

Part I: The History of Detroit Fanfare

Detroit Fanfare was founded by Dennis Barger Jr. and Tony Miello in 2010 as a means of bringing a comic centric convention to the Detroit area and at the same time, paying homage to the original comic convention, Detroit Triple Fan Fair which had its beginnings dating all the way back to 1964. As Fanfare started assembling its first year, the focus was bringing back many of the major participants that helped to launch the Triple Fan Fair as a tribute to bringing a new convention to the Detroit market. As plans formulated, Barger and Miello invited Gary Reed to come on board to help obtain some guests. Reed was the owner of Caliber Comics, a Detroit area publishing house that has helped to launch the careers of many of today's top talents. Soon, Reed joined as co-promoter.

Detroit Fanfare owes homage to what is known as the first multi-media convention in the country, The Detroit Triple Fan Fair. Launched in 1964 by Bob Brosch and Jerry Bails, the "comic book swap meet" was soon joined the following year by Shel Dorf who re-formed it into the very first Detroit Triple Fan Fair (or DTFF). It was held at the Embassy Hotel in downtown Detroit on July 24th and 25th, 1965.

The first board was a collage of talented motivated members of the fan community, drawn together by their common interests and motivated to create an event to showcase their collective passions. Board members Carl Lundgren, Jerry Bails, Tom Altschuler, Ed April, Noel Cooper, Gary Crowds, Howard Devore, Marvin Giles, Dennis Kowicki, Larry Larson and Eugene Seeger. The group planned a show featuring a 24 hour movie room, with classic films being shown on 16mm projectors, Panels on varying subject matters from Tarzan to the Golden Age of Comics, vendors and guests, all for the price of \$2 for both days. The show was a success by their standards, and it became an annual event immediately.

Many of the first Board members would take a turn at the helm, and would find that this event was a great way to get discovered for their talents. Many fans of the first show would later help run later DTFFs and many of them would also find fame and move out of Detroit for career opportunities. Several successful years would go by, before Shel Dorf was forced to move to California to help care for his aging parents and launch there, what is now commonly known as The San Diego Con. Luckily for the DTFF many new faces were around to help run the convention.

The succeeding board members of the DTFF, who took over during Shel Dorf's departure, would be referred to as "Detroit Mob" by an industry they set out to conquer. Greg Theakston, Tom Orzechowski, Keith Pollard, Jim Starlin, Arvell Jones, Mike Vosburg, Al Milgrom, Terry Austin, Rick Buckler and Mike Nasser were a wave of talent and many of them became actively involved in running the DTFF. As talented legends in the industry came to visit the DTFF like Stan Lee, Neal Adams and Jim Steranko, some of the local talent left with them. As the late 1970's approached most the young talent of the area were working in the comics industry. The DTFF suffered from this exodus of talent as it included many of the organizers. The shows would become sporadic and eventually ceased.

But the spirit of the original DTFE lived on. Other talented people of the Detroit Area continued to emerge and a number of new shows popped up. Steve Sundahl, Stu Shapiro, Tony and Mike Brown, Mike Lester, Dave Lillard, and others mounted shows of various sizes. It was Gary Reed, owner of a chain of comic stores in the Detroit area that brought back an annual large show with King Kon.

Although only lasting three years, the idea of annual scheduled shows continued as Motor City Comic Con picked up and shortly established itself as one of the major shows in the Midwest. With other shows developing over the years such as Extravagon, SNAP, Escape Con, Kids Read Comics, and many others, the convention scene in the Detroit area remained strong. However, like in other areas, the emphasis of the large conventions shifted towards celebrity guests and away from comic based events.

Detroit has always made a substantial contribution to the comics world. Most of the 1970s ' creators found work at Marvel but in the 1980's-1990's, it was the independent market that benefitted from the creative energies of the Detroit area. Reed, after leaving the con scene, picked up the remnants of local Arrow Comics and launched Caliber Comics. The local talent was well represented with creators such as Guy Davis, Vince Locke, Mark Bloodworth, James O'Barr, Randy Zimmerman, and many others. Although Caliber has introduced dozens of top flight creators now working for the major publishers, it was a company that established itself with local talent.

The talent growth continued, even after the closure of Caliber. Talents such as Geoff Johns, Mark Crilly, Bill Loeb, Ethan Van Sciver, Dan Mishkin, Jason Howard, Bill Morrison, Glenn Barr, Rebecca Buchman, David Petersen, Paul Storrie, Rob Worley, Jim Ottaviani, Jeremy Bastian, and Katie Cook were making their mark.

The show started at the Hyatt Regency in Dearborn (now the Adoba), again keeping the flavor of having the show at a hotel as the original shows were. Due to the success of the show and the expansion of the guest list for the second year, Detroit Fanfare decided to move into the actual city of Detroit proper and held the second show at Cobo Hall. Comic guests included Kevin Eastman, Phil Hester, Ron Marz, Larry Hama, Tim Bradstreet, and over 100 more. Media guests included Peter (Robocop) Weller, Bruce Campbell, Steven (The Walking Dead) Yeun, Brian (Clerks) O'Halloran, Kelly Hu, and Adam Baldwin. However, Fanfare found that there was quite a bit of resistance to fans coming to the Detroit area and moved back to Dearborn for the foreseeable future although they have not ruled out a return to Detroit again.

Detroit Fanfare pays homage to those who have run these conventions and created the comics and also to celebrate Detroit's rich heritage in the comics industry. With the passing of Shel Dorf in 2009 this show's purpose became very clear. To start with the blueprint Shel created 45 years ago and it was crucial to blend the local talent and provide fans inexpensive access to be a part of and to have programs spotlighting the new wave of creators who line the creator tables of the convention.