

Classic Posters - Collecting Posters as Investments

By Michael Erlewine

There are posters of all kinds on the market, everything from travel posters, to posters for products, sports, celebrities -- promotional posters of all kinds. Some of these are valuable. But at the top of the value heap are posters for specific occasions -- event posters. These are commercial posters printed to announce and advertise a specific event, posted in shops or taped and tacked to telephone poles. These are, for the most part, one time-events, with one-time printings, or at least first printings. Music-concert posters are among the more valuable.

Of course, The appreciation in value of posters is not a new phenomenon. Posters by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec sell for \$20,000 and up. Event posters by turn-of-the-century artists like Mucha and Cheret sell for thousands of dollars and continue to be in great demand.

There is general agreement that concert-music posters -- rock posters -- represent a genre of posters that are very collectable and are appreciating in value. And although there are great numbers of concert-music posters printed before the sixties, it is '60s posters that first captured the fancy of the public and marked the start of widespread collecting in this generation.

Perhaps this is due in part from the fact that the '60s also mark a real change in public

consciousness, a generation gap or break with the status quo and the alternative culture and lifestyles that flowered in that time -- new forms of music and community.

The epicenter of this vast change were the 1960's dancehalls of San Francisco, and it was there that this new sense of community blossomed, with its own music, and its own bands. And the heralds for all of this new music and community were the posters that were the primary means to spread the word of this new community of consciousness to those-who-had-ears-to-hear-it.

These music concert posters announced not only the events, but also spoke to the emerging alternative community in general. Here are (simultaneously) commercial posters, records of an historic event or culture shift, and mementos for the venues where they occurred and the bands that played there. It is no wonder, as the culture shifted into '70s mode, that people began to grab up some of these paper reminders of that great era -- the fabled "Summer of Love."

I know. I had a bunch of these posters in my basement, either gigs my band played or posters that I liked and had torn down and stashed away. I had no premonition that a poster tucked away in a box in my basement of an image of a seagull by artist Gary Grimshaw, for an event at a new place that was just opening called the Grande Ballroom in Detroit would one day be worth over \$1000. Never crossed my mind. I just liked the posters.

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As time passed, the rock-music posters of the '60s were literally a graphic reminder of those times, setting off all kinds of memories for those who were present back then. Perhaps some of us need a little help remembering these times and the posters helped to bring it back, even for people who were not in San Francisco at the time. Bands like the Grateful Dead became national acts, known to everyone of that time. People from all parts of the U.S. and the world shared the music, the drugs, and the alternative community. Generations that came after, who were not of age at the time, wanted to have a part of all of that too. Younger people studied the music, the times, and the drugs, and identified to some degree with the '60s.

Most of us were participants, just living those times. Some of us had bands and played venues like the Fillmore Auditorium and the Straight Theater. As mentioned, few of us were disciplined or organized in collecting posters. We had some that we just came across. Quite a bit has been written about people like Ben Friedman, who ran the most famous of the early poster shops, but not so much is known about the early experts on collecting posters.
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