

Classic Posters Interview with Mat Marello by Michael Erlewine

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Artist Name: Matt Marello

Birth Date and Year: August 17, 1960

Birth Place: Reading, Pennsylvania

Michael Erlewine: WHEN and HOW did you get interested in art in general, and posters in particular?

Matt Marello: One of my mother's earliest recollections of my interest in art is when I presented to her a series of "nude" drawings around the age of 6. She wanted to know where I found the "inspiration" for the drawings, and I told her in "daddy's magazines" I found in the garage. From that day forward I was known as "the artist," and always thought of myself as such because of it.

Needless to say, the magazines disappeared, and I went out in search of new subjects.

As an undergraduate student at the Philadelphia College of Art, I became particularly interested in public art - street performances, happenings, etc. My senior thesis project was a series of street posters, one new poster a week for 9 weeks "exhibited" on the streets of Philadelphia. They were child-like drawings with sayings like "I cut meat for a living" and "My dog throws up beef." It created a big stir because some left-wing radical wrote an essay in local paper deriding the project, arguing that street posters were traditionally a tool of political expression, and not a tool for "self-aggrandizement." Needless to say, the project became a hot topic and brought me a great amount of attention. One day I was approached by a local club entrepreneur, Chris Boas of the

Love Club, wanting to know if I would be interested in creating a series of posters for his new club. Broke, I agreed, and the rest, as they say, is history.

Michael Erlewine: What kind of art influenced you?

Matt Marello: That's a tough question. I was raised in a lower middle class family (my father was a truck driver), so my exposure to art while growing up was very, very limited. I did, however collect "monster" magazines - Creepy, Eerie, Vampirella. I'm sure these had an influence on me. When I went off to school, the exposure to art history swept me up and thrashed me about for a while - Dada, Abstract Expressionism, Pop - it all had a profound effect.

Michael Erlewine: What concert-posters artists influenced you?

Matt Marello: I suppose at the time I was influenced by the punk-posters that were coming out of London, but not so much. They were a bit messy for me, a little too aggressive. I've always gravitated toward things with a bit of humor.

Michael Erlewine: What was your first concert-music poster (date, venue, bands)?

Matt Marello: My first poster was a general announcement flyer for a new club called "LOVE" at South and Broad in Philly. As the club evolved and started to book bands, I began to do proper concert posters.

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

Matt Marello: The Love Club, The East Side Club, Ripley's, The Kennel Club - all in Philadelphia.

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

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Matt Marelo: No main bands, unless you count the posters for my own band - The Executive Slacks. I figured I was in art school, start a band, right?

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

Matt Marelo: 8 1/2 x 11 sheets of white paper, and a Sharpie marker.

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

Matt Marelo: None.

Michael Erlewine: Who are your favorite current poster artists?

Matt Marelo: I don't know of any, to tell you the truth.

Michael Erlewine: What are your favorite bands?

Matt Marelo: Now, or back then? Back then - Flipper, Killing Joke, The Dead Kennedys - typical alpha-male bands. I'm not really a big listener of music anymore. I'm not too fond of rap, and white-boy music has entered a long, pathetic cycle of re-hashing the past. Nothing new, to my ears, has emerged in the last 15 years.