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COLLECTOR'S CORNER

John Morris, who produces antique shows with and without his M2 partner, Kim Martindale, has roots in the music world as well

John Morris



John Morris had a peripatetic childhood. When his father was in the Army (he also worked as an advertising executive), John was in the sixth grade in New York, Alabama, North Carolina, and Texas. “The only thing I remember from sixth grade was the names of the five tribes of Alabama.”

Back in New York, the Morris family lived in Westchester County, just north of New York City. John went away to prep school, and then to Carnegie Tech, famous for its theater program. He thought he

would be an actor, “but there were too many people trying out for too few parts,” so he went into production (lighting, sets, etc.) instead. “I worked on 30-40 off-Broadway shows, then I bought ‘The Establishment’ —a English satiric, news-oriented comedy show along the lines of ‘Beyond the Fringe’ that was produced by BTF alum Peter Cook—and took it on the road to American colleges.”

John also bought the production rights to the “Cambridge Circus,” another satirical-comedy English university revue that first was presented at the Edinburgh Festival. As “Beyond the Fringe” and “The Establishment” were from Oxford, “Cambridge Circus” was from Cambridge. John says, “Both shows had been brought to Broadway, and I bought ‘Cambridge Circus’ to tour American colleges after that. John Cleese was in ‘Cambridge Circus,’ and he says that he would have gone to work in the Foreign Service had I not employed him as an actor, sent him on the road, and shipped him ‘The Economist’ at every stop.”

John’s interest in American Indians and Indian material started in Boy Scout camp in upper New York State. “The craft counselor was very into Indians. He

had beadwork moccasins, a General Custer uniform, and he got me interested. When I told him I liked his moccasins, he told me to make my own pair.” A few years later, early purchases included a rainbow tableta from an Indian shop in Greenwich Village, and 16-foot-long kayak. “I read, studied, bought. I found Indian things interesting and attractive.”

John’s theatrical agent also worked for Bill Graham, and the agent set up a meeting of the two men in Toronto. “We got along, and we put together a Toronto show for Luke and the Apostles, opening for the Jefferson Airplane and the Grateful Dead. As a debut, I organized a free concert in front of Toronto’s City Hall with the Grateful Dead which was attended by 40,000-50,000 people.”

John ended up working as head of production for Graham in New York. “I brought major production values to the Fillmore East. I knew Josh White, and added the Joshua Light Show to the concerts. But that was just the beginning. I took the Airplane and the Doors to Europe and toured with the Moody Blues, with Japanese percussionist/keyboardist/composer Stomu Yamashita, whose supergroup, Go, included Steve Winwood, with Noel Redding, previously Jimi Hendrix’s bassist,

and others.

In 1969, John's production experience and contacts with bands and agents made him the ideal person to join the team planning what became the Woodstock Music and Art Fair ("An Aquarian Exposition/3 Days of Peace & Music," August 15,16,17) and then become production manager of the event itself.

Legends and counter-legends have grown up around every aspect of Woodstock over the years, but the prevalent origin myth says Woodstock started as an ad in the Wall Street Journal: "Young Men with Unlimited Capital Looking for Interesting and Legitimate Business ideas." The source of that unlimited capital was John Roberts, whose family owned the Block Drug Company. Michael Lang, a former Miami head shop owner, festival promoter, and band manager, responded to the ad, and his original vision of creating a recording studio in Woodstock morphed into the idea for a three-day outdoor music event that would come to fruition a little more than than eight months later. Originally, the concert was conceived as a promotion for the studio. But Roberts and his partner, Joel Rosenman, preferred the concert part of the idea, and a legend was born.

By that time, John Morris had a solid reputation as the grown-up in the room at the Fillmore East. Along with overseeing production, he booked acts and dealt with agents. In Pete Fornatele's book, *Back to the Garden*, John describes himself in the Fillmore East years as "East Coast prep school," different in style from many of the people he worked with. It was John's ability to navigate between the straight world and the rock world, what Fornatele calls his "dynamism," that made him "the perfect person to run the Fillmore East." And Woodstock.

An agent told lighting technician Chip Monck (the Fillmore West and the Monterey Pop festival were on Monck's resume) that Michael Lang had been trying to book acts for a music festival he was planning. Monck knew John from the Fillmore East, and the two of them met with Lang to see if there was work for them. There was.

John was the only member of the planning group who had actually produced concerts, and it became his job to book acts and oversee the design and logistics of the event. On the eve of the festival, when crowds started arriving, John says, "we realized that it was going to be a lot bigger than we thought." And when the crowd swelled to 400,000-600,000- plus and the New York State Thruway was closed, it was John who told the crowd, "It's a free concert from now on."

While Woodstock was in the planning stages, John met a



Hopi Butterfly Maiden Tableta

antiques collector from Philadelphia who told him to get on a plane and go to Santa Fe and meet Lloyd Kiva New, who was working with "amazing" young artists and teachers including Fritz Scholder and Allan Houser at the Institute of American Indian Arts. John decided "to do an Indian art project at Woodstock." He invited about 20 artists including Kevin Red Star and Earl Biss and "flew them up from Albuquerque with the Hog Farm." He still remembers the tepee poles that were stowed in the plane's aisle.

He sent crates of paintings and sculpture to be exhibited, but the weather was so bad at the festival (remember that rain?) "that we never unpacked the crates. We were afraid the art would be destroyed."

Cahuilla/Apache artist Billy Soza was part of the artists' group, and remembers that when they landed in New York, there was a bus waiting for the Hog Farm and three limousines for the Indians. Soza says that they were treated "like rock 'n roll stars." To quote Michael Lang, in *Woodstock: Three Days that Rocked the World*, "John Morris, always stylish, booked limos to transport the Hopis up to Bethel..." In the same book, Lang also credits Woodstock's success to "that initial group...a really miraculous group of people" who were "the best at what they did." John says now that Woodstock was "the biggest accident in the world, and we kept it alive. Everyone really was everyone else's brother."

Post-Woodstock, in the 1970s, John moved to London. He was the producer for Paul McCartney's first post-Beatles tour all over Europe, and with other promoters, he organized tours for The Grateful Dead, Santana, Isaac Hayes, the Jefferson Airplane, Alice Cooper, and others. Envisioning a British Fillmore, he took over the 3600-seat Rainbow Theater, where he worked with the crew from the Fillmore East to turn it into a concert hall. "When we opened, we had The Who, the Mothers of Invention, Mountain, Leon Russell, and Joan Baez,

major American and English acts. But it was difficult to get consistent booking. We were too far from America,” and “after one too many Chuck Berry concerts,” John went to live on the Caribbean island of Mustique. In 1978 he moved to Santa Fe, and he splits his time now between homes there and in Malibu.

It was at an early Don Bennett-Kim Martindale Indian art show at the Santa Fe Hilton that John looked at the show they produced and thought, “I can do that. So I did. After Don split with Kim, I asked Kim to be my partner, which we have been, working together when we can for 15 to 20 years.”

John has produced antiques shows in various locales including Napa, Denver, Seattle, and Scottsdale, as well as an annual show in Santa Fe at Christmas, and opened El Museo Cultural de Santa Fe as a show venue in about 2000. “Kim and I developed El Museo, and when dates opened up there, it became home to Objects of Art: Santa Fe, where 56-70 dealers offer everything across the board, antique, contemporary and Modern, from Modernist accessories to American Indian to eclectic sculpture. A New York dealer bought almost every piece of sculpture in that booth.”

He continues: “In the Fall of 2013, when Whitehawk announced they were combining the 2014 ethnographic and antique Indian shows, we started getting phone calls from dealers. In response, Kim and I decided to do a traditional antique Indian art show at El Museo, not gigantic, but dedicated, tradition-wise. We expect 25-35 dealers. Jimmy Economos and Ramona Morris both said they will come out of retirement to do the show.” John calls Economos “a guide, a maven,” and calls Ramona “a long-time wonderful exhibitor who retired from shows, who has with the same last name, and who brings pistachios for her booth.”

Although dealers at the 2014 American Indian Art Show: Santa Fe will sell only antique material with an allowance for 30 percent contemporary material, John finds contemporary work “really exciting. I did a show in Denver where a number of major contemporary artists exhibited, and I would like to bring them in in the future, maybe next year. Traditionalists

reject the idea, but we’ll see. I’m talking about artists of note, like Doug Coffin, Darren Vigil Grey, and Doug Hyde, who may appeal to collectors who have a degree of acceptance for contemporary artists. I’m thinking about Indian Market graduates, artists who don’t do Indian Market any more. But we will do the show this summer with people who don’t want to mix their antique Indian material with contemporary work, and with African, pre-Columbian, and non-American Indian.”



On stage Saturday at Woodstock with Ron Grillion, John's friend from St. Thomas, who worked on the festival and made announcements in French for French Canadians in the audience. John: “Ron probably spoke to more people in a crowd than any Frenchman in history.”

His Rolodex/contact list is still studded with bold face names, no longer as professional colleagues but as “friends who happen to be in show business. I’m having my 75th birthday party in England, where I lived, and I’ll see some of them then. I’ve always been lucky to have lived in great places.”

He shares his Santa Fe and Malibu homes with Luzann Fernandez, an attorney who practices in Los Angeles. Lifetime collectors, John and Luzann now own paintings, jewelry, kachinas, and an “amazing” Hopi Maiden tableta once greatly admired by Charles Loloma, who carved a mask to go with it. “Not major pieces,” John explains. “Our taste and lives are eclectic. These are things we live with and love.”