

diversions

page 7

dive.dailytarheel.com

thursday, april 17, 2008

POSTER CHILDREN

Area artists contribute handmade gig posters to a vibrant music scene

BY RACHAEL OEHRING
STAFF WRITER

Rain splatters on the windshield of my car as it crunches its way down a gravel driveway toward a small house with discarded art pieces scattered in the front yard.

An amiable Ron Liberti sits in the living room of the house in ink-splattered jeans, smoking a cigarette, glad to be dry and comfortable.

"The Philadelphia Story" plays silently on a TV in the background, surrounded by used silk-screens and old books filled with typefaces, as the artist pulls out chairs and we begin to chat.

"I try to surround myself and my art with quality people and quality music and, luckily, we've got a lot around here, so it's inspiring and it's cool," he says.

In Liberti's kitchen, between the fridge and a printing rig, sits a large drying rack covered in big pieces of construction paper that soon will bear the image of a horse and information about Bellafea's upcoming CD release show.

This is Liberti's studio, where he hand-prints show posters for bands, primarily around the Triangle — the ones hanging on the telephone poles in Carrboro or the wooden kiosks lining Franklin Street.

Maybe you've even taken one. Just make sure it's the day after the show before you unceremoniously rip your fingernail off trying to pry the industrial-strength staples from the creosote-soaked wood.

"I think it's lame if (people) rip them off the poles before the show," Liberti says. "It's nice and everything, but they're there for a reason. They're an ad first."

After going to art school in New Jersey and studying printmaking in England, Liberti made his way to Chapel Hill in 1991 after visiting a friend.

"It was very beautiful here," Liberti says. "And I looked at the (Cat's) Cradle schedule, and I was like, 'Look at all the bands I'm going to New York to see ... and they're playing here.'"

Though Liberti is one of the subjects of an exhibition at Wilson Library (along with fellow poster artist Casey Burns), he is far from the only poster artist in the area.

There are many local artists who create show posters all around the Triangle. They all have very different and distinctive styles, as well as very different ways of creating their art.

Matt Hart, of ThisPosterWillSelfDestruct, whose art depicts the monsters and goblins that lurk underneath beds and in closets, makes his posters completely by hand, using little more than an X-Acto knife to craft his creatures.

"I barely know how to use a computer," Hart says. "That's kind of something that makes my stuff stand out. All the techniques I use I learned in high school. It's all technology from the '70s."

Joe Norkus, a poster designer for the Trekkly Records Printing Company, does many of his prints digitally.

Also a Web designer, Norkus uses new technology but understands the importance of keeping it old school.

"Screenprinting kind of adds another layer of chance," Norkus says, "because you're working with an imperfect medium and sometimes the mess-ups are really cool."

The poster designers all employ different techniques to create their

art, but they all agree on the one thread that binds them all through their posters: the music.

All three designers are either currently in bands or have been in bands before, and all of them cite the necessity for advertising for their own bands as the reason they started creating posters.

"I think definitely they feed off of each other," Hart said, "especially in the little poster-making community."

"It's mostly comprised of people who play music or who have played music. Most of the people I know who do posters are in bands."

Norkus adds, "Playing in a band means making and putting up your own flyers. It's important to me, it goes hand in hand with the music."

Liberti also got his start making posters for his own bands but soon realized, as the others did, that other people were interested in his art as well.

"I've been in bands the whole time, so that's certainly kind of how I started printing," Liberti says as he drags dark brown ink across the screen again to create another perfectly imperfect horse on a piece of pink construction paper.

"And other people started digging them, and I had more ideas than I had shows for my own band."

Though all the artists agree on the importance of the music scene in their art, their opinions differ on how important the idea of art versus advertising is.

"(The posters) are advertising first," Liberti says. "When you're walking up the street, and you see a kiosk ... and there's one that's a little bigger that's screenprinted and handmade, they're gonna look at that, hopefully, and think, 'Wow, somebody spent that much time doing this poster, then that show has got to be something.'"

"I think it does work because it kicks it up a notch." Hart and Norkus, on the other hand, say the posters hold more artistic value than advertising value.

"I'd like to think it's effective (as advertising)," Norkus says, "but the act of making it is more like doing something with my hands."

"Advertising is less important than art for me, when it comes to posters."

Hart echoes the sentiment, "I really like the idea that it's something I can put out there and spend a lot of time on, and if someone really likes it they can take it home for free."

"I meet people all the time that when they find out what I do, and find out who I am, they have some story to tell me about how they stole a poster," he says.

Whether or not art trumps advertising, there will always be the one thing that brings all of the artists together, whether visual or otherwise in the Triangle, and the whole reason the poster-making community exists.

In Liberti's own precisely succinct words: "Music is the fuel."

Contact the Diversions Editor
at dive@unc.edu



Photo by Bryan Reed

Printmaker Ron Liberti screens posters for a Bellafea show in his home studio in Carrboro.



Paper Trail: The Poster Art of Casey Burns and Ron Liberti will be at Wilson Library until May 31.

reviews

MUSIC Reviews of new releases from R.E.M., Bellafea, The Strugglers, Shakemaker, Nine Inch Nails, Cloud Cult and more! See pages 9 and 11.

MOVIES Reviews of "The Forbidden Kingdom," "Forgetting Sarah Marshall" and other recent cinema offerings on page 8.



concerts

RAINBOWS IN THE DARK
Between the Buried and Me, along with their tour support, showed a Cat's Cradle audience the many hues of heavy music.

PAGES 8, 9

goings on

GREEN GRASS(ROOTS)
The twice-yearly Shakori Hills Grassroots Music Festival kicks off today — with a new focus on environmental sustainability.

PAGE 11

profile

LIFE STORIES
Figure 8 Films, a production company based in Carrboro, explores what it means to tell a story when the characters are real people.

PAGE 12

Q&A

HOW TO MAKE A HIT
Local songwriters Randy Bickford (The Strugglers) and Heather McEntire (Bellafea) explain the intricacies of their craft.

PAGE 10