

Chuck Sperry 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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Chuck Sperry

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Birth Date: February 5, 1962

Time of Birth: 8pm

Birth Place: Dayton, Ohio

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

Chuck Sperry: I was lucky to have creative parents. They fostered my interest in art from an early age. They introduced me to crayons in my crib, and introduced me to an art tutor (a friend of my parents) before I had even begun school. I was always in extra-curricular arts classes. In Dayton when I was a pre-adolescent -the {Living Arts Center}, and in Ft. Lauderdale during my high school days - sculpture classes. My father worked as a professional artist for many years. He was apprenticed to {Koepnik} - a very accomplished sculptor - and I used to come with my father to work. Koepnik had a very big barn studio in the beautiful farmland outside Dayton. Inside were all these sculptures - finished and in-progress - hundreds of busts,

angels hanging from the ceiling, abstracts. A religious feeling would overcome me when I would go there.

My brothers and sister are older than me and had a lot of really cool posters in their rooms when I was growing up. I saw Gary Grimshaw's posters, among others. I used to go into headshops when those opened in Dayton and look at all the cool posters. I loved {Rick Griffin} and {Stanley Mouse}, {Alton Kelley}, {Victor Moscoso} and {Peter Max}.

Michael Erlewine: What kind of art influenced you?

Chuck Sperry: I loved {Mad Magazine}. Everything about it was so inspiring and entertaining. I thought this kind of satire was the best form of art ever. I was never very impressed with Saturday morning animations - except - of course, the Warner Bros. characters. The music and movement was so heightened and intense.

At times I would delve into my parent's copy of Dante's Inferno. The {Dore} illustrations gave me the chills, and were strangely frightening. I had art classes at the {Dayton Museum of Modern Art} in Dayton. The whole atmosphere there was very special - a kind of sacred preserve or art territory - inhabited by great dynamic modern sculptures and a lot of Flemish art. The Flemish Renaissance painters had a big influence on me. The codes and symbols are somehow hidden behind their realistic observation. I think this kind of narrative composition had a big effect on my imagination - how I make pictures now. But add to that, a big dose of {EC Comics}, all those {Tales From the Crypt}, and {Weird Science} comics that I read. These had great art and amazing stories. {Wally Wood} and Ingram have such amazing graphic styles.

Growing up - I remember that the best art had a story to tell. Could you tell your friend the story of a comic or drawing on the walk to school? Like recounting {Twilight

Zone} episodes - the {EC Comics} and {Mad Magazines} made great stories for your friends.

Michael Erlewine: What concert-posters artists influenced you?

Chuck Sperry: I have a unique style and approach to my work, but I'm very impressionable - when I see great work. The biggest challenge is to find MY response to the work of a great artist. {Robert Williams}, {Robert Crumb} and {Spain Rodriguez} are three artists that influenced me a lot - perhaps more via their attitude toward the world. {Rick Griffin} is the supreme draftsman in the poster medium. His drawing and artistry always keep me reaching higher... {Victor Moscoso} had a big influence on my color theory.

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

Chuck Sperry: Besides some Xerox flyers I did for {Steel Pole Bath tub} in the late 80's - my first real professional poster gig was for {Superchunk}, {Polvo} and {Overwhelming Colorfast} at The {Fillmore} in June of 1994.

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

Chuck Sperry: {Fillmore}, {Bottom of the Hill}, {Avalon}, {Great American Music Hall}, {Slim's}, {Thee Parkside}, {Covered Wagon}, {Paradise Lounge}, etc....many many, and that's just San Francisco.

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

Chuck Sperry: I do a lot of posters for the {Incredibly Strange Wrestling} shows here in SF. I think I have done over 25 posters for just this one event. I have followed

them since 1994, from small clubs to the Fillmore to an American tour and now on a world tour. This event keeps gaining momentum.

Right now - I love The {Dragons} (San Diego).

{Turbonegro}

{Dirtbombs}

{Detroit Cobras}

{Hives}

{Hellcopters}

{Supersuckers}

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

Chuck Sperry: I am always looking for a different size - or shape - some way to break out of the box. My usual parent sheet though is 19"x 25". My posters fit into full size, half size and variable width categories from this parent.

Michael Erlewine: What other poster artists have you collaborated wi

Chuck Sperry: {Ron Donovan} - we're like brothers, partners since 1994. I collaborate a lot. I don't feel the sense of loss of control or a lack of ego-fulfillment that I see so often in solo-artist types. I'm a very social and gregarious artist. I love the exchange of ideas and sharing work. I worked on {World War 3 Illustrated} in NYC - an artist-edited political magazine. Then I collaborated on an underground newspaper in SF called {Filth}. Then I collaborated on {Psychic Sparkplug} and now {Firehouse}. I really don't think an artist alone is even half as compelling

as his work in relation to others and the social and political climate that produces it. I also like to relate to other artists as people - not as an image of an artist.

Michael Erlewine: Who are your favorite current poster artists?

Chuck Sperry: {Frank Kozik}, {Coop}, {Alan Forbes}, {Lindsey Kuhn}, {Mark Arminski}, {Chris Shaw}, {Marco Almera}, and {Gary Houston}.