

# Poster Guy

## Michael Erlwine



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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.

Michael@Erlewine.net

Here are some other links to more books, articles, and videos on these topics:

Main Browsing Site: <http://SpiritGrooves.net/>

Organized Article Archive: <http://MichaelErlewine.com/>

YouTube Videos: <https://www.youtube.com/user/merlewine>

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## Poster Guy Michael Erlewine: A Brief Bio



*Prime Movers Blues Band at the Living End, 1966*

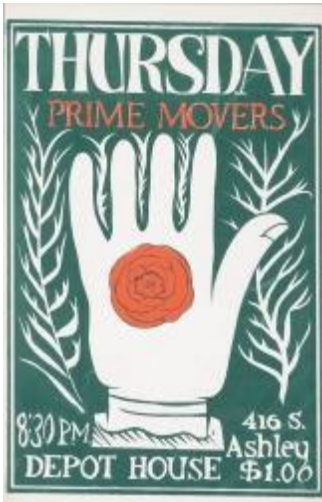
Raised in Ann Arbor, Michigan, Michael Erlewine began playing music back in the early '60s, when fueled by the books of Jack Kerouac and other beat writers, he dropped out of high school in 1960 and traveled to and lived in Venice West and San Francisco's North Beach. By 1961, he was playing acoustic guitar and hanging out with the folk-music scene, traveling from coast to coast. He hitchhiked with Bob Dylan in 1961 and helped to put on Dylan's first concert in Ann Arbor. Michael Erlewine lived in Berkeley for a year in 1964, taking in all that the Bay Area had to offer, such as the pure Sandos product. He was assistant manager of Discount Records in Berkeley, and continued to learn about music and participate in the post-beatnik and the pre-hippie movement.

In 1965, Erlewine returned to Ann Arbor and during that summer, with his brother Daniel, formed the Prime Movers Blues Band, one of the first (if not the first) hippie-style band in the region. The Prime Movers became a local force in the Midwest. Michael Erlewine was the lead singer and played amplified Chicago-style harmonica. Iggy Pop was their drummer and, in fact, got his nickname name "Iggy" from his stint in the group.



*Michael Erlewine and Iggy Pop*

Erlewine's interest in collecting posters stems from those days. In the process of trying to make a living as a musician, to better advertise the Prime Movers Blues Band, he built his own silk-screen shop and learned to design posters, cutting them by hand in Rubylith. For years, he designed and silk-screened all of the Prime Movers Blues Band's posters, which were then posted throughout the area -- an endless job. As a result of working with posters, from the ground up, Erlewine fell in love with concert-music posters as a pure American art.



*Erlewine-designed band poster*

Because of his band's knowledge of Chicago-style blues, Michael was naturally involved in the 1969 Ann Arbor Blues Festival, the first major electric blues festival in North America. In fact, for the first several blues festivals in Ann Arbor, Erlewine interviewed (audio and video) most of the major blues artists, people like Howlin' Wolf, Arthur Big Boy Crudup, Son House, Bobby Blue Bland, Muddy Waters, and dozens of others. He and other band members also were put in charge of feeding and caring for the substance requirements of the blues artists that came to the festivals. (See: "A Short History of Blues Festivals by Michael Erlewine")

Years later, he was appointed the official archivist for the Ann Arbor Blues and Jazz Festival during his stint on that festival's board of directors. Erlewine has served on a number of executive boards, including that of the historic Ann Arbor folk venue, The Ark.

When the sixties music scene dried up and his band dissolved, Erlewine continued as a single performer, playing piano and singing in bars. In the early '70s, Erlewine became interested in computers, at first programming handheld calculators and then, in 1977, home computers. He founded and built Matrix Software, which (along with a little company called Microsoft) are said to be the oldest extant Internet microcomputer software companies in North America.



*Early photo of AMG archive*

When music CDs came along, Michael tried to keep track of which vinyl recordings were on what CDs through creating a database of the information. Here was one guy in a small town in the Midwest who had started something called the All-Music Guide -- AMG. Everyone laughed when he told the world he intended to cover 'all' music. Today the All-Music Guide ([allmusic.com](http://allmusic.com)) is the largest music database on the planet. Erlewine went on to found the All-Movie guide ([allmovie.com](http://allmovie.com)), All-Game Guide ([allgame.com](http://allgame.com)), and other major Internet sites. As president of that company, he did contract work for all major online communications networks, including Compuserve, AOL, Apple's E-World, the Microsoft Network, and many others.



*All-Music Guide - some of the series*

There are some thirteen or more editions of the All-Music Guide as a book, and a dozen or so CD-ROMs that Erlewine produced as executive editor. AMG has received hundreds of awards, and including a number of prestigious awards from Yahoo for the best music-data site on the Internet.

Over the years, Erlewine's interest in concert-music posters has never waned. He loved commercial concert-poster art and began to add pieces to those he had collected from the '60s. As a programmer and database-content expert, of course he wanted to catalog concert posters. And so he did.

Classic Posters was born as an attempt by Erlewine to share information about concert-music posters with others, much like he has done with music, film, and games. He feels that this is information that should be available to everyone.

Michael Erlewine is well-known as an archivist of popular culture. For years, he has carefully catalogued concert music posters. When he had trouble finding clear images of posters, he built a studio to photo-document concert posters, complete with a special vacuum table to hold the largest of posters motionless, without harming them.



Using state-of-the-art digital photography, he has photo-documented a great many thousands of rare posters. As the executive director of Classic Posters.com, Erlewine's goal is to make concert-music posters and information about them available to more people.

"Everyone wants at least a little piece of the rock!"



*ClassicPosters.com Library*

#### AMG Books and CD-ROMS

Erlewine started AMG, the All-Music Guide as one person in a tiny office in a small town in the Midwest. When he left AMG, he was managing some 150 onsite employees and overseeing more than 500 off-site free-lance writers.

"CPC Video Studio with Library Set" ClassicPosters maintains a small fully-equipped video studio, where visiting artists, vendors, and collectors are interviewed and photographed.



*ClassicPosters.com Photo Studio*

#### Photo-Documenting Project

We began some years ago to carefully document the diverse world of concert-music posters. Using a specially-designed vacuum table and state-of-the-art digital photography equipment, we have assembled a photo archive of over 30,000 images. Collectors, dealers, and poster artists from all of the country have sent (or brought) their collections to the studio for photo-documenting, thus insuring an archive of these valuable images for examination and study.

Erlewine is also an avid collector of concert-music posters. His poster archiving efforts have their roots back in the '60s, when he would collect posters for gigs where his band, The Prime Movers, played.



*Poster-documentation Project*

### Classic Posters Headquarters

ClassicPosters.com is located in a spacious building in Big Rapids, Michigan, which includes a large library, conference area, Photo-Archiving studio, video studio, matting and framing area, extensive storage, shipping are, and offices.



*Classic Posters Headquarters*

Erlewine's CD collection became part of AMG and is now permanently housed at Michigan State University - 720,000 CDs.