

Interview with jb (rastagrafix) by Michael Erlewine

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

Jb: One of my earliest memories was of my dad drawing an Indian. I was stunned that you could just make a picture of something like that! Later, in high school, I knew I was going to be an artist, and I worked hard at it, even winning an award or two. I went to work early-on in a local art gallery, and then during the Vietnam era enlisted in the air force, ended up at the Defense Language Institute studying Chinese during the week and dropping out on the weekends. When I got out in 1968, I lived in the Haight and worked in galleries again, but as time passed I became more interested in restoring art than in creating it. Now I'm the head of a museum conservation lab, and not an artist anymore. But I'm still stunned at the art that surrounds me everyday.

Michael Erlewine: What kind of art influenced you?

Jb: Beatnik art, the art of the 60's, and the vibrant colors I saw in the Mission District: Galleria de la Raza during the Dia de los Muertos exhibition; the mural on the facade of China Books; and the Fillmore posters tacked to telephone polls. Mookerjee's "Tantra Art," cheap copies of ukiyo-e prints in Japantown, and especially the work of Tadanori Yokoo.

Michael Erlewine: What concert-posters artists influenced you?

Jb: Wes Wilson, Kelly Mouse, Rick Griffin, David Singer, Victor Moscoso,...heck, ALL of 'em. The folks who did the light shows, my pal

Demetrios and his florescent puppets upstairs at the Avalon (whatever happened to him), that darned white rabbit poster above my refrigerator...

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

Jb: After a sailing trip to the Lesser Antilles in '72, I started seriously hanging out at Kingston Records on Fillmore Street, Ruel Mill's tiny enclave of riddim and vibes. One day I saw Ruel drawing up a flyer for a concert he was producing with Toots, Dennis Brown, and Jacob Miller at Winterland. He was doing such a lousy job that I offered to whip something together overnight, gratis. The result was crude, but after hanging out later with the talent I figured it was a pretty cool gig.

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

Jb: Most of what small amount I've actually done was for Reggae bands: local groups at neighborhood clubs, Toots et al, Big Youth, Third World Band, Burning Spear, Soul Syndicate, Earl Zero, Epiphany Records, Mango Records, and a few others. Once I started getting into the "big time" I realized I really didn't want to compete with the pros on the fast track (hey, it was a hobby, ok?). I was only active for about 5 years. But I still dream of doing "one more" for Toots.

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

Jb: My first job was a hand separation on bristol paper (I used a desk lamp on the floor under a piece of Plexi). The printers jaw dropped when they saw what I brought in, but it worked. After that, most of my work was done

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oversized with india ink and screens on mylar. I did B&W hand separations, and spec-ed the colors for the plates at the printer. On the Big Youth poster you can see where I missed an area of the green. One of my last jobs had something like 16 individual separations!

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

Jb: None really, though I worked on one album cover with a graphic designer friend (a mixed result), and was so laid up with the flu once for a Third World deadline that another artist friend bailed me out with most of the coloring (we never signed that one).

Michael Erlewine: What are your favorite bands?

Jb: Alpha Blondy, Oliver Mtukudzi, Henry Dikongue, African Reggae in general, and of course all the old stuff: Freddie McKay, the Clarendonians, Abyssinians, Junior Byles, and of course Lee Scratch and most of the stuff out of the Black Ark, and almost anything with Hucks Brown and Jackie Jackson and Paul Douglas doing backup.