

Classic Posters Interview with Ed Walker of S.F. Rock by Michael Erlewine

Classic Posters Interview with Ed Walker of S.F. Rock by Michael Erlewine

ED WALKER: Farm and my garden and my orchard... I'm out there playing on my tractor and my loader and mullin' the weeds. That's what I like doin'. I was born and raised on a farm that's all I learned how to do when I was a kid.

Michael Erlewine: let me set this over by you and we'll just talk for minute. Ok, first of all what's your birth date and year when were you born?

ED WALKER: May 25, 1945

Michael Erlewine: And where?

ED WALKER: I was born in Brush, Colorado.

Michael Erlewine: And what was your given name?

ED WALKER: Edward George Walker.

Michael Erlewine: Cool, now what we what we want to know is a couple things. One would be... and it can be in whatever order, I wonder how, how you got into this. We also want to know, how you were connected with the scene in the 60's and how did you integrate to that, I mean what part of it did you see, or not see...

ED WALKER: I got here I came from Colorado in 1965 and lived in the bay area ever since, and started in the antique business in 1973. I started with furniture and did that for 15 years, did toys for a few years and in 1989 I switched over to paper and posters and been in it ever since.

And I just like collecting and I was, like I said, my cousin told me that these rock and roll posters are gonna' be great and a good thing to do in the future, and I

went that direction, but I never got to be on the scene. I moved here in 1965, but I didn't really get into the scene until 1970, so I missed all the good ones. I missed Janis, and Jimmy and all those. I missed 'um. I didn't get into the scene 'till after it's over.

Michael Erlewine: Could talk about what you like about the posters? I mean, sure it's an investment thing, but they're beautiful things.

ED WALKER: They're beautiful, yeah. I mean I got into because I like the art. I mean you know, it is a form of art that came out of that era that changed this whole world. It changed the whole United States then, in the 60's. And part of it is the posters and being they're limited too.

Michael Erlewine: And this stuff is appreciating, right?

ED WALKER: Oh definitely. It hasn't stopped rising as you know. It hasn't leveled off. It keeps getting better and better and harder to find.

Michael Erlewine: And more, would you say more and more people are interested in collecting this stuff?

ED WALKER: Oh, I got new people coming all the time, young people collecting old style.

Michael Erlewine: Really?

ED WALKER: Oh yeah, and then people that were there at the time, and now they've got a little money, and they're into their later years. Man. I'm gonna' collect some of the stuff I had before. A few people really get into it. They see that it's not only an investment, but it's nice stuff. You know a lot of people make an investment and they go put it in a safety deposit box. Here you can buy

Classic Posters Interview with Ed Walker of S.F. Rock by Michael Erlewine

your nice piece and enjoy it on the wall as it appreciates.

Michael Erlewine: What do young people see in the old stuff?

ED WALKER: Well, the young people, I mean the ones that are into music. Nowadays is pretty hard to create new music. when you know the ...

Michael Erlewine: It was all done.

ED WALKER: It was done, and now they're just fine tuning it or distorting it, and it's not like a personal thing for the artist. In them days, they put it together and it's... but the new people that realize that that this is the art of the music, and they're collecting that, because they were the founders, the early people, you know?

Michael Erlewine: Do you carry the new poster stuff?

ED WALKER: Oh yeah.

ED WALKER: It's new, and I carry it because the people are collecting it. You know, the people that like the new bands or whatever, they're collecting it now, and then, down the road, I'm sure that they'll keep collecting more. And all the new stuff now, even though it's new, it's still collectable. It's numbered. A lot of it's numbered, and then they got artists doin' it to, and it is good work, even though a lot of it's computer generated. It's still nice art.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, what about all the punk stuff? All the handbills, and the Mabuhay Gardens and the Kennel Clubs. Do you carry any of that?

ED WALKER: Yeah, I carry it.

Michael Erlewine: Does that sell?

ED WALKER: Well, a few people. It's not as, as popular as the common,

everyday stuff, but there are people collecting everything.

Michael Erlewine: Do you think it will grow in the future?

ED WALKER: Oh, definitely.

Michael Erlewine: And whether it's colorful or not?

ED WALKER: Yeah, a lot of the Punk stuff was black and white or whatever, but still, it was so vividly produced that it is good stuff and it will be popular. It's popular now because there's not a lot of it.

Michael Erlewine: But you guys don't issue posters.

ED WALKER: No. I don't reproduce. I have produced two posters since I've been here, but I've never reproduced a poster. We get everything just get off the street. And everything's authentic. We try to strictly stay to the real stuff. I don't deal in seconds and thirds or reproduction. I don't advertise them, even though I do carry some for the people that can't afford the \$1000 poster. They can buy a \$150 second printing.

Michael Erlewine: Right!

ED WALKER: Even though they call it a reprint, it was still done at the time, but you know, it's all documented and whatever. So I do carry some, but I like to deal the original rare stuff. That's what we strive for here.

Michael Erlewine: And you do handle some original art? I saw some out there today.

ED WALKER: Yes, original art, one of a kind, things. Most of that is only done one time, the original art, and that's kind

Classic Posters Interview with Ed Walker of S.F. Rock by Michael Erlewine

of like what I stress. I like to have the rare stuff and the original art.

And original art is getting in demand too. A lot of people feel, well, I got the poster, and maybe if I could find the original art, I'll buy that too.

Michael Erlewine: And your customers aren't just San Francisco people

ED WALKER: No, I deal with everybody all over the world.

Michael Erlewine: Really.

ED WALKER: I have my web site, with people from all over the world. People all over the world want to trade, and the web site has helped me tremendously in getting out to the world, and there are people all over the world collecting this stuff.

Michael Erlewine: And when were you founded. When did this start?

ED WALKER: I started in 1991. I started down on Fisherman's Wharf at the Cannery. I started and opened up a gallery there with a partner. I had Rick Griffin as a partner.

Michael Erlewine: Really.

ED WALKER: And Rick Griffin had put 95 pieces of original art work on the wall, and unfortunately Rick died three months after we opened up, on June 1st, 1991. Rick had his fatal accident on the 15th of August. And so, it kind of drove me into a spin. I lost Rick. He was my partner at the time, and he was gonna' do some art work for us at the gallery, and do a few things for us, and he ended up gone and that kind of put us in a spin. Then I moved into this location and I've been in the same spot since 1992.

Michael Erlewine: What are some of like the rarest posters now. What are some of the most in-demand rare posters? What are the most common really rare ones that people ask for.

ED WALKER: A lot of people ask or are trying to get the early Family Dogs and the early Bill Grahams, early like the first twenty are hard to get. It's the early stuff that's in demand. Jimi Hendrix stuff is always the best, hardest, hardest to find.

Michael Erlewine: More than Grateful Dead?

ED WALKER: More.

Michael Erlewine: Oh really!

ED WALKER: I mean Hendrix stuff is more in demand, I think. I mean there's a lot of Grateful Dead fans, but Jimi Hendrix still is somethin' special. It's the hardest to find, and the easiest to sell, because it is in demand but, all the stuff of people that have died, the Jim Morrison, the Janis Joplin stuff, any of that stuff that's really obscure, is really in demand, collectable, because they are the one's that are gone. And then there is the Acid Test stuff, which was done early, and it was is in real demand, because not so much of it was printed, you know, and that was the start of it all -- Ken Kesey and his Acid Test. That is in great demand and then in the last two or three years, Sonny Barger's got popular with his book of the Hells Angels and since that the Hells Angels stuff is really becoming rare, and that stuff is getting impossible to find, I mean it's hard to find and it is easy to sell.

It's goes right out, and it's one of those things. They put on a few shows, and they were part of the scene at the time, the Hells Angels. They helped them out and all that. The angels were part of it,

Classic Posters Interview with Ed Walker of S.F. Rock by Michael Erlewine

and that stuff is really hard to get a hold of and it sells real well, and it's rare.

Michael Erlewine: Is stuff still turning up?

ED WALKER: Oh yeah. I get stuff comes through my door just daily, but it keeps turning up, especially with the Internet. People are aware and I get offered stuff off the internet all the time, plus I've been at the same location for 9 years and people know I'm here. I treat them fairly and I get a lot of stuff that comes through the door.

Michael Erlewine: If someone was a first time collector, and they don't even know where to start... they just kind of like the idea of collecting posters, you know, creating an investment of some kind, where would you recommend they start?

ED WALKER: Well if, somebody's new, we have some steps we take them through, and try to get an idea of what they know of the past or kind of what their feelings are, and then start them off. We find out what you like and then tell you what's available and the variety available, because there's tickets, handbills, postcards, posters, banners, bumper stickers, buttons, you know. There's so much of it that was produced, that I mean, a lot of variety. Then you get an idea of what they're interested in, and I usually step through with people asking them what do you think your budget is and then try to fit them into something where they're happy and to get collecting for the future. We see what they are interested in and try to fit their budget and to tell them that it's something to enjoy that's also a good investment.

Michael Erlewine: What's your philosophy on the collectable business.

ED WALKER: Well, I like, the collectable business. It's not like a business you can call up on the phone or order off of a catalogue and restock your inventory, so you gotta' buy it off the street or from collectors or collections or whatever.

To make the customer happy, I've always tried to be honest in this business, that's what I was trying to say. In the collectable business, it's easy to not be honest, because you have the knowledge and a lot of your customers don't. But I've always been true to people and tried to treat them right by being honest, because I want them to come back. And when they buy something, I want to make them happy. And if they're happy and I've made a sale, I'm happy, so that's what I call good business, when both people are happy and they got what they wanted and I got what I wanted and we got a deal. And they come back, and I try to treat people fairly, so in my philosophy, like I said, I'm gonna' pay a little more for the people who walk through the door, and charge a little less, and it's worked out great for me.

So the philosophy that I had is to "pay a little more and charge a little less" and just to be honest with people, to let them know that I'm here to serve you, not here to take just your money. I make the guarantee that whatever I sell is guaranteed as what I sell it. It's a first whatever and I'd back it 100% and a lot of my deals are done on a handshake, and a lot of that isn't done nowadays. A man of your word is more important to me than your money or whatever. You know and, and that has really worked good for me over the years.

Classic Posters Interview with Ed Walker of S.F. Rock by Michael Erlewine

Michael Erlewine: And what I found out about the poster business is the "word" is important in this case.

ED WALKER: Right. And I just have the philosophy: you tell people the truth. If the posters got four tack holes in it, you don't tell them that it doesn't have any tack holes, cause when he gets it, it's gonna' have four tack holes. so you might as well be honest.

Michael Erlewine: Right

ED WALKER: And tell them the way it is, because the common person is not so dumb. He can see, you know.

And it's worked for me because I've been successful and everybody is happy with what we've done, because we've treated people fairly. Like I say, success in business is not always dollars and cents, you know?

Michael Erlewine: Right,

ED WALKER: I've been in this business in the same location for nine years. I've never had to hire a layer, and I've only had three bad incidents with UPS where I've lost stuff or whatever. In 9 years, I've only had three bad incidences.

Michael Erlewine: I think that's pretty good.

ED WALKER: As a business part, I feel is important to people. And we haven't created hassles, you know, haven't misrepresented ourselves.

Michael Erlewine: And you ship carefully?

ED WALKER: Right, I ship any way the people want it shipped. How would you like it shipped? I'll do whatever you ask me. And if you'd let me do it I ship 3rd day air UPS or the US mail or whatever.

Everything's insured, guaranteed. We've never had a bit of a problem.

Michael@Erlewine.net