

Classic Posters Interview with Ward Sutton by Michael Erlewine

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Michael@Erlewine.net

Michael Erlewine: When and how did you get interested in art?

Ward Sutton: I first got interested in art through comic books as a kid. My childhood was spent drawing, and I carried on cartooning, painting, etc. all through high school, college, etc. In 1991, I moved to Seattle. The scene was not only about music there at the time, but also comics, design ... and posters. That's where I eventually got started, creating posters for a ticket to a show, free beer, and maybe \$25 if I was lucky.

Michael Erlewine: What kind of art influenced you?

Ward Sutton: I like to draw influence from all different sources - old film posters, magazine covers, toy packaging, album covers, pulp novels, and, of course, comic books. I like looking at the work of older illustrators and older design.

Michael Erlewine: What concert-posters artists influenced you?

Ward Sutton: I would probably say that Art Chantry had the biggest influence on me. When I first showed up in Seattle, he was one of the few art directors that would meet with me and give me a chance. Over time, I learned a lot from him - his sensibility and his attitude about art and design.

Michael Erlewine: What was your first concert-music poster?

Ward Sutton: Although I created a poster for a benefit show in 1991, as a one-off, the poster I consider my first was a BxW Xerox poster for the band

Gas Huffer, local faves in Seattle at the time. It was for a show on Feb 7, 1993 at the Re-Bar in Seattle.

My first color poster is a better story. Postering had become such a big part of the music scene and culture, and artists/designers would keep eyes open to the telephone poles to check out their friend's/competitor's work. Xerox posters were so cheap and a whole subculture had grown up around the idea. Well, soon some over-zealous city councilwoman made it her pet cause to "clean up the city" from all these "ugly" posters that she cited as a safety issue for people working on the telephone poles. So postering became illegal. Suddenly there were all these artists/designers with no outlet anymore. Art Chantry got together with the club MOE and they decided to put out a large, oversized newsprint publication - with each page being its own poster. I was thrilled to be included in this project, and even more thrilled when the owner of MOE said he wanted to see one of my designs in color. So he got some silk-screeners (who were also just working for beer/food/concert/tickets) to print my poster, and that became my first silk-screened color poster - all because of an anti-postering ordinance! The poster was for Material Issue and the Deflowers June 11, 1994 at MOE.

Oddly, the then-unknown band Weezer was also on the bill, but the guys from Material Issue wouldn't promote them as part of the tour (maybe they were jealous of Weezer's talent??). I met one of the guys from Weezer, who was really cool and he told me how Material Issue had been really rude to them, not allowing them to eat with them, not letting them on their bus, etc. I told the Weezer guys I was sorry they didn't

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make it on the poster, but no one told me they were on the bill. They were bummed but said they liked the poster anyway.

Michael Erlewine: What are the main venues you have done posters for?

Ward Sutton: I wouldn't say I've done work for venues in any specific way, except my first Xerox posters, which were all for the Re-Bar in Seattle.

Michael Erlewine: What are the main bands you have done posters for?

Ward Sutton: I've done a bunch for Pearl Jam and I really enjoyed working with Ames Bros. I really like the way those posters turned out. I'm also a big fan of Mudhoney and am glad I've gotten to do two posters for them.

I also enjoyed doing the posters for Beck, Pavement, Morphine and Radiohead.

Michael Erlewine: Please describe the media and size/formats you have most used?

Ward Sutton: I have always drawn my posters with brush and ink, shot them on film, and cut Rubys for the color overlays. It is the old-school way, I guess. To be honest, my last silk-screen poster was in 1999. I think if I were doing them today, I would probably have to use a computer, since all the places I knew with stat-cameras seem to have closed down.

Michael Erlewine: What other poster artists have you collaborated with?

Ward Sutton: No collaborations.

Michael Erlewine: Who are your favorite current poster artists?

Ward Sutton: These days my focus has turned to animation and cartooning, so I

must confess I am not that in touch with current poster artists.

Michael Erlewine: What are your favorite bands?

Ward Sutton: Boy, my musical tastes are all over the map. But in terms of current rock 'n' roll, I'd say I really enjoy the Strokes, the White Stripes, the Hives ... Like I say, I haven't designed posters for about 4 years, but I would love to do one for any of those bands.

Michael Erlewine: Please list any poster shows of your work:

Ward Sutton: One Night Only, New York, NY Feb 6, 1998, One Night Only, Minneapolis, MN June 18, 1998, One Night Only, Seattle, WA July 15, 1998, The Art of Ward Sutton, Boulder, CO August, 1998, One Night Only, Austin, TX, March 18, 1999