

Preserving Poster Art

Even in the age of Twittercasts and digital downloads, classic poster art is still an essential part of Moonalice's show

BY ROGER MCNAMEE

When T Bone Burnett told us he wanted to produce an album of Haight-Ashbury-style psychedelic roots music, he triggered the creation of Moonalice. We made the album and went on the road, interweaving music, psychedelic lights, video and poster art with whatever the audience brings to the show. Poster art matters to us so much that our art director, Chris Shaw, actually helped us land on Moonalice as our band's name.

Poster art matters to us for the same reason that music does: It is an inexpensive way to bring joy to many people. But for whatever reason, poster art and artists have never gotten the respect that we believe they deserve. Promoters and bands generally treat poster artists poorly, making the artists bear all the costs and give up their copyrights in exchange for five to 10 copies of the poster and the privilege of making it. The art world has not shown much respect either. If Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, a poster artist from the late 19th century, is considered a museum-worthy artist, then why aren't Stanley Mouse, Rick Griffin and Wes Wilson? Moonalice decided to do something to help poster artists—we concocted a very loose plan that started with commissioning as many posters as possible through a deal where artists get paid for their work and share the copyright.

The plan has been a success. Chris and the artists are committed to producing at least one original poster for every Moonalice show. To date, that's 736 in barely more than seven years. Twenty-four artists currently create posters for Moonalice, including Stanley Mouse, Wes Wilson, David Singer, Dennis Larkins, Lee Conklin and Grace Slick. The younger generation is led by Chris Shaw, Chuck Sperry, Carolyn Ferris, Alexandra Fischer, John Mavroudis and Ron Donovan. Producing a hundred posters a year means a

lot of commissions for everyone. It also creates an infrastructure that supports websites, online stores, poster shows and licensing opportunities for the artists. Our artists have earned commissions from the National Baseball Hall of Fame, the San Francisco Giants, the San Francisco 49ers and the city of San Francisco, as well as

licenses from Liquid Blue. We have also produced six coffee table books—*Art of the Dead* and *The Moonalice Legend, Volumes 1-5*—and have built websites that enable our artists to show their work. We have held Moonalice poster shows in San Francisco, New York City and Croydon, N.H. We have contributed art to exhibits at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and other museums.

A lucky accident has enabled Moonalice to help our artists teach the world to appreciate poster art and make a good living through their art. We stumbled upon a major real estate project that needed a cultural angle to secure

approvals from the city of San Francisco and state of California. By pure coincidence, the project was on Haight Street. We thought, "How about a rock poster print shop and exhibit gallery?" The city and state loved it and approved the project, so we are building the Haight Street Art Center, where artists will be able to produce and exhibit the finest posters, using silk screen, lithography, woodcut and other techniques. The art center will open in 2015.

The art center will empower the cooperative of Moonalice poster artists. Our goal is to make the Haight Street Art Center the hub of rock poster art. The co-op artists will be able to show their work in the gallery and online. They are curating poster shows and art exhibits for museums around the world and laying the groundwork for more coffee table books. Eventually, we will build a virtual museum so that people can enjoy and learn about poster art online.

When we formed Moonalice in 2007, we had no idea we would play about a hundred shows a year, much less that we would be responsible for more than 700 posters in our first seven years. We just thought poster art and Moonalice went well together—and that together we could make a lot of people happy, including ourselves. It was all an experiment, just like live video Twittercasts of every show, and the 4.6 million free downloads of our song "It's 4:20 Somewhere." The experiment continues. Who knows where it will go? But everyone is welcome to join the Moonalice tribe and find out for themselves. 🍄

Roger McNamee, who performs as Chubby Wombat Moonalice, is the co-founder of Moonalice.

