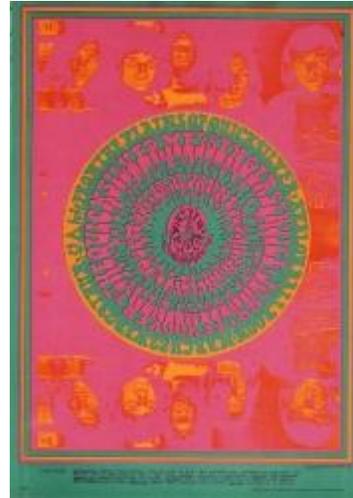
Eric King: The one thing that you told me, Victor, that I was enchanted by, was the story about you watching on the street, watching people cross the street to look at your posters on telephone poles.

Moscoso: Yeah, I would. I did it in galleries, but usually I didn't spend that much time in galleries. I would just stand out on the street, you know, like outside the Trieste, because the Trieste was on Grant Avenue, and I spent a lot of time there. And I could even stay inside the Trieste and watch. And I would just watch people, as they passed, you know. Some noticed, some didn't, you know. Some would come across the street to see. And I wasn't aiming just for the heads, you know, the ones into marijuana or acid takers. I was aiming for anybody, like the fisherman throwing his net out. I'd catch whatever I could and one of the reasons I used vibrating colors is because it's kind of like neon lights flashing. The neon colors ... ah excuse me ... the vibrating colors will catch your eye.

The other thing that catches your eye is contrast. Stop: Black and yellow. But that's not all that interests me. You can read that from across the sidewalk and continue. The neon ... the vibrating colors will catch your attention and then "what's going on?" brings you over. The other thing that hangs you up is complexity. Make them complex. A poster should not transmit it's message quickly and simply. They'll be gone man. I wanna' see if they could stay there an hour. I wanna' see if they can stay there a whole week. [Laugh]. They wouldn't stay a week; they'd have to go get some lunch or something.

Poster Image

Eric King: Things like this one, the one with the lettering and the circle (the number "53"). I mean, it took a long time to see who performed that weekend at the Avalon. I remember seeing that in the window and I stood there and I'm turning my head.... And that's the whole point.



Quicksilver Messenger Service

Moscoso: That was advertising. That was the only advertising. There was no newsprint. There was no TV, no radio. The only way that those events were advertised was by those posters, which we made as hard to read ... I made as hard to read as possible, so that the other guys, to some degree or other ... I mean each one has his own thing, you know. And it worked. The halls got filled up, because of those posters. They started getting torn off the wall. Then you could buy them for a dollar. So here was a unique situation, where not only are you advertising the event, but you're selling it while you're advertising it at Ben Friedman's shop. They go up at the Trieste and catty-corner from the Trieste was Ben Friedman's poster shop. They'd be in Ben Friedman's for a dollar. So, here's advertising coming at you

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from, from both sides of the corner. A dollar!

Planning a Poster Series

Michael: I have a question for you. One of the things that I really admire about your career, that's starting to be emulated by artists like Mark Arminski, is that when you did the Neon Rose series, you had a method about producing a set of posters and you were totally aware that they would be collected.

Moscoso: Oh yes.

Michael: I believe that's something that only you did.

Moscoso: Nope. Bob Fried came up with the company called "The Food."

Michael: But did he produce a series?

Moscoso: Yeah, but not ... again, not as many. He did the Orange Groove. I think it was "The Food." All right? See, he saw what I was doing, and, in fact, his early posters, he copied my lettering, the way I copied Wes' lettering, you know.

Michael: But my question is: How did that come about in your mind? I mean, how did you know to set about creating something that would have some legacy effect, back then, when most people just spontaneously were not thinking of that at all?

Moscoso: When it first started, for instance, when I did the "Stone Façade," I had no idea, nor did anybody else, that these ephemera would not disappear. We all thought it would just, like anything else, go into the garbage, you know.

However, when they started getting sold for a dollar ... hey, I took art history. I

know that the Toulouse Lautrec and Jules Cheret posters started getting ripped off the walls. That's when the poster stores opened. Hey, poster stores open. Instead of selling just personality posters, Ben Friedman then started showing the psychedelic posters. After a while, the personality posters started shrinking down in amount in relationship to the increase in the psychedelic posters that were taking over, you know.

For lo and behold, I said to myself, this is what happened in Toulouse Lautrec's day. If it happened in Toulouse Lautrec's day and it looks like it's happening now, well, then it's happening now. Just like it happened in Toulouse Lautrec's day. And so what I did, so as not to be a dependent on either Chet Helms or forget Bill Graham, man. All I wanted do was invent posters. Not free posters, not white rabbit posters, not East Totem West posters.

I didn't want to do those. I wanted to ... I guess because of the historical value, I somehow intuited that these were events, historical events, with dates, and that's all I wanted to do. And I didn't want to be dependent on Bill Graham, Chet Helms, or anybody else at that point. I said, "Okay, I'll set up my own company," and I went to the Matrix because the Matrix, the Matrix was playing the Doors, Big Brother and the Holding Company-- the same groups that were at the Avalon Ballroom and at the Filmore. And I said to the guy at the Matrix ... I forget who it was. There were two guys running it at the time. How would you guys have me do some posters for you? Already, I've been doing posters at the Avalon and they already were good. They already were

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good. And they said, "Sure, we'd love it, but we don't have the money. We can't afford it." I said, "No problem. I will give you 200 free posters for your event. I will pay for them and I'll run off as many as I can afford and sell them." Sure. Well, here they're getting 200 free poster, you know, one of the top poster artists at that time, you know.

Moscoso: So I commissioned the poster, I designed the poster, I produced the poster, and I sold the poster. I was selling posters to Australia, the other side of the world.

Michael: To me, that's brilliant. That was, to me, an important event in the history of posters at the psychedelic level.

Eric King: Nobody else thought of that.

Michael: Yeah. I mean people are only now trying to emulate. Mark Arminski is trying to make a business out of his series.

Moscoso: Frank Kozik does it. The young guys are doing it. The young guys are doing it. Yeah, they're doing it in silkscreen, as opposed to offset, which we did. Our numbers are a lot more. Basically, the principle is the same, you know. Kozik, Mark Arminski, Coop ... they are doing what we did, only for the present, the younger generation, now. We are dinosaurs.

Michael: Yeah, but you're the only one who did it then.

Moscoso: Yeah, then Bob Fried did it, but only with a few.

Michael: I wasn't even aware of that.

Eric King: He did about a half a dozen or so.

Moscoso: About that. Again, if he had started when I had started, which he could have, he would have been a major figure.

Michael: Also, in your series, the Neon Rose series, which I have collected all of, there is a tremendous sense of continuity of ... I don't even know how to even describe it, but obviously they all go together really well, in general.

Moscoso: Yeah, well that's because of me.

Artist Control

Michael: And it was because you controlled the whole process.

Moscoso: The whole thing.

Michael: And no one was directing you, right?

Moscoso: And nobody directed me for the Avalon, either. I never, at that time, never showed a sketch.

Michael: So Chet Helms was not....

Moscoso: Nope. Never showed a sketch.

Michael: Wes Wilson says that was why he left the Avalon and Chet, because he didn't want direction.

Moscoso: Oh, boy did he get it from Bill Graham.

Michael: He did?

Moscoso: Oh man, he had fights with Bill.

Michael: About the readability. That kind of stuff?

Moscoso: Well, that's direction.

Michael: Yet, there weren't imposed themes, as at the Avalon.

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Moscoso: Well, I didn't mind the themes.

Michael: So, you did get themes.

Moscoso: I could have discarded them. Phillip Hammond ... by the time that I started doing posters again, for the "Stone Façade," Chet handed me a postcard. He says the title is the "Stone Façade." Do something with it. Ok, so you could say that was kind of collaboration. But I can blame him, for that. [Laughter]. He deserves half the credit for my greatest failure.

[Laughter].

Moscoso: Ah, but once I started again, Chet was already busy, you know, doing other things and had pretty much dropped out of the poster... I mean he was still selling posters, you know, but he wasn't directing them and was, in fact, when he went to England, he left Phillip Hammond to run the Family Dog, and Phillip Hammond was into astrology. So Phillip would come over to me, and I was doing a Family Dog poster, and he says, "Like on that one. Not that one, but the one that that's based on, from the playing of Quicksilver Messenger Services. Quicksilver is Mercury, you know, the planet Mercury. In there, in the one with Quicksilver is the astrological signs on which the date fell, and he would give me the astrological reading for the event and he would make suggestions. I could have done something totally different, but I liked what he was saying and I liked astrology. I didn't know shit about astrology, but I like all the images in astrology.

It was like opening up a whole book of images, you know. So I took his suggestions on that one from the play.

They also handed me a photograph of the Quicksilver Messenger Service at the De Young Museum. Oh fuck, man, it's long that way, while the poster's this way. What can I do with this? I was just gonna' discard it, but where it clicked, it was from the Plains of Quicksilver, which I interpreted from the Plains of Mercury, and then I thought of the planet Mercury. I said, "That's it!" The lettering is gonna' be the planet Mercury, and that's where I just stumbled. I've never seen that before. That's one of those serendipitous events, you know.

And where one line is positive and the next line is negative. Positive/negative. Not only that, it's vibrating colors, so it'd make it really difficult to really see.

So as that became Mercury, that made it easy. And then I realized, hey wait! I've got space up here and space down here. The thing reads either way. Well, now, the photograph of Quicksilver makes sense. Bing! Bing! Upside down. I just flopped them.

Eric King: And the symbology was fully integrated into...

Moscoso: Perfectly. It just worked perfectly, you know, it was like that's the way things would happen. I do the poster, take it down to the printer, have it printed. The first the Family Dog would ever see of it was when they came down to pick up the finished poster, already trimmed. They put the thing up and post it. No one ever, in those days, had a thing to say about what I did and also with Stanley Mouse and Alton Kelley. Same thing.

Michael: Right. Well they trusted you then. Whatever you did ...

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Moscoso: It was selling. It was selling man. It was selling like hotcakes, you know. Don't fuck with something that's going a hundred miles an hour man. You're gonna' slow it down, you know.

Michael: Right.

Moscoso: You know Chet and I might have had our differences, but he wasn't a fool, you know, whereas Bill Graham was, because all Bill Graham could see was the bottom line, and he was a bully.

Michael: He was a bully. I even experienced that.

Moscoso: A chicken-shit bully.

Archetypes and Schooling

Michael: Well, it's synchronicity, right?

Moscoso: Oh, definitely. I was in synch, but Jung speaks about the archetype, that we all have these archetypes. A spiral is one. A circle is another one. If you look at children's art, it's all the same. I don't care what part of the globe. It's only when they get older and go to school, that you begin to distinguish nationalities. You look at any child's drawing, say at the age of three or four. You can't tell what country they're from. You can't tell what culture they're from. It's only later on, when they are enculturated by the school, by their culture, that they then learn that they can't draw.

Moscoso: I once went to ... when my oldest daughter was in kindergarten. This was in North Beach. It went up to seventh grade and I started out in kindergarten, where she was, you know. The walls were covered with these brilliant paintings. Man, they were just like joyous to behold, you know. And then I got to the rest of them. As you went up in grades, more and more rigid,

more and more rigid. The seventh grade, man, they are drawing with rulers. The girls are putting buttons and things on, you know. The detail stuff is becoming very important, you know. The overall effect is lost, for the details, you know, and it's the school at work. It's the enculturation at work, you know, and you could see it from kindergarten to the seventh grade. Man, it was the Jesuits give us a child till he's seven and he's ours for life, man.

Michael: Well, I was raised Catholic.

Moscoso: Then you know.

Michael: Dominicans.

Moscoso: You know and they knew what they were talking about, man. I call it brainwashing, you know, but...

Michael: And I home schooled some of my kids, for the same reason.

Moscoso: Yeah.

Michael: And I never finished high school. I couldn't stand school. I just wanted to be out.

Moscoso: I couldn't stand school either.

Moscoso: The only thing I liked about school was art and the girls and sports. I was into sports.

Michael: I liked literature and philosophy.

Moscoso: I didn't like anything I had to read.

Michael: Right. I liked reading.

Moscoso: Write.

Michael: I can write.

Moscoso: Add... [Laugh].

Michael: I was terrible at math. That was my worst.

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Moscoso: You know, all of those things. In fact, I got through school by doing visual aids for the teachers. I would sit in the back. He'd be giving his lesson. I'd be working on his next visual aid, man. I'd get an "A."

Michael: Really.

Moscoso: Not because I knew shit about what I was doing. Yeah, I knew about the Louisiana Purchase, because I did the map [laughter] that got used for the Louisiana Purchase.

Moscoso: Then when I got to Cooper Union. Yeah, here I am in college now, it caught up with me. We were in what was called the "dumb English" class. They had a couple of us, like me, who didn't know how to read, write, spell, or compose a letter, so we'd have to go after school. [Laughs].

Eric King: Oh my god.

Moscoso: ... to the dumb English class. I ran across one of the things I had written. Boy, it was really shitty. I really was a bad writer, you know. I had to teach myself all of these things, later on, because during school it was a turn off. In fact, I remember one guy ... I don't remember his name, but whenever you raised your hand to ask a question, he would say, "That's a very interesting question. Why don't you write a report on it and hand it in to the class."

Moscoso: Aw shit, in no time at all, man, nobody raised his or her hands, man. And that way, he could just deliver the same fucking lecture that he'd been delivering for ten, fifteen, twenty years, which was boring as shit. I don't even know what he taught.

Michael: [Laughter]. Well, that's the way I feel about school at this point. I mean, I

just closed my mind for about 12 years and then walked out.

Moscoso: Yeah, well, except for the sports, girls, and drawing. That's what I did.

Michael: Well, girls were good, and I could draw some too. I like art. My mom was an artist, so we were all artists.

Moscoso: Did she make a living at it?

Michael: Toward the end of her life, she did a lot of shows, and, yeah, she was a good artist. Sometime, I may send you some images.

Moscoso: Okay, ah, fine art.

Michael: Fine art. Absolutely.

Moscoso: So, she would sell it to a gallery?

Michael: Galleries, yeah, and toward the end of her life, she did a lot at the Ann Arbor Art Fair, which is the largest art fair in the country, but it's a very good art fair. But, ah, she was pretty old by then.

Moscoso: Hey. Grandma Moses was 80 years old when she started to paint.

Michael: That's right.

Moscoso: Hokusai was 70 years old when he started on his greatest images.

Moscoso: ... the "Great Wave" and the those beautiful ah scenes of Mt. Fuji, you know, were done after he was 70. He was, I think, 89 when he died, and he was bargaining with God. He said, well, how 'bout five more years. And he says, well, how 'bout three more years, huh? [Laugh].

Michael: Joseph Conrad must have been forty and he started writing in another language. Right?

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Moscoso: Oh, that's right. He was Polish.

Michael: Right.

Moscoso: And then he started writing in English, so yeah there's always ...

Michael: There's hope.

Moscoso: You're not 80 years old, right?

Michael: No.

Moscoso: So you can become a painter.

Michael: I'm going to be 60 in about two months.

Moscoso: Oh, you're a young guy, man. I'm gonna' be 64.

Michael: Oh, wow.

Moscoso: I sing that to my wife, "Will you still need me, will you still feed me ... "

Michael: Eric, you and I are the same age.

Eric King: Yeah, we're the same age.

Michael: We are about a month apart. He's a little older than me. I think he looks it, right?

Eric King: Yeah, don't I look a month older.

Michael: Yeah.

Eric King: Titian was 90 years old when he painted the Venus of Mervino, but he won. I mean he still had, you know, that feeling ...

Moscoso: The appreciation ...

Eric King: Right.

Moscoso: Right.

Eric King: The appreciation ...

Moscoso: You don't have to die 'til you die, you know. In fact, in Brooklyn I watched that happen. You can either go into the wire-rope factory or the sugar-packing factory. I mean, these are the two big jobs in Brooklyn. Or do something else, you know, but those were the main things. And I could see my friends getting married, take a job at the wire-rope factory, and basically die. You know, it was like they were shells; they were living and doing it, but that spark that they had when they were kids was gone. See, and I recognized really early on that was not for me.

Michael: No, me neither.

Moscoso: ... you know and the way to get around that is to make ... to do what you would wanna' do for your life, in other words, for your living, you know, to pay the bills.

Michael: I've done that.

Moscoso: If lucky enough, you know some of us are, to do what we would wanna' do anyway and be able to pay the rent with that, you are truly fortunate.

Michael: I agree. I mean I loved astrology and I did that as a business I loved movies and music and I did that as a business; my hobby was with posters and now I'm gonna' try to do something with that.

Moscoso: Okay, all right, now let me put these in writing.

Michael: Yeah, those are beautiful, and I will give some real serious thought to that one.

Michael: I wonder where images exist of that other one. I've never seen that other one.

Eric King: It's not very common.

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Michael: It's not as nice a piece of art, but it's just fascinating.

Moscoso: It's nice, you know. It's the Legion of Honor.

Michael: Palace of Fine Arts.

Moscoso: Palace of Fine Arts. Right.

Michael: Yeah, it's cool.

Moscoso: It's nice, you know, naked ladies with breasts. You can't go wrong with naked ladies with breasts, you know.

Moscoso: The magnetic dogs. Who else but Rick Griffin would think of stuff like that. Signed "the dumb one." [Laughs]. He was weird and extremely talented. I still listen.

Eric King: Yeah.

Moscoso: This is nice ...

Eric King: There's just such a sweetness ...

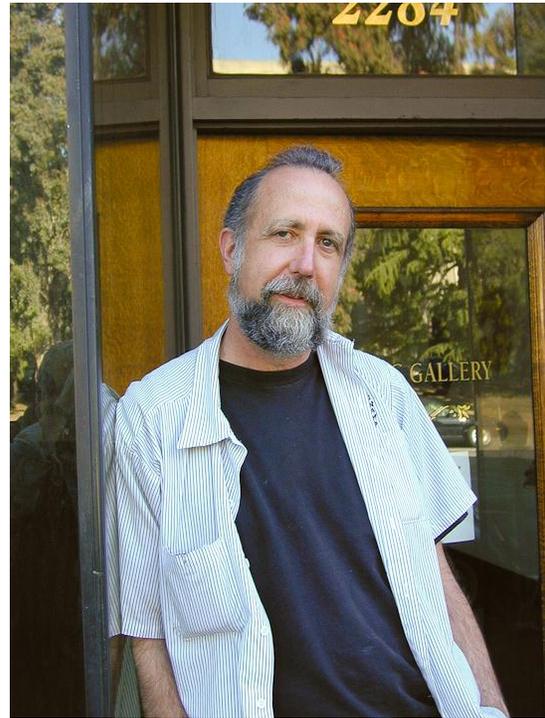
Eric King: Isn't that sweet.

Michael: And it's so big. I really didn't think it would be that big.

Eric King: Yeah.

Moscoso: Ok. So Rick, see you later. Now I'm gonna' put these away. Ok, now what would you like from me Michael.

Michael: I think we're doing fine. What I would love is maybe a few photographs. Maybe a photograph of just these pencils or just some idea of how you work. I think that people are fascinated by how artists, you know... what are they? What do they do, you know. Otherwise, I think we have a lot of material here.



Interview with Poster Expert Dennis King

by Michael Erlewine

[Dennis King is one of the legendary poster experts and collectors, working from his studio/shop in Berkeley, California. King not only knows the classic psychedelic poster art but all of the art and artists that have come up since then. He stays current in what is happening in the concert poster art scene.]

Saturday, May 12, 2001 at D. King Gallery

Birth Data

Dennis King: September 24th, 1952

Dennis King: Yeah, it was 7:16 PM Oakland, California. And that's Daylight Savings Time.

Michael Erlewine: What was your given name?

Dennis King: Dennis Michael King.

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And I grew up in the Bay Area. Here's some little groups of collectors and dealers that came out of the Bay Area, and it's really interesting to see the different generations that got into this. And it's kind of funny, because I'm in a kind of a limbo-age bracket.

There's a number of people who are older than me. There's a number of people that are younger than me by two or three years, like Jacaeber Kastor, but I kind of came out of the beatnik thing more than anything, because I lived around here. And I was a real big kid and I was real precocious. And you know, I got kicked out of junior high school for wearing Roman sandals and all this kind of stuff. It was like 1963 or something like that. So I used to come to Telegraph Avenue, because it's in the neighborhood, and it was the Telegraph scene. If you talk to Country Joe or any of those guys ... we talk about it sometimes. But very interesting, because there's a real international and intellectual atmosphere around Berkeley.

Michael Erlewine: What year is this?

Dennis King: Well, this is early '60s

Michael Erlewine: Early?

Dennis King: Late '50s early '60s

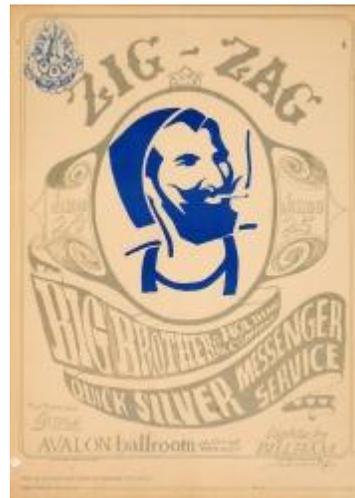
Dennis King: And I didn't realize it at the time, but there was a very Japanese influence, because I have come back to look at that, to figure out where it all came from. It wasn't really obvious to me, but you look at, you know, the whole Alan Watts, Zen Buddhism....

But there was something very Japanese, in retrospect, about the Berkeley experience. And I can't quite put my finger on it. That's why I go back

and I try to pick up pieces of history, to see where it came from...

Michael Erlewine: The Beat experience in general, I was here in 1960...

Dennis King: So, at any rate, I basically came out of the whole Berkeley thing, more than San Francisco. I think the first time... Well, interesting recollection is FD-14, the 'Zig Zag' poster, was a big deal. I remember walking down Telegraph Avenue. It's sitting up in the window of Shakespeare & Co. Books, and you're looking at this thing sittin' here, saying, "My god! How the fuck did they have the balls to put this thing up there?," because everybody knew what it was. And that was kind of my whole perception of, well, what the hell's goin' on in the city?



The Zig-Zag Poster

I don't remember when I first got over to the Haight, but at some point I went over to it with somebody and went to one of the things in the Pan Handle. It was one of the early things and I just don't ... 1966 sometime. But then I started heading over to the city a bit more, but I was still pretty young at that time. I was 14 and a half or 15. I was out and about,

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all over the place. And that's when I started picking up posters.

And you know, if you go to the poster store, they used to be a buck. And it was like, Ok, I gotta' scrape together a couple a bucks to buy a couple posters every once in a while. It's like, you know, at that age, it was kind of ... if there were things going on, it was a big deal.

So, at any rate, that's kind of how I got involved in the poster scene. And it kind of went on from there. What really touched it off, I think, was early '70s ... around 1970. I used to be into comic books when I was a kid. I started reading comics in 1956, and I kept a bunch of the stuff, and I went to a flea market and I realized somebody was trafficking used comic books. So I took a box of mine out there and sold them all off, and then, you know, started to get into that whole paper scene. And realized, "Hey, there's a couple of guys out here." This guy who's doing comic books, he's got a couple posters. So I picked up a poster or two, and then one thing led to another and I realized, wait a minute... It's kind of like the way a lot of people collect or the way I see a lot of people collecting over the years. It's like: These are the ones I really want. You know, get the ones I really want.

And then you see some other ones and you say, hey, this one's pretty good too; let's pick this one up. And by the time you realize where you are, you say god, you know, I've already got half of these things. These other ones aren't so bad. You start pickin' these up. You start working on a set. So by the time 1971 or 1972 rolled around it ... 1971 I guess, I was out looking for collections. I was buying them and keeping a set for myself and selling some other ones off

to pay for my collections, which is also something I did with comic books and later I did too with baseball cards, which I made a lot of money off of and survived off of, for a very long time.

So I kind of started out in flea markets. And I never reacted really well to being in a dirty, dusty flea market, bakin' in the sun all day. It didn't last very long for me. That lasted less than a year. I said, "To hell with that." I did posters on the side for a really long time. I started doing comic books for my first papered collectables library, I put myself mostly through college doing that.

Michael Erlewine: Just right here in town?

Dennis King: Yep, I graduated from Berkeley here.

And I ended up in... I used to go and do comic book shows a lot. There was big comic book show down in San Diego. It was the big deal once a year, and Stanley Mouse used to come down there, came down a couple of times. He would air brush t-shirts. And Rick Griffin was down there with Gordon McClelland, who was representing him at the time. Rick would come down every year and he'd be at the show. There was actually a little fringe poster thing going on down at the comic book show. And so I did a little bit of comic book stuff down there. And then when I got out of college in 1976, I actually got a teaching credential too, and I taught for 3 months and I said, "Fuck this."

You know, it's like nobody cares. I taught high school. Nobody cared. They didn't give a damn. There was a whole big political thing in the administration and I said this is not why I'm here. I'm out.

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I wasn't really interested in doing business. I had always been pretty anti-business, even though I was doing a kind of flea market business on the side, anyway. But I had a friend, who graduated business from Berkeley, and he'd always wanted to have a retail establishment. And we were going to do kind of a comic books, sports collectables, posters -- all paper collectables. And he was going to run it, and I was going to travel around and buy things to bring back and sell. He had all these ideas, like we were going to pipe laughing gas into place, so people would be happy when they buy things.

And anyway, we spent about 2 or 3 months, basically putting everything together, finding a location, figuring out how to do the financing. And he had like a girlfriend, who just turned 18. He got hooked on her and was gonna' get married. She said, "I'm not going to get married to a guy who runs a store doing this kind of stuff." And so he ended up pitching the whole thing and became a commodities worker, which he still is.

And after my spending all this time I said, "You know, fuck it! I put all this time into this, I'm just going to do it myself." And just intuitively I thought, you know, maybe there's a place here. Maybe there's a place in Berkeley. I could see this place. There's a little, kind of alcove where they have like some little tiny stores, off Telegraph Avenue. And I saw it in my mind. And I went over and I looked around and there was nothing. But there was a door that had some plants and a couple of brooms and things sitting there. It was really a closet with a glass door.

So I went to the guy at the place next door and said, "Hey, what do they do with that closet over there?" "Oh, go talk to Willie." So I went down to talk to Willie and I said, "Hey, you know, what about this place here. Can you rent me this place?" And he was a really funny guy. He's a Chinese guy. He was probably pushing 70 years old, and he used to wear a Chairman Mao cap, and he used to go around... He hated everybody. He was like, "I hate niggers, I hate whites, I hate chinks" -- all this stuff. He said, "But you know kid. You're all right. I like you!" [Laughs].

And he said, "You got guts man. I'll tell you what. I'll rent you that place for \$50 a month." And so I rented this 4 foot by 12 foot closet for \$50 a month and put a couple portfolios of posters there, put some comics on the wall, put some sports cards in there. And then I went around and started calling all the TV stations and all the newspapers and said, "Hey, I've got some stuff here that your viewers and your readers are really going to love. They've never seen this stuff before. They'll never see it again. You come out. We're gonna' have a thing for the media here and we'll have some wine for you to drink. And you can take a look at these things and do whatever you want."

A lot of them didn't really respond. But the guy at the Daily Californian, who's the U.C. Berkeley newspaper editor, was just real into this for some reason, and he wrote up ... he talked to me for awhile, I guess, and then he said, "Well, we'll send somebody over." So, the photographer shows up and he was totally not into it. He said, "Oh, this guy can't be in the paper. I don't know why he sent me over here." Next thing you

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know, the next day, when I'm opening for my 'Grand Opening', I'm on the front page of the Daily Cal, my picture, "THE KING OF THE CARDS!," and I show up to work at like noon, when I'm supposed to open the place... I've got like 25 people waiting to get to my place.

Then I start getting the other local newspapers... they picked it up, and such. But then I got Channel 4, NBC, and they said, "We're sorry, we couldn't come, but I'm really interested in this," and they came out to tape something, and they were so into it that they ran a three-part segment, three days in a row, on the 6 and 11 o'clock news.

Michael Erlewine: Wow!

Dennis King: I got all this publicity when I first started. So I sat in this little closet going claustrophobic, put some mirrors on the walls so it wouldn't drive me too batty, for about 3 or 4 months, and then somehow or another, the synchronicity kicks in, and across the way the travel agency went out of business and I got into their spot. So I really quickly got into a bigger spot and started off. So I been, basically, you know, from 1976 on, I've been doing this full time.

And the posters were ... it was a three-part business, really. It was all three of those kinds of collectables, and I couldn't have done it without any one of them at the time. There was no way. But between the three of them, it was enough to carry the whole thing. And I've been doing it ever since.

Michael Erlewine: What stuff do you like for yourself? I mean what do you like to collect? What do you think is beautiful from the whole poster scene, just personally?

Dennis King: Well, the thing that I'm most interested in collecting is original artwork.

And that may have something to do with the art gallery kind of sensibility. A lot of art collectors are really interested in drawings and sketches, because you see the stylistic elements and how the things built up. I don't know if that's what it is or not. It's really hard to say. It's so exclusive.

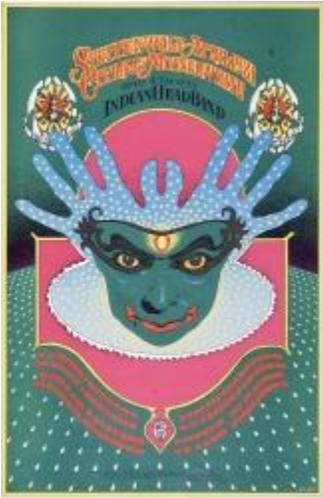
You know, there's one made and it's sittin' here. Owning that one piece. Its something that I've really kind of pursued, and I pursue it with some of the more modern artists as well.

Michael Erlewine: Putting originals aside and just talking about the art itself, what kind of things do you think are beautiful? If you can even think of it that way. Maybe you don't.

Dennis King: No, I do. But, you see, I started collecting so long ago. I mean, I really started collecting in 1967. I went through phases of this ... that I've collected. I wouldn't say I'm omnivorous, but there's so many different types of posters, handbills, postcards -- all that kind of stuff -- that I've collected, that it is kind of hard to look at it that way, because most of what I've had, I've had for quite a while. I don't add much to my collection these days. There's certainly things that stand out among the work. Some of Wes Wilson's at the end of the Fillmore run, the last 20 or 30 posters that he did in there in 1967, are just really one of the pinnacles of that whole era. There's some peripheral things that he did, like that "Open Up and See" poster for J. Walter Thomson that he did. A beautiful piece. The Levi's piece. There is a lot of that stuff that's really

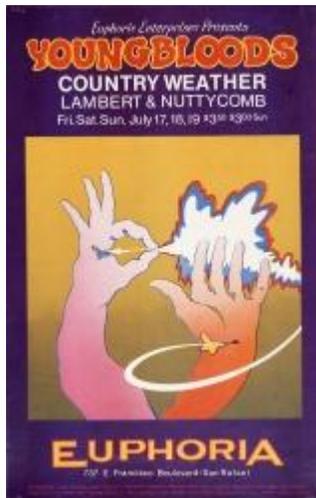
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great. That's really one of the high points. Bob Fried, the really psychedelic Bob Fried stuff, because cause Bob was... his whole point was to try and capture the psychedelic experience on a two dimensional surface. And it's really obvious, when you look at things like the FD-115, the guy with the green hands coming out of the head. That's one the most psychedelic posters ever made. I'm sorry. You look at that and you say "L.S.D." There's nothing else you can really say.



FD-115

Michael Erlewine: I feel that way about the Euphoria poster.



The Youngbloods at Euphoria

Dennis King: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: And I saw the original acetate poster of the man walking across the books on stilts. That says a lot to me, intellectually -- a beautiful concept.

Dennis King: Well, I believe, and I'm not sure that that, I don't know if it's a Dore, or who it is... I don't know how much of that is really his work.

Michael Erlewine: I think it might be pretty much his work, but who cares, the poster is fantastic.

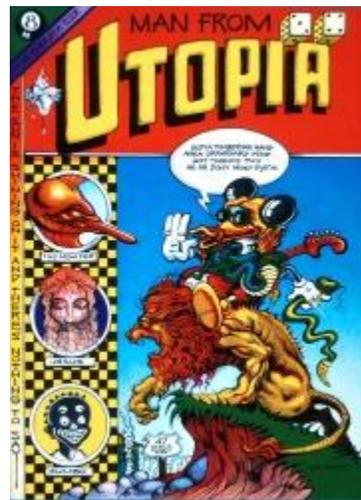
Dennis King: I'd be very surprised. And then the Rick Griffin stuff, obviously.

Michael Erlewine: Do you have a favorite Griffin?

Dennis King: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: What sort of things?

Dennis King: My favorite Griffin stuff is the "Man from Utopia," the big, oversized comic book. That's my favorite Griffin stuff. The really psychedelic stuff grabs you because the imagery's so strong. It captures the experience



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Man from Utopia

It was interesting, because one of the other things that, really, I haven't thought about it too much, but I thought about it a lot at one point, was growing up and living in the Bay Area. There was a whole kind of consciousness that a lot of people that I was around had, but it was very hard to relate to other people, who were not from the area, because there was something for whatever kind of words you want to throw up around, you know, the '60s were a special time or whatever you want to say. There was a very special feeling in the area in 1966-1967 that goes beyond the trappings. This very profoundly influenced who I am and how I relate to people.

You know I think it's interesting when you look at the group of poster dealers, and I don't know that I wanna' go into this too far, but it's interesting, because Jacaeber Kastor grew up in Berkeley, but most of the poster dealers really are not from the Bay Area. It's kind of interesting. Most people are either transplants... and, I don't know how to put it, it's probably... Let's not go there.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, one question I have is: Posters as memorabilia, posters as art. There seems to be, in my view, a shifting now. We've kind of exhausted the memorabilia aspect of it.

Dennis King: I don't think so.

Michael Erlewine: Not to stop it, but I don't know what else one can do to accent it that hasn't been done. I'm thinking that the fine art part of it is starting to come into its own. I wonder what your thoughts on it are?

Dennis King: Well, I think there are three categories: One is memorabilia, one is historical documents, and the other is art. And I think the historical document aspect has not been hit, has hardly been scratched, and I think that's one of the I mean certainly a lot of the posters and such don't fall into the art-world realm, as much as they fall into the historical documents realm.

Michael Erlewine: Well, I mean Lautrec and stuff like that are, I think, very collectible and very much considered art. It is a fact that ALL posters are historical documents of one type or another.

Dennis King: Well, because they're both. For example, you pick something like this. This is not art.

Michael Erlewine: No, but something like Rick Griffin's Oxomoxoa.

Dennis King: Oh no, I understand, but I'm just saying that within the realm of poster collecting, there are these three categories. And one of the things that makes posters so attractive to collectors is they do cross these different boundaries. You get into the best pieces, they represent memorabilia, nostalgic memorabilia; they represent historical documents that are extremely important because the documentation of a turning point in our history; and they represent art. So whenever you have things that have these three crossovers or four crossovers then ...

Michael Erlewine: As we grow older and die, the memorabilia probably doesn't work. It won't be other peoples' memorabilia.

Dennis King: That's true, but the historical document aspect will be even

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more important and I think that's been overlooked.

Michael Erlewine: I think you're right. A good point.

Dennis King: And I think that's why you see things like the acid test poster. Nobody's ever going to look at that as art. I mean, you know, basically the artist Gut took Captain Marvel and threw in a big "Shazamm!" Here we are guys. You know it's like part of that whole comic book thing that was happening. In fact, it's very interesting because the whole comic book thing underflows all that late 1965, early 1966. You start seeing "Tribute to Dr. Strange" and that was a big deal. I don't know if you know about "Dr. Strange." He was a marvel comic book, the master of mystic arts. It'd be interesting at some point to explore really what the roots are, the comic book roots of the poster artists, because Rick Griffin obviously was very influenced. He did a lot of underground comic book work. Victor Moscoso did underground comic book work, so there's a lot of that happening, as well. I think there's a tendency of a lot of collectors to think that they're the center of the universe and to mistakenly think that, because myself and my generation are going to be gone, no one's gonna want this stuff anymore. I think that's very egotistical on the one hand and very misguided on the other, because I think the historic implications of these pieces are much greater than most people really recognize. We are still so close to that time period, that we're not really... we don't have the distance to take a look at it and see how significant they really are.

I'm not real into, you know, touting all that, but I understand what you're

saying. The interesting type of feedback that I get from customers is that I'll see customers that I haven't seen in 10 years or 15 years, and they'll come back to me because they say, "Well, I trust you. You'll tell me the truth," and my philosophy, not only in this business, but in my other businesses as well, is that I'm in for the long run. I've been doing this for however long this is. I mean you think about posters ... 30 years, and I've always felt like I'm not doing this for this year and for next year. I'm gonna be doing this in ten years. I'm gonna be doing this in 20 years, and if I'm going to continue to make this my livelihood, I have to be honest with my customers, tell them the truth, help them when they need some guidance, for where they wanna go, help them find what they wanna do rather than what I wanna do. Because then they remember me, and they come back to me. And I think that kind of sums up my business in a nutshell.

Interview with Paul Grushkin of "The Art of Rock"

by Michael Erlewine

"The Art of Rock" and "The Art of Modern Rock"

Interview by Michael Erlewine, 20
February 2003

Born: September 3, 1951, New York
City

Grew up in Bergen Co., N.J.

[Perhaps no one has done more to expand the public's knowledge of concert posters and the poster scene than Paul Grushkin. His two "Art of Rock" books are classics and their publication changed the scene itself and set the value of posters more than any other event I can think of. Every poster lover has these books. Thanks Paul!]

Paul Grushkin: When I have seen probably over a thousand people open up "The Art of Rock". What happens is inevitable this: They open up a couple of pages, their fingers sneak out and they go [gasp]... "I was at that show." A couple of more pages [gasp] "I wanted to go to that show. My brother was thrown out of that show by Bill Graham." You wouldn't believe this. See, what the art does, it stimulates people's recollections of what it was like to actually be with rock and roll. We can all have CD's; we can all do downloads and MP3's. There are many, many ways to access music since time immemorial. But, what posters show is the commonality of us in going to the show, wanting to go to the show, and the shared experience of what it was like to be at the show.

All through art, the ironic part of this whole thing is that now time has

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progressed and the album has morphed into the cassette, the cassette morphed into the CD, and the 8 track and the 45 single before that. Now of course, it's the CD with very little album art, and the MP3 with no album art at all.

So people are actually hungry for art; it's an innate thing within them. They respond to posters, and why else then would there be this enormous renaissance of poster art in the year 2003.

Okay, let's explore that first thing because this is the actual genesis of the art of modern rock. That is that music perhaps because of MTV and just the exegesis of time and the human community moving forward is that rock and roll bands don't last as long as they used to, that people access music by the moment, and then they move on from that band's one song that grabbed them to the next band and the next band and everything is such a blur. Yet the human spirit is such that wonderful things want to be acknowledged and wonderful things want to be preserved and that actually happens to be the reason for poster art, ok? There is a certain utilitarian aspect to it, this band is playing at the Capital, come on down.

Many young poster's artists are either approaching the bands or approaching the promoters and wanting to do a poster for ephemeral events. Events that happen and then disappear into time, and yet the poster becomes this thing that people grab on for a longer period of time than the show. They look at it, and they go, "Man that was a good time! Look at that art." It's just like what I heard last night at the,,," Michael ,this is happening in every corner of the United States and around the world in the

greatest profusion of silkscreen offset and digitally inspired art that's ever been.

Michael Erlewine: I agree.

Paul Grushkin: This is in 2003, with the MP3 upon us, the disappearing thing of music, and yet the appearing thing of poster art. When I was doing "The Art of Rock"... Well, let's go back a little farther... the first book that I did... I'll even go back farther. I grew up in a book publishing family. My mom is a librarian; she's 82 years old, and she is still a librarian at the Englewood-New Jersey public library. My dad passed away a couple of years ago, but he was one of the century's foremost designers of books. In fact, in his career, he had become the senior vice-president and art director for "Harry Abrams," the world's largest, biggest, art-book company. My home in New Jersey, Michael, has 10,000 art books. From the basement to the third floor, and this is what I was raised in.

Michael Erlewine: Cool.

Paul Grushkin: I went to Stanford during the war years, during 1969-1974. But, I was raised in book publishing, so all of my experiences with the "Grateful Dead," hanging out with them, the members of the band, at their office, lead into, in 1983, the publication of the "Grateful Dead, the official book of the Deadheads", which has now sold almost 400,000 copies. It's in its 15th printing, and it was the first time that the Dead archives had ever been accessed. I was very fortunate to be in that place, but my love and my conviction lead me to that opportunity. I was on the publication on "The Book of the Deadheads", that Bob Abrams, son of Harry Abrams, flew west

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to find somebody to do the poster book, and I could do the Art of Rock, and he knew of me because of our family association, and quite frankly, he put it to me within the first half hour. Are you the guy that's willing to do "The Art of Rock"? Little did I know what this would entail some two and a half years of being persuasive, beyond my own belief, that I could be that persuasive.

Michael Erlewine: And you're pretty persuasive.

Paul Grushkin: And I'm pretty damn persuasive. Basically, obtain the situation for a book where we would begin with Elvis and the Black acts of the 1950s and letter-press, and go all the way through punk and new wave with deep, deep explorations into psychedelic, and essentially honor all of the artists that we could possibly find. There was also a time, when "Poster Art"... This is the book that was published in 1987. It's been reprinted four times. It has a tiny folio edition that came out in 1990. But, the situation was that San Francisco Bay Area was still the king of posters. There were certain wonderful things, with Van Hammersveld and others in Southern California, with Gary Grimshaw in Detroit. God-damned nothing in New York City, little bits and pieces here and there, but essentially you had a west-coast renaissance of poster art, which is absolutely true, is absolutely believable. The historical record shows that to be so. So we were all very fortunate for the very first time, things that we had been pursuing intuitively to find this art was now, "codified" in a huge 500-page oversized nine-pound book, brought out by Abbeyville, son of Abram's. How lucky we all were.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Paul Grushkin: Within the first month or so, people starting going to dealers and their friends and going, "Page 16, plate 34, you got it? I want it!" Okay?

So, people began to pursue things in a more sophisticated, a more targeted... They had more information now. They understood that the length and breadth of Rick Griffin's career, or Alton Kelley's, or Stanley Mouse's or Grimshaw's or whomever really extended much further than they thought. So, people really started to pursue this art with love, vigor, and conviction, whatever... And the book, "Art of Rock, Poster's from Presley to Punk," AOR became a standard work all over the world, in every auction you would encounter, Sotheby's, Christie's, and all the independents.

A poster was given a provenance by the plate and page number in "AOR"... "AOR, 3.336 ... That's the one, see, look at it, ok?" That's not to say these posters didn't exist before "Art of Rock." Of course they did. But the fact is that collector's and the poster dealers and the artist's themselves, in the end willingly, or I had to persuade, beat on them and shame them into doing it, mostly, came together in a book that would otherwise never would have happened. And it never has happened before and since.

Michael Erlewine: I agree.

Paul Grushkin: Sometimes in life you are presented with a situation where there is goodness in intent and there is goodness to produce. This is so with "The Art of Modern Rock". But clearly with, "The Art of Rock", yes, I was somewhat...I was young in that, and we

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were all learning how to make a book together. But, by God, with two exceptions, the book is exactly what was wanted, needed, cared for, and ultimately came out as.

Michael Erlewine: That's true.

Paul Grushkin: It's remarkably ego less. The stories were told. Even though rock and roll stories are mostly apocryphal and who's know among the shifting quicksand of history as to whether it really did happen that way, most of what appeared in, "Art of Rock", actually did happen, generally speaking, that way.

The stories are true, from the heart, and it works, not only people. People can also see that rock and roll, well, my parable in all of this is that there are many, many, many, many, many, many, many, many kinds of rock and roll. And it's happening all at once. So we can't always say there is a straight chronology from A to B, and ultimately, to Z. Because, A, B, and Z are all happening at the same time. So the way we deal with that, many of us historians, is to say, it's not when you got on the bus, it's that you got on the bus. That mean's that your brothers and sisters that got on in 1954, with the Black acts and with Elvis in 1955, or your other brothers and sisters that came alive in the late '80s with punk and new wave, they are all on the same bus of rock and roll, which is, the thing that made it different, the thing that changed your head, the thing that allowed you to look at the world differently, that made you a rebel, that...and on and on. Okay? That's what rock and roll is the embrace of all that.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Paul Grushkin: So even if you loved Tom Jones, or even if you grew up on New Kids on the Block, it's the same thing as growing up on Quicksilver Messenger Service or Queens of the Stone Age. It's rock and roll. Poster's have always been there. It's almost like the guys working in frescoes for the Medici, you know. You want to commemorate it. It's so powerful and so meaningful and it's changing society and your part of it. That is why you look at those early Fillmores and Family Dogs, and you realize what the freshness in spirit there was. They were making it up, just as the bands were making it up, all at once. In that environment, comes out genius, maybe like Victor Moscoso, absolutely, from the heart ...and on and on...

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Paul Grushkin: So, in 1987 was birthed "The Art of Rock". Here we are 16 years later. Why did it take 16 years? Hey, I started a family. My wife and I had to support a family. We all had day jobs. I was very lucky that I stayed 25 years in rock and roll merchandising as VP of sales at Winterland and Sony Signatures, and Signatures, Company X.

And now I'm with New Vista, a division of Quantum Color. We do translucent, vital posters! Yeah! Still there baby, still there. Now, in that 16th year, has come the opportunity to do the "Art of Modern Rock," and it was not easy to get this situation together, because unfortunately our economy is such that major publishers are no longer willing to put up the decent dollar to produce beautiful art books.

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Many companies, like Little Brown, the famous Little Brown imprint, gone! The famous Viking Studio imprint for big beautiful oversized photography and art books, gone, gone, destroyed, gone. So that you can't automatically set up a bidding situation between Little Brown, Viking, Abrams, Simon & Schuster.

They're not doing that. They're not putting their money into it. Things are too ephemeral. Things are moving too quickly. So, one has to look for the great independents, the ones who have been making their money by doing it, not so much by doing it underground, but just working with certain things like, say the National Basketball Association, Ok, and doing all their wonderful publications.

So, I came to a place two, three years ago with my friend Joel Selvin, the rock critic of the San Francisco Chronicle. There had not been up to that time a book on the Hard Rock Café's world-famous memorabilia collection. How could that be? Well, the Hard Rock is a difficult entity to work with, and many, many egos and what not, and there was one man who finally stood up and said I can help you challenge that. His name is Jim Forni. He was the president of a company called Rare Air, and he and I successfully convinced the Hard Rock Café, who had no photography of their own, that if they put up a million dollars in cash, we would essentially create 45,000 books for them and send crews around the world and do the photography and assemble a mighty, mighty book, and which we did.

It is so successful, and people everywhere around the world love it, because it looks like the Hard Rock Café. This fantastic production team that

doesn't work for Simon & Schuster, William Morrow, and the rest, has been quietly doing books of extraordinary taste and deep conviction for subjects that are very like, Hard Rock, or the NBA, or whatever it may be.

So, Jim Forni migrated to a company called, NVU, he actually founded it, called NVU Productions, and it is here that he raised his hand and said "It is time Paul, Dennis King, my co-author, yes, let's do art of modern rock together. Let's make it a real... let's put the money into the production and let's give the world again a 500 page oversized art-book in which all the great artists, the minor artists, people you've never heard of, the upcoming bands, the established bands...but, by God the truth of it is going to be in the poster art itself, if it's good art it goes in the book."

Michael Erlewine: That's great.

Paul Grushkin: Whoa, what an opportunity Michael!

Michael Erlewine: I agree.

Paul Grushkin: So here we are. We have begun that process, Fall 2003. Dennis King and I put out the word, because this site gig posters exists. There is a lot of dialogue between the artists, a lot of chatter going on. This is good. This is where things stand in 2003, that building a dialogue with your fellow man in cyber-space, and so. We put out the word that the book was now going to happen, indeed, and the publisher is in view, and let's rock. So what has happened, in the past 6-8 weeks is that thousands upon thousands of posters have been physically been sent. Now this is a very interesting little story I am about to tell you. That is, when we did the first "Art of

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Rock", there was no question that there were posters. That's all there was.

There were no .jpegs, or .tiffs, or digital files, or CD's, in which you burned and what now.

Michael Erlewine: That's right.

Paul Grushkin: There was only the paper poster that somehow came into being. Either an entity like BGP was fronting the thing, or somehow, guys like Gary Grimshaw, and Russ Gibb in Detroit, and off-set runs were produced. But you see now, with this incredible proliferation, the poster explosion as we call it, the new renaissance of print making, with silk-screen being made in every corner, and cranny of the US. Leia Bell, in Salt Lake City, and Drowning Creek in Commerce, Georgia, and everywhere in between. They're doing it in runs of 20, 50, [laughs], 75, 150, Oh God, a huge run, 250 pieces.

This is not 5000 pieces produced by BGP. These are things you have to hunt down, persuade, please, please, send. Well, I know it's your last three, but if we get it in the book, man, your going to...you know, it will be such a joy and pleasure for everyone else to enjoy, but mostly yourself. Please indulge, send the poster.

Oh Paul, can't I just send a .jpeg? Well, how do I know that it's actually a poster?

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Paul Grushkin: Did you post it? Was it up in a window? These are some real interesting questions that are starting to emerge here in an age when you can create digital art and go, "Well, I intending it for being a poster. Well, I never quite got around to...really, you know...it's a really great piece of art."

Well, how big is it? "Well, I never printed it."

Worse than that, did it actually get off the computer? You know, there are many variations on that little thing. Well, we'll create one fiery print. We'll make some color Xeroxes off of that. (Yawns). Well, that's postering in the modern age.

Let's do 20 of them. That's all I can afford. Let's see now, silkscreen. I'll create a silkscreen press in my home studio here, in my garage. I'll print like 75 of them. I can't afford more paper than that. You see, there is even these weird exigencies, that's the word about doing this book, because, now once again it's the cajoling, it's the please, please, please send the poster.

Michael Erlewine: Right. How's it going?

Paul Grushkin: It's going great. It's wearing me out.

Michael Erlewine: I'll bet.

Paul Grushkin: It's going great. Yes, when I receive stacks of digital prints, I kind of wince. But, that's what's happening.

Michael Erlewine: That's true.

Paul Grushkin: Yes, when I see these incredibly beautiful silk-screens, my heart just goes pitter-patter because I'm seeing American folk-art in its glory.

Michael Erlewine: I agree.

Paul Grushkin: I'm seeing rock and roll in its truest spirit, and that's a very heavy deal. When you see kids who are hungry, hungry, hungry, to make posters, to see posters, to touch posters...to go ahhoohhh, man, man...and variations on that.

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Michael Erlewine: That's true.

Paul Grushkin: It's part of the human spirit to look at a piece of art and go...fluu (fuck???)... we were doing it in our day, and the young ones are doing it in their day. But Michael, the hardest thing is to not look down your nose at somebody else's music.

Michael Erlewine: Well, yeah, you have to be egalitarian about it.

Paul Grushkin: Well, the moment you say it was better in my day, the moment is that...it's passed you pal. It's not fair to say that, to my son, "Well, whatever your listening to sucks. It was better when John Cipollina was doing it.

That's not to say that everybody is the best artist. Some artists are lesser; some artists only have two great pieces; some artists have a 100 great pieces.

Michael Erlewine: That's right.

Paul Grushkin: I guess Dennis and myself, along with the production team, are sifting through all that and making a magnificent book, not to diss people by going, "Well, you're a one poster guy, or an eight poster guy," but simply finding the mini-themes. Ones of the interesting things we are trying to do with this book is not make it chronological, because as I said there are many different kinds of rock that is happening simultaneously. So to say that one came before the other exactly, is not totally the truth. However, you can look at scenes like Texas, and the huge burgeoning of posters.

Michael Erlewine: I know.

Paul Grushkin: And it has ripples, ripples right into the present day. You can look at Seattle and San Francisco of course, but now there are themes, like

silk-screening, power tools, you know things you can do with your computer

Michael Erlewine: Yeah.

Paul Grushkin: Certain bands that resonate because of their name and therefore create wonderful bodies of art, like Guided by Voices. What a great name for a band! Doesn't that suggest incredible posters.

Michael Erlewine: Right. Queens of the Stone Age, what, with a series of some 30 posters this summer?

Paul Grushkin: There it is man, there it is. So, I think the challenge in all of this is to at the moment when production is cut-off, I mean production begins at no more choices, that's it, these are the ones, the text has been written, and that's probably end of June, 2003 and then it takes about 60-90 days to print and bind and warehouse and get ready for release.

Michael Erlewine: Wow.

Paul Grushkin: And if we're lucky, and I think I still we are still very much on track for October of this year.

Michael Erlewine: That's great.

Paul Grushkin: The other thing that we want to do more than anything else is to involve the collector's.

Michael Erlewine: Sure.

Paul Grushkin: The rock and rollers, the poster artists, the venues, and create some traveling exhibitions.

Michael Erlewine: Sure.

Paul Grushkin: Tell each other where the great websites are, and celebrate the living shit out of this.

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Michael Erlewine: Don't forget the archivists and catalogers like me and others.

Paul Grushkin: No...that's a key destination.

Michael Erlewine: Because you got to archive, you have to catalogue something, to make it collectible.

Paul Grushkin: You got to. That's right, so I'm going to ask you a question. Why do you archive? Why are you so possessed by this?

Michael Erlewine: Well, you know when I was young, it was stones, and salamanders, and bugs, and snakes. I guess I am compulsive about it.

When I first started the All-Music Guide, when I was on guy in a little office in the middle of Michigan somewhere, many of the well-known music writers that I contacted laughed at me, because how could anyone be so arrogant to try to do "all" music. But I kept at it, and all of those guys that laughed at me ended up working for me as freelance writers. I ended up working with over 500 freelance writers that wrote for us... today there are something like 950 freelance writers and a couple hundred full-time staff members at AMG.

Paul Grushkin: But what is it in the human spirit, Michael?

Michael Erlewine: Well to me, first of all, it's a delightful thing. I mean that I'm one of these people that I cannot wait to get up in the morning. I can't sleep, because I can't wait for the next morning, right? I can't wait to get up. I can't wait to go and just do what I'm doing, because it's an unfolding, right?

I love all of it. That's what I was trying to say, I was trying to say that it's not just

the big ones, the good ones, the best ones. It's each of the areas that are distinct. They are valuable in itself. I pride myself in being able to treat everyone and every area equally, so that the treatment is going to be the same. I'm going to try to bring out, even if I don't like it, those kinds of art that I don't like, personally. That has nothing do with it, right? It has to do with this existed and people do like it and it represents something.

Paul Grushkin: Did you enjoy the punk and new wave art?

Michael Erlewine: I enjoy it, yeah. I do enjoy it, I do. I collect it. But, remember that I'm 61 years old, so I'm enjoying it more as an archivist than I am as someone that is like 25 years old. For instance, David Singers recent String Cheese Incident with a woman on a rocket.

Paul Grushkin: Yep.

Michael Erlewine: That's awesome to me. That's just a beautiful thing. So that's the kind of stuff I think is gorgeous.

Paul Grushkin: Did you fall in love with letterpress?

Michael Erlewine: You mean when I started?

Paul Grushkin: Well, yeah, I mean you were a child in some way of the 60's.

Michael Erlewine: My mother was an artist her whole life. I grew up in a family of artists and craftsmen. My dad was a businessman, a magician, a photographer, and a collector, so I was constantly surrounded with culture.

Paul Grushkin: Yep.

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Michael Erlewine: So I grew up in that. I got into posters because I had a band in the 1960s. The only way I could make advertisement was I built my own silk-screen shop with drying racks, designed my own posters, printed them and put them up. That's how I got into the thing.

Paul Grushkin: And as is today. Many kids are doing it in that same spirit.

Michael Erlewine: I cut Rubilith by hand. And of course, when I played at gig at the Grande Ballroom or something, I'd take the poster of my own gig.

Paul Grushkin: Yep,

Michael Erlewine: One of them is worth something like three grand now.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, so I don't know what makes me an archivist. I mean, the truth is, if I did, I probably wouldn't be doing it. If I could figure myself out.

Paul Grushkin: No, I mean, I think that's the neat part about it too. I look at Dennis King in much the same, in much the same light. He also has an internal flame within him too. Now he's an archivist. He cares deeply about the artists themselves.

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