

# Dennis Preston Interview



by Michael Erlewine

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## INTRODUCTION

This is not intended to be a finely produced book, but rather a readable document for those who are interested in in this series on concert poster artists and graphic design. Some of these articles still need work.

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## Interview with Dennis Preston

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

Preston: I became interested in art in first grade, drawing cartoon characters. Interested in posters around 1968. I began painting drumheads for local bands in 1966 ('Tonto & the Renegades' was the first one). I began doing posters for local bands in 1968.

Michael Erlewine: What kind of art influenced you?

Preston: Big Daddy Roth, Stanley Mouse, Frank Frazetta, Salvador Dali, Alphonse Mucha, R. Crumb (his style, not the subject matter).

Michael Erlewine: What concert-poster artists influenced you?

Preston: Rick Griffin, Wes Wilson, Stanley Mouse, Alton Kelley.

Michael Erlewine: What was your first poster?

Preston: To the best of my knowledge, it was the summer of 1969, the M.S.U. Union Ballroom, for the "Dogs" and two Detroit bands, a Jerry Patlow presentation.

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

Preston: The Stables, East Lansing, MI, Michigan State University (throughout the campus), East Lansing, MI, the Melody Ballroom, Inkster, the Rosevile Ballroom, Detroit, Sherwood Forest, Davison, MI.

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

Preston: The Dogs, the Woolies, Plain Brown Wrapper, Dick Deal & the U.S. Male, Otis, the Cloud, Beast, the Maxx, Danny Hernandez and the Ones. For the Sherwood Forest and Melody Ballroom posters, it was mostly Detroit, Ann Arbor, and Flint-area bands:

Rumor, Springwell, Northwind, Stilleyes, Silver Hawk, SRC, Amboy Dukes, Frijid Pink, Teegarden & Vanwinkle, Whiz Kids, Sunday Funnies, Brownsville Station, Third Power, Guardian Angel, Savage Grace, Mike Quatro, UP, Julia, Frut, Catfish, Bob Seger, Commander Cody and His Lost Planet Airman, and Rare Earth.

### **Bigger Name Bands**

The Byrds, Big Brother and the Holding Company, Ravi Shankar, Chuck Berry, Steve Miller, 3 Dog Night, America, The

Carpenters, Ginger Baker & Buddy Miles, Alice Cooper, Ike & Tina Turner, John Mayall, Leon Russell, Edgar Winter, The Guess Who, Peter Frampton, Cheech & Chong, Muddy Waters, Eddie Harris, Charles Mingus, Les McCann, Buddy Guy, Junior Wells, Lightnin' Hopkins, James Cotton Blues Band, The Dillard's, the 5th Dimension, Canned Heat, Crow, Josh White Jr., Loudon Wainwright III, Pharoah Sanders, Tom Rush, Doc Watson...

Michael Erlewine: What media and size do you work in?

Preston: Mostly pen & ink, format shading films, borders, and type, chart- pak type.

Size: Most of the posters were 11 x 17. The Melody and Roseville Ballroom posters were 10 x 13, and always printed split fountain. The rest of the posters were mostly 8-1/2 x 11 and 8- 1/2 x 14.

Some posters were all hand-lettered and the rest were a combination of hand lettering and dry transfer type. I was very limited with the printing, because a majority of the posters were rush jobs and because of printing budgets. You can tell which ones I had more time to work on. With the Melody Ballroom posters (I only own a few. There are probably hundreds of them out there), I would get a call from Jerry Patlow sometime between 11 PM and 2 AM, and the poster would have to be in the mail by six in the morning.

For some of the posters I would use a drawing out of my sketchbook or cut the drawing from another poster that I've done for the Lansing area. Example: I used the frog from the Toads of Sleepy Hollow poster for the Bullfrog poster in Detroit.

Jerry's posters were always printed split fountain. Once in a while, I had a say in the ink colors and what color paper.

Most of the time, it was Jerry or the printer who decided. I personally think some of them were pretty bad, but sometimes they surprised me with some of their color combinations, which were pretty unique.

I didn't have the luxury that Grimshaw had with the multi-colored posters. That would have been nice. Most of the 11x17 posters were black ink on colored paper. Once in a great while, a color ink. And, like most artists, I didn't get paid a whole lot for the amount of time I put into them. Like other artists, I would also copy an Art Nouveau figure or redraw something I saw in an old book. Back then, I think a lot of that was going on,

but we would add our own style to the drawing.

Michael Erlewine: Who are your favorite current poster artists?

Preston: I still look at books that have my old favorites. I don't know any of the names of the current artists, what their works are like.

Michael Erlewine: What are your favorite bands?

Preston: CSN&Y (first two albums), David Crosby (first album), Beatles, Quicksilver Messenger Service, Nick Drake, The Nice, King Crimson (first three albums), Jimi Hendrix, Pink Floyd, Fleetwood Mac, Joni Mitchell, Bob Dylan, The Byrds, Beck, Dave Mathews, Jefferson Airplane, Doors, Touch, Yes, The Move, John Mayall (The Turning Point album), Michael Hedges, Paul Clark, Randy Stonehill, Bruce Cockburn, Phil Keaggy, Mike Roe, The 77's, Mike Knott, Lost Dogs, The Choir, Daniel Amos/ Swirling Eddies, Beth Orton, Natalie Merchang, ELP, Neil Young, Rolling Stones, Spirit, Donovan, The Frost, Amboy Dukes, SRC, Led Zeppelin, Sufjan Stevens, Cream, Mountain, Traffic, Procol Harum (Salty Dog and Broken Barricades albums).

Michael Erlewine: What about posters shows of your work?

Preston: Preston Exhibition 1979

The Capitol Art Gallery at the Olds Plaza Hotel

Feb. 15 - Mar. 15, 1979, Downtown Lansing, MI

It was a one-man show, made up of concert posters, drawings, and paintings.

Michael Erlewine: Any additional notes?

Preston: Most of the posters I created were from 1969 to 1974. When I look at them now, I wish I had gone to more of those concerts. I had free admission to them and sometimes was invited to hang out with the performers. Basically, I was a shy guy and didn't like to be in crowds. One of the concerts that stands out to me was at M.S.U., America was performing. I wasn't out front in the seats. I was on stage, off to the right side. One of the guys was having his birthday that night, so I was asked to do a card for him, while they were performing. So I went behind the curtain that was behind the band, where there was a smaller auditorium. It was the same stage, but just divided by that curtain. Anyway, I drew a caricature of him sitting backward on a horse with no name, out in the desert. After the concert, they gave him the card. And he got the biggest kick out of that thing.

They wanted me to go with them and get something to eat, but I said no. I think it was partly because of me being shy. The other thing could be that I don't get star struck around performers. They are just regular humans like me; they just



have a different job. Being the way I am now, I wouldn't mind talking to folks about music, art, or whatever.

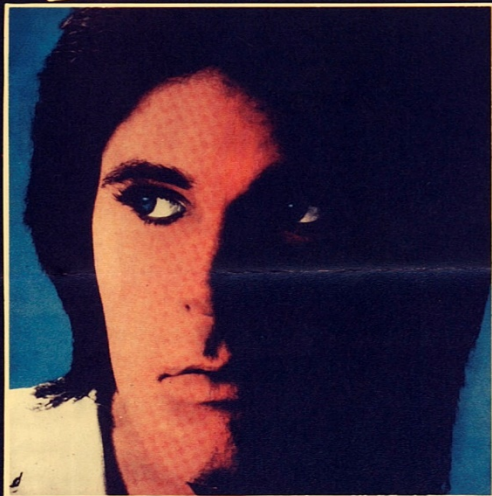
Besides concert posters, I've done a few album covers. I would have liked to have done more of those. During the concert-poster years, I was also really into surrealism, paintings, and drawings, but mostly I painted. Some of them probably would have been great covers. I used to play bass in a band called "Beast." After the band broke up, I began to play more instruments and

write songs. One of my goals back then was to record my own album and do the cover art too. I met that goal in 1991.

I've written and recorded more songs since then and maybe sometime I'll release those basement tapes on CDs. Once again being able to do the cover art, but, what's in the back of my mind is a buried goal of also doing my own concert poster. I don't know if it will ever happen, but, still, it's in my mind, somewhere.



# RICK NELSON



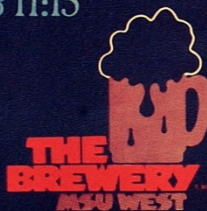
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