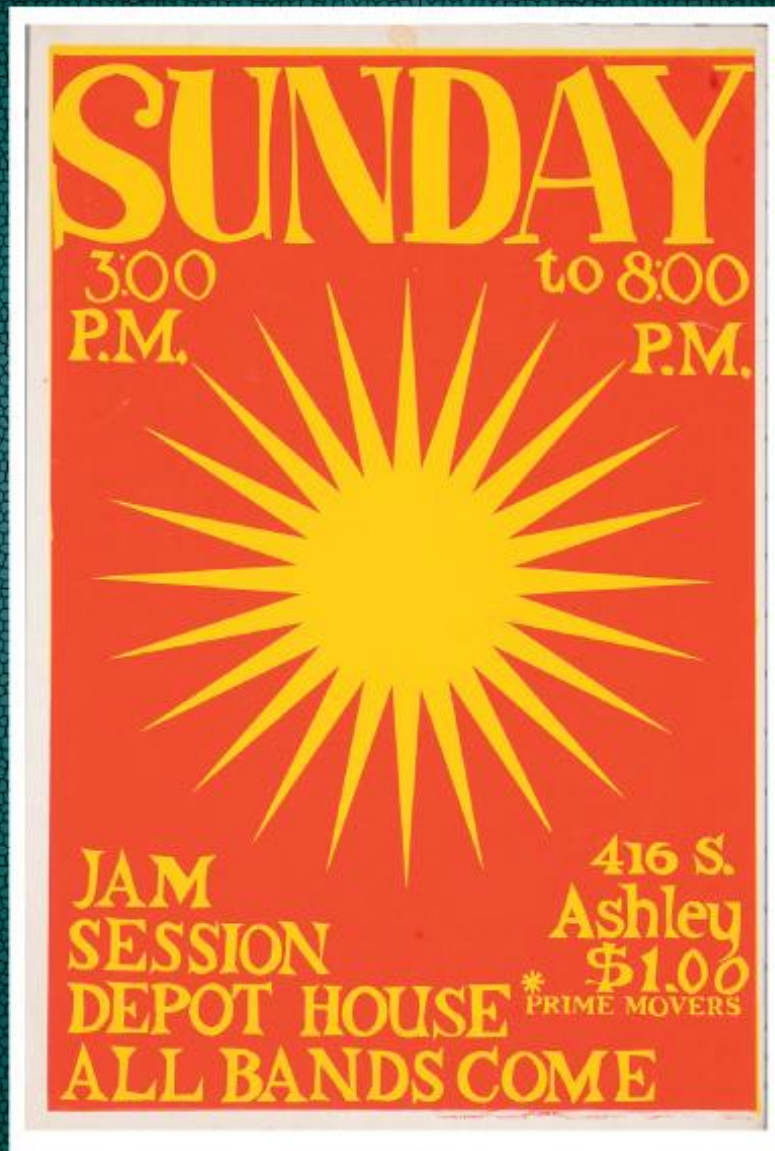


# Classic Posters

Collecting, Archiving, and More



by Michael Erlewine

# Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

## DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to poster artist Gary Grimshaw who when all is said and done is probably my favorite poster artist from the 1960s and beyond. In particular I appreciate Grimshaw's 1970s work and especially the UAC-Daystar posters.

## Table of Contents

3	ClassicPosters.com – A Brief History
5	A Brief History of Rock Posters
17	Boxing-Style Posters
22	Meet the Poster Experts
25	Natural Habitat of the Poster
26	Never Met a Set I Did Not Like
34	Psychedelic Lettering of the Sixties
36	The Roots of Sixties Poster Art
40	The Seed: The Start of the Dance Hall Scene
42	Poster Collector Facts
44	Psychedelics & the Tibetan Tradition
50	Rick Griffin's AOXOMOXOA
52	Victor Moscoso's New Book
54	The Grande Ballroom
59	The Poster Style of Gary Grimshaw
68	Wes Wilson Images for CP
70	The "Art of Rock" by Paul Grushkin
71	Banking On the Wall
72	Collectables as Investments
81	Collecting Posters as Investments
83	The Art of the Deal
90	A Tale of a Poster Investor
93	Easy Poster-Measure Boards
94	How to Evaluate Posters - Nostalgia

97	<a href="#">Photo Archiving of Music Posters</a>
104	Poster Packaging and Shipment
111	Poster Glossary Terms
115	Poster Numbering Systems
121	Printing and Collecting Terms
123	Printing and Collecting Terms
125	The Cataloging of Posters
131	Some of the Tools the Experts Use
137	Tools of the Trade
140	Visual Guide to Poster Grading
152	„Off the Wall' - Wes Wilson's
153	Biography of Artist Bob Masse
156	Biography of Lee Conklin
157	Ben Friedman, the Poster Man
159	Poster Guy Michael Erlewine
164	Eric King – Poster Archivist Pioneer
166	<a href="#">Promoter Bill Graham</a>
173	The Art of Victor Moscoso

*Cover poster art from 1967 by Michael Erlewine*

# Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

## ClassicPosters.com – A Brief History

I have been in love with music concert posters since 1965 when I ended up in charge of advertising for my group the Prime Movers Blues Band. I guess no one else was interested or could figure out how to advertise but me, so before I knew it I had converted a small attic room in the Prime Mover House at 114 N. Division in Ann Arbor Michigan to a silkscreen shop.

It was there I spent who-knows-how-many hours cutting Rubylith screens and printing band posters. Replicating an image you love for a band you love was a slow but deeply satisfying process. The rest of the band (and me) would then take the freshly printed posters and put them up all over town. The posters didn't last long either. The next day many of them would be gone and we would have to do it all over again. I wonder where those posters are today.

This was in the mid-1960s and concert music posters were reaching a new audience and a new era. Of course, the main poster scene was in San Francisco. Eventually we heard about the poster artists there and saw their. Wow! We loved it.

So it is no wonder that my love for concert posters remained later when I became an archivist of popular culture and started AMG: the All-Music Guide, the All-Movie Guide, and the All-Game Guide. When I sold AMG in 1998 I had plans for the All-Poster Guide, but the company that bought AMG was not interested in my ideas once they purchased my company. The All-Poster Guide was canned from day one, but I never forgot about it.

Some years later, after I was kind of pushed out of my former company, as entrepreneurs often are, I decided to create the All-Poster Guide all by myself. However that URL on the web (by that time) belonged to someone else so I settled on ClassicPosters.com and dug in.

Some years went by as I assiduously compiled data on rock posters. I also began to photograph posters so that years from now scholars could study them. In the basement of my library/studio I built my own vacuum table and paid \$5000 for the latest professional camera in 2001, the Nikon D1x. Today that same camera is worth maybe \$300.

With my vacuum table to hold the posters in place, special lights to illuminate the posters, my Nikon D1x, I began to photograph and measure concert posters. Before I was done I had photographed over 30,000 posters, handbills, postcards, and original art.

Collectors from all over the country eventually trusted me enough to either bring their collections to my studio themselves or (while holding their breath) dare to send this priceless art overnight by FedEx.

And I made a number of trips to San Francisco and the Bay Area to meet the artists and collectors of these posters, those that were still with us.

To make a long story short, although I built a wonderful poster site, because I was delayed in my original impulse and idea, by the time my site was operational I had competition in WolfgangVault.com. They had something I did not have, which was deep pockets. I had no way to compete

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

with them and they built a wonderful site and also bought up almost every major poster collection I know of.

It was disappointing but that is the way life works sometimes. You snooze, you lose. I was a day late and a dollar short, as they say. Anyway that is all water over the dam at this point.

I seem to keep getting older and I am told that is a good thing compared to the alternative, so it is time for me to share some of my work with anyone out there interested in concert posters. Now I am careful to say "Concert Poster" because I have no interest in what are called "Promotional Posters," however beautiful they may be. I only ever cared about actual posters that were made and put up around town for a real live music concert. We won't be discussing promotional posters here.

This is the first of what I hope will be several volumes of material on concert posters. I apologize in advance for any typos and the less-than-elegant formatting of this book. I don't have the time or interest just now to clean it all up, although as you will see it is quite readable. I have too many other things to take care of while I am still on the planet, so please accept what I can offer, warts and all.

And ClassicPosters.com is still very much alive although run by someone other than myself. Please visit their wonderful site for images, etc. I have donated all my 30,000+ images, articles, data, database, etc. to them and also the the Bentley Historical Library at the University of Michigan, where my work will be available to scholars in the future.

What you have here are a group of seventeen interviews I did with some of

the most important poster artists and collectors I have been able to meet. Some of them are short, but most of them are long to very long. If you love concert posters and their history, at least in the mid-Sixties, then these articles will be a fun read for you.

# Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

## Brief History of Rock Posters

by Michael Erlewine

### The Sixties Dancehall Scene Beginnings

So when the very different sixties-style posters began to appear in San Francisco in 1965, it heralded a big change in approach. For one, these new posters were event specific (pre-printed) and consisted of but a single pass through the printer.

The first poster of the new era that marked the start of the new hippie culture has, appropriately, been called "The Seed." It was done for a gig the Red Dog Saloon in Virginia City, Nevada in June of 1965. It was not that the scene started here, for it was already fomenting in San Francisco, according to key figure Chet Helms. Helms says that the summer of 1965 at the Red Dog Saloon was more of a woodshed experience, a place for many of the San Francisco regulars to gather, try out things, and just have one heck of a good time with one another. It was when they came back to the city, in the fall of 1965, that the actual scene began.



### *The Seed*

And the San Francisco hippie scene was built from the bottom up, rather than the top down. In other words, it was a grass-roots movement, not something organized by the establishment. In fact, those first Family Dog posters were only a little more than glorified rent parties. And the first posters were, as mentioned above, one pass affairs - single printings. In the beginning, this can be explained by the small size of the event and the almost hand-made nature of the actual posters, most of which were quite small.

And these first get-togethers grew out of informal parties, attended by those hip enough to hear about them. And the subsequent slightly more formal events were an attempt to re-gather these same folks (and more like them), rather than to attract the straight public. This emerging counter culture at the start was, above all, enjoying its own company - like meeting like.



*The 2nd Family Dog Dance*

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

### LSD is Different

And part of the 'like meeting like' was the growing group awareness of the value of psychedelic drugs. This was a lot of what was being shared, the drugs and the particular awareness that came out of those drug experiences. It is important to understand that psychedelic drugs were different from the substances of choice used up to that point, alcohol, tobacco, and even marijuana and hashish, not to mention heroin. And this difference is at the root of much misunderstanding about what the emerging hippie culture was all about. This is worth at least a few words here.

First, psychedelics were very different from drugs like marijuana, as to what the taker of the drug could take away from the experience. Alcohol or marijuana both put the user into some form of enjoyable (at best) state, a state during which you could have interesting thoughts, feelings, or even act differently, but one that ultimately you came out of, returning to your normal sense of yourself. If you wanted to have that feeling again, you had another drink or smoked another joint. In this way, these drugs (alcohol and pot) were equivalent and a matter of preference.

But hallucinogenic drugs had one major difference. It was possible to take a drug like LSD, have a real come-to-Jesus experience of one sort or another, come down from the drug, and have a completely changed view of the world. This was not so for alcohol and pot. LSD changed lives, mostly for the good, sometimes for the worse.

What broke down on a strong dose of LSD (and those early hits of acid were

strong, according to researchers) was the difference between me, in here (between my ears), and you and 'it' out there - outside of me. Not only did this great dichotomy weaken, but of equal importance, it was clear to LSD takers that what they saw out there looking at them was very much a reflection of what they felt and believed in here, between the ears, so to speak. And it is that feature that made LSD and similar hallucinogenic drugs different.

One could take LSD, suddenly see that in many ways were are creating our own world and then having to live in it, come down from the drug, and yet still remember what was experienced. Then it was up to each of us to figure how to re-program our life, in order to take advantage of and put to use what we saw and experienced on LSD.

In summary then, it was not the LSD that was so important, but the awareness that came out of that experience that was of value. Most were not into the drug for itself, as for the awareness that came from using the drug. Of course, this can be a thin line, and even hallucinogenic drugs were also abused, and not just used. But for many, it was not the drugs, but the awareness. And it was this awareness that people were sharing in those first Family Dog dances and the series of gatherings called the Acid Tests. Without understanding this very important fact, much of the hippie counter culture does not make sense.

### Sixties Posters

And so, this informal style of poster carried over and settled in, as the movement and the posters grew larger. Not only did they continue to be one-

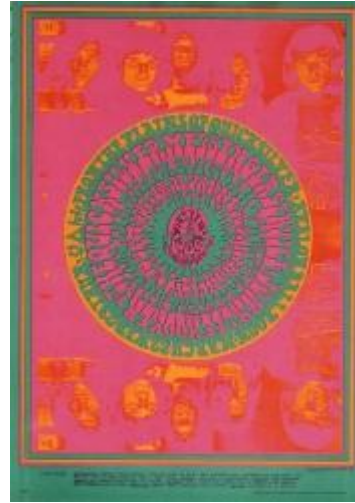
## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

pass posters, specifically featuring a single event, but also they were purposely made hard to read, with strange and exotic lettering and subject matter. In fact, it is almost as if during its embryonic stage, this nascent culture needed to keep out the 'straight' people and bring in those of a similar mind bent, so that it could grow and flourish. And this is what happened.



*Family Dog Poster FD-04*

So-called straight people could not or would not bother to read these strange posters, but fellow 'freaks' would spend all the time necessary to decode whatever messages were locked in the poster, often standing and puzzling over them for long periods of time. In fact, artist Victor Moscoso made a point of sitting in a nearby coffee shop and observing passersby, who would stop and ponder his most recent effort, tacked to a telephone pole.



*A Moscoso Poster, to be read slowly, if at all*

Again, here is a complete flip-flop from what went before. Where before, we had a single picture or no picture at all, and large, clear type, we now see multi-colored posters, with complex imagery and hidden messages, that were almost impossible to read. I guess this is what cycles are all about.

And although these posters first appeared in San Francisco, it was almost no time at all before their counterparts were flourishing in places like Detroit, Ann Arbor, and Austin, to name a few. The new culture spread like wildfire, mostly fueled by traveling folks, who shuttled back and forth, from coast to coast, by car or simply by hitchhiking. It did not take long for the word to spread.

### **Posters as Commodities**

But something else was also taking place, something that had never happened before, and this was the fact that these posters (that had been printed to announce an event, like all posters had up to that time) were becoming commodities in themselves.

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

After all, fans, from the time that posters first appeared, have pulled the occasional poster off a telephone pole and taken it home to display in their room. That was understood.

But suddenly, music-concert posters were being handed a poster or card at the end of each concert, as a reward to ticket buyers, and this helped to create a whole aftermarket for these items. And card-sized posters were being sent by mail to ever expanding mailing lists prior to each concert, not only in San Francisco, but also in Detroit. And these cards were being kept and collected.

Even the tickets began to be issued with images on them, and the small post-card-sized handbills were readily distributed. This practice continues to this day, and concertgoers at Bill Graham Presents events at the Fillmore West are given full-sized posters at the end of each evening. This whole idea of everyone getting a "piece of the rock" was new. A whole collectable market sprung up in tickets, cards, and posters. In the history of posters, prior to this, there were no cards, and few colored tickets.



### *The Hawaiian Aoxomoxoa Proof, with cards*

Moreover, another almost unheard of practice sprung up, that of reprinting the posters and cards. In the past, event posters were never reprinted, because the event was over. It was not long before promoters were thinking in terms not only of printing enough posters to advertise a concert, but also of printing enough extra posters for the aftermarket demand for them. And reprinting in-demand posters became commonplace, and gave rise to a generation of poster experts, who would guide us to which were originals, which were reprints, and which were pirate editions. There was money in this paper. And all of this was collected, not only as memorabilia, but also for the art itself.

Most of this huge surge in creating collectable posters more or less died down by the mid-1970s, the reasons for which deserve a book in itself. Suffice to say that there were at least two main reasons or signs of the end of the 'Summer of Love' and all that it entailed.

### **The Scene Fades**

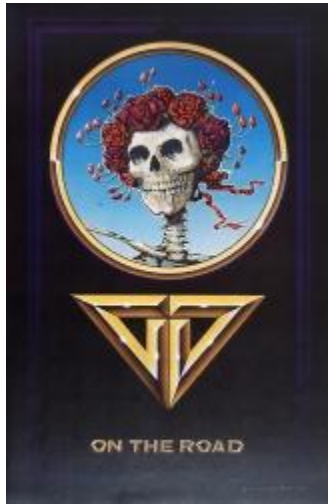
As poster expert Eric King pointed out to me, one main reason was that the drug scene had moved from being useful as a wakeup call in the beginning, to well beyond this usefulness, and on into drugs for drugs sake, and hard drugs like heroin at that. This changed things. Where before, you went to a dance or gathering, and welcomed any and all into your home to come down and rest up, spend the night. It was a real community of like-minded folk. But after drug abuse became the norm, if you invited someone into your pad, you could wake up in the morning and find



## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

your stereo gone. That effect was one major killer of the community spirit.

The other was the fact that the dancehalls themselves were the first victim of the huge success of music groups like the Grateful Dead that arose from the cultural movement of the sixties. What began as get-togethers and almost cultural celebrations, with music, light shows, drugs, and sex, eventually resulted in the record companies and capitalism, in general, favoring the music groups. They alone seemed to be elevated to star status. They were where the money went.



*Tour Poster*

In the beginning, the spread and sale of the San Francisco posters themselves across the US heralded the coming of the bands featured on the posters. Outside of the Bay Area, no one had ever heard of these bands. The posters traveled first; the bands followed, in due time. But as the bands gradually became the icons, they soon grew beyond the simple dance halls where they had begun. Instead of an auditorium, bands like the Grateful Dead now needed a stadium or a coliseum to hold all their fans. They eventually left

behind even places like the Fillmore East and Fillmore West. Instead of gigging around the town they emerged from, they were almost always on tour. The venues they left behind withered, faded, and were often closed. The sixties as a cultural phenomenon were over. But the business of the sixties lived on.



*Coliseum Bands*

### **Record Companies Gain Control**

And pre-printed band or tour posters (many with places for overprinting) came to the fore once again. As these now-famous bands grew and flourished, the type of posters they used changed with them. No more silkscreen posters; they were too time consuming and expensive. Instead, they now had large offset posters, some of them brandishing supporters like Miller or Budweiser beer. Often these posters were designed by some of the original San Francisco artists, but as often as not these artists had fallen into the trap of having to imitate their own earlier work. The public wanted more of what they did in the heyday, not something progressive.

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

In the end, the establishment, had managed to get their arms around the sixties cultural phenomenon, although it took them a while. So, once again, we had the slick tour and promotional posters. The psychedelic poster scene ended or just became a part of the business.

### **Punk and New Wave Artists**

But as the sixties scene played itself out and all that it represented became part of the hype, a new music was already peeking out, brought forth by a generation that despised the slick tour posters and the packaged sounds. This was the birth of punk rock and the rise of the punk poster.

As pointed out above, the sixties posters had morphed from simple flyers to large, multi-colored posters, with spiritual themes and group consciousness. As Shakespeare said "Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds," and the commercialization of the sixties movement was particularly hard to stomach for those who were there. Gradually, the record companies wrestled control away from the hippie movement, and replaced psychedelic posters with just another generation of slick band posters. The idea of community, so important for the San Francisco dancehall scene, was all but forgotten.

However, the emerging new punk posters were, in reality, anti-posters. For one, they were small. And they were done in twos and threes, tens and twenties -- almost always in small quantities. A great many were unsigned. It was part of the cool. They were seldom done by artists that had been active up to that time. Many were just

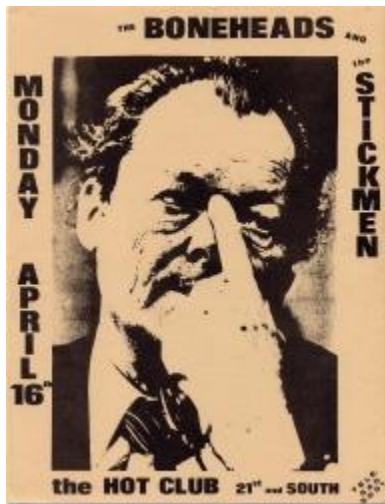
made by fans, who pasted them up or drew them out on 8.5x11' paper, and photo-reproduced them. Almost all were black and white. They were everything the sixties posters were not.



*1977 Punk Poster*

The theme of the emerging punk culture was not the peace and love of the hippie culture, the 'Summer of Love'. Again, just the opposite. There was a pre-occupation with everything disgusting and dirty, whatever was shocking and rude. Instead of band names like "It's a Beautiful Day" and "Quicksilver Messenger Service," there were names like the "Butthole Surfers" and the "Circle Jerks." It was as in-your-face as possible. That was the point.

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More



*Punk Poster*

But the punk movement was not without thought. In fact, it was quite literate, compared to the hippie culture. It has been documented that the Beat era was highly literate - sophisticated even. Many of the hippie leaders were beatnik wannabes, who arrived too late on that scene to participate, but were perfectly positioned to lead the next cultural wave, the dancehall scene. And one of the areas that they led in was that of introducing the hippies to the basic liberal arts - writing, philosophy, and spirituality. They were well read and the typical hippie was not.

Therefore it comes as a little bit of a surprise to find that the typical punk devotee is quite literate, or at least is aware of that dimension. An easy misunderstanding is to mistake the trappings of punk with what the trappings represent. In other words, the punk image and style is in your face, disgusting in fact, and filled with as much of the grim as can be shoehorned in. But this is a conscious choice and effort on the part of the artists and musicians, and not what they in-fact are. In fact, they are more reminiscent of the

more educated beatniks. They are thinkers.

### **Punk Beginnings**

When did all of this take place? We don't really see much significant sign of this new movement, this about-face in poster style, until around 1977, and then only in a few places, like CBGB's in New York City, where groups like Patti Smith, Talking Heads, Dead Boys, and the Damned begin to show up, complete with these B&W posters.

Also then there was the Hot Club in Philadelphia, with groups like the Cramps. The main artist for the Hot Club was Bobby Startup. And of course, the Mabuhay Gardens in San Francisco, and groups like Blondie, the Nuns, Crime, Hoi Polloi, Ratz, Novak, Devo, and many others. Artists for the Mabuhay include James Stark, Jerry Paulsen, Don Evenson, Steccone, and John Seabury. Yet all around these few clubs, in the stadiums and vintage clubs, business was going on as usual. I mean Led Zeppelin and Ted Nugent were at Madison Square Garden, Pink Floyd and the Eagles were at the Oakland Coliseum, Marvin Gaye was at the Portland Coliseum, and so on. And the Armadillo World Headquarters in Austin was still serving beans and brown rice. These new punk clubs were just ignored or not on the radar screen yet.

And in 1978, we begin to see venues like the Artemis, the Hot Club in Philadelphia becoming more prominent, and The Bird in Seattle, with graphic artists like Frank Edie and Gary Panter. There was even a little new-music action in the Keystone in Berkeley that year, and quite a lot of attention in this

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

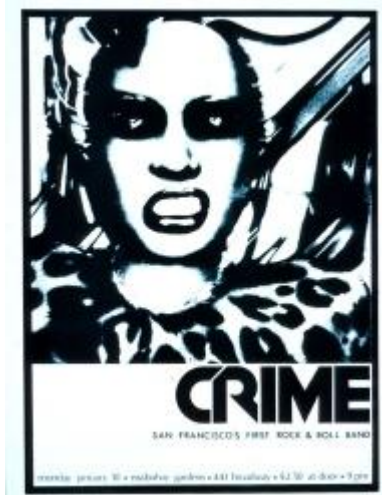
new genre coming from overseas, Germany in particular.



*Artist Gary Panter*

By 1979, we see the Mabuhay Gardens, and Deaf Club in San Francisco at full tilt. One of the main centers of this new music, Philadelphia, was also going strong by then, with the Etage (artist Jim Meneses), Grendel's Lair, and still cookin', the Hot Club. And there was The Golden Crown in Seattle, with poster artists Dennis White and Satz.

With the new decade, 1980, we have really turned the corner. By this time, Detroit had joined in with Altier's, Bookies, and the Madison Theater, with art mostly by Gary Grimshaw. And Philadelphia continued to grow, with Emerald City, Omni's, and the Starlite Ballroom. The Back D.O.R. (artist Joseph Prieboy) and Showbox (artists Art Chantry, Justin Hampton, Stranger) were cooking in San Francisco, and Berkeley Square in Berkeley. CBGB's and Max's Kansas City were happening in NYC, and Austin had begun to turn punk too, with the Club Foot (artist: Jagmo). And there was Pancho's in Seattle, with artist Robert Newman.



*Mabuhay Gardens Poster*

### Frank Kozik

And with this emerging culture taking hold of the minds and hearts of this coming generation, there came new artists to lead the way. And it was no longer going to be all about black and white. In the dozens of interviews I have done with artists that remember this period, almost all agree that it was the landmark work of poster artist Frank Kozik which led the way. Kozik had no connection to or great affection for the sixties art and the San Francisco scene, in general. He was all about this new music and he had his own ideas about the art that went with it.

And Frank Kozik had a new method of marketing his services, something that Victor Moscoso had done years before him. Instead of being at the mercy of promoters and oddball print shops, Kozik went to promoters with a deal they could not refuse. He would give them, for free, 100 posters that he would design, if they would allow him to print an extra 500 or so, to distribute how he wished. They jumped at the chance: no-expense posters, custom made for them, and no printing hassles. Kozik

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

made money on the aftermarket and got to work with the printers he wanted to work with. Pretty soon, he was making this offer to major venues across the country. He soon controlled the market. This pretty much turned the poster market in a new direction, and sent a lot of poster artists scouring for jobs. They were not prepared to compete with him.



*Early Kozik Poster*

And these were not your black and white photocopied paste-ups. Kozik was soon into color and lots of it. Gone were the saccharine themes from the sixties. At first, Kozik's work was subdued, in monotoes, perhaps one or two colors. And the themes were mock serious: long faces and bulging eyeballs, and of course, half-naked women, S&M themes -- all of the more or less predictable shtick from the punk culture that came before it.



*Half-naked Woman*

But by 1990, Frank Kozik had begun to loosen up a bit. For one, he was now working more and more with color. There were still a lot of naked babes and some ghastly stuff, but it was increasingly becoming cartoony, with a handful of solid colors. Yet, sprinkled in the midst of these were some striking pieces. In fact, there are a lot of striking pieces. Kozik was an expert in a variety of styles.

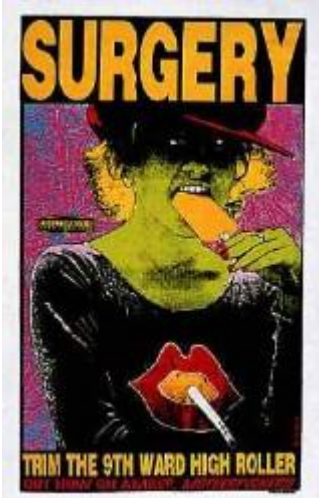


*Cartoon-like Kozik*

I am not a great lover of the cartoon-like posters of Kozik (after all, I am an old fart from the sixties), but every time I sit down and go through the Kozik catalog, I am struck at the great of number of

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

incredible pieces that are not like that. He was just very creative. No doubt about it.



*Pure Kozik*

Frank Kozik was the leader in a revolution of younger poster artists, but he was by no means alone. In fact, part of his appeal to the younger artists is that they immediately felt that they could do that too. Hundreds of artists picked up on where Kozik was at and there soon was a flood of cartoon-like posters, all with "in-your-face" themes. It became what rock posters were all about.

There were, however, exceptions, like Detroit artist Mark Arminksi, who came on the scene about the time Frank Kozik did, and was also brought up in the "in-your-face" culture, but with sensibilities that hearken back to the sixties artists. Not since Victor Moscoso do we find a master of color, as we do with Arminksi. He, among modern artists, stands alone, with one foot in the '90s and one firmly in the '60s. This may be why so many collectors of sixties posters also collect Arminksi.



*Arminksi Poster*

### **New Wave Posters**

The "new wave" poster artists, as they sometimes have been called, have exploded until concert-music posters have more artists and more collectors than ever before. Some people think there are more artists than collectors. And this expansion has gone in all directions, with everyone trying for a piece of the pie. A whole book needs to be written about all of this, but let's just cherry pick a few items.

The Punk poster movement was softened somewhat, and turned into what came to be called the "New Wave," which really was punk without the worse grit. It was a kind of sanitized punk. And there are a lot of New Wave artists.

We could say that punk art is in your face and brings you up short with all of the hard facts of what man has done to man and the environment. Then another whole wave of poster artists appeared, that brought into focus all of the icons of American culture, especially if they were trashy or sleazy. These artists were not interested in real grit so much as they

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

were in finding humor in popular social icons. And they were all about cartoons.

### **Retro-Icon Artists**

We could call this the Retro-Icon Movement, and a good example is the work of Coop, whose work features plenty of plump and amply endowed women, either naked (with green or red skin) or dressed in a tight-fitting devil's suit. A lot of these women have little horns too. This is an example of this style of posters, in this case keying off the American pinup and all of its history. Again: images are in cartoon mode, and any common-denominator piece of American culture is fair game, everything from all kinds of monster hot-rods, to strippers, and tattooed ladies.

Today, we are in the midst of a poster explosion, as hundreds of new artists take up posterizing. As for styles and trends, it becomes harder to follow, probably because we are still too near to it, but also because a wide variety of poster styles exist today, with each proliferating in its own way.

And the whole cartoon-like style of posters, begun by Frank Kozik and almost ubiquitous by the 1990s, have reached the end of its pendulum swing, and has turned. Graphic artists like Jermaine Rogers and, in particular, Justin Hampton, and others, who began to produce cartoon-like graphics, but with more flat posterized areas, with themes less sarcastic, images less funny, and everything more just good-looking art.

### **The New 'New' Artists**

This trend has been carried to its current state by brilliant new artists like Brian Ewing and Scrojo, who have turned the

cartoon style on its end, making cartoons (or line drawings) serious once again - definitely not funny. Using large areas of color and a simplified, but compelling, drawing style, these artists have commanded the attention of their peers.

Artists like Tara McPherson and, in particular, Leia Bell have taken the poster scene by storm, with their homey slice-of-life approach. With Leia Bell, there is no sarcasm, no punk residue, and no attitude. Instead, what we find images that are unsettling in their very direct approach to common everyday experiences, like brushing your teeth, or relating to a younger sibling -- heartwarming images. Heaven forbid! Who would have thought?

So posters has turned the punk and new wave corner, opening up a host of new and different styles, many of them (like Brian Ewing and Leia Bell), deeply refreshing. And the whole way posters are made is changing.

### **Poster Processes Change**

For one, gone are the days of posters being laid out, shot with film, separations made, and the thing printed. Sure, that still happens a lot, but today there are so many other ways to produce a poster. We have color copiers, and color printers. We have large drum printers and inkjet printers. We have the very expensive Giclee (pronounced Gee-Clay) printers. Poster artists are running off as few as three or four, or twenty, or fifty, and that is the run. Signed and delivered. And there is some humor in all this.

Poster experts, dealers, and collectors at first threw up their hands and howled at the artists. You can't do this! You

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

can't do that! You can't make a poster on a copy machine! You can't do it at home on an inkjet printer! We don't like that! This response really happened.

But the artists could care less, because they were able to design their posters on a computer and print it out, on the spot, in whatever quantities the market required. Objections are purely academic, because the cat is out of the bag and the simple fact of business is: there are all kinds of ways to produce posters. Good luck about keeping editions separate or telling what is an original and what is a reprint. That is history. What remains is the art. You like it or you don't.

And we don't just have gig posters anymore. There was a rash of what were called "Commemorative Posters," where artists would do now a poster for a great music event in the past. We might see a "Grateful Dead" poster for some obscure (but historic) date, for which there never was a proper poster. Artist Denis Loren did a whole series of commemorative posters for the Whisky-A-Go-Go in Los Angeles. ArtRock produced many posters of this type. More subtle were the artists that produced a poster for an upcoming event, but not at the request of the promoter. Often the poster was much better than the official poster, but this soon resulted in problems and lawsuits. Many artists did it just for the joy of celebrating one of their favorite music groups. However, where there was money involved, there were cease and desist letters sent.

Some bands (like Pearl Jam and String Cheese Incident) have cut through all of this and produce all their posters themselves, selecting the artist, the

theme, and overseeing both printing, and distribution - the whole deal. Anyone who messes with this process from the outside gets a lawsuit.

Most of this kind of thing has died down now, and we have settled into the business of there being a great many good artists and not always enough gigs for them to create posters for. And the community of poster artists is very active, as can be seen from [gigposters.com](http://gigposters.com), the main watering hole for young artists. It is a great place to check out.



# Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

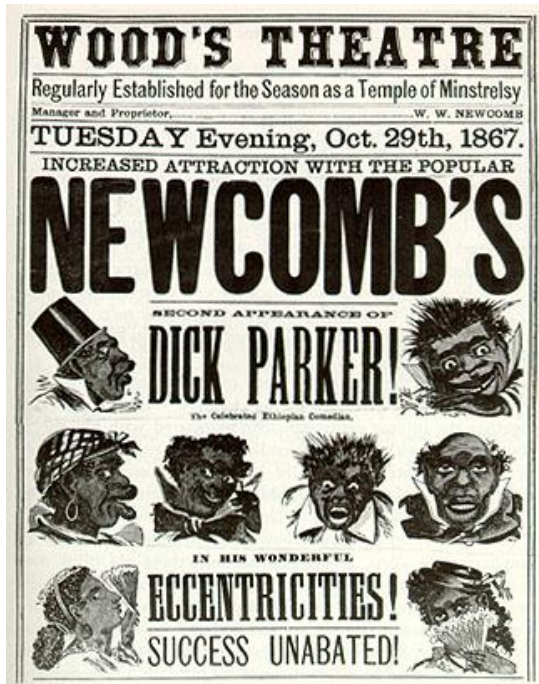
## Brief History of Boxing-Style Posters

by Michael Erlewine

First, a quick apology: What follows is just a quick-glance at the history and types of the concert-music poster, for those of you who don't have the time to seek out a real book on the subject, sit down with it, and give this subject the attention that it deserves. This sketch may help you recognize some of the main formats and styles of poster you will encounter.

### Early American Posters

The modern poster, as we know it, has its roots in the simple posters and flyers used to advertise circuses, vaudeville acts, local carnivals, etc., reaching all the way back to 1840's and the advent of the minstrel show.



*Early Minstrel Show Poster*

Perhaps the best known of all, the ubiquitous circus poster remains virtually unchanged to the present day,

and can be found each year in virtually every town of any size in America. They have a beauty all their own and should evoke some nostalgia. After all, we grew up with them, all of us.



*Typical Circus Poster*

### Boxing-style Posters

In the 1950's, the rock poster grew out of the generic block-lettering poster, what is often called the "Boxing Style" or sports posters. These were simple posters with large block lettering, often grouped around a photograph of the performer or with no photo at all, usually printed on cardboard. It was nothing more than an announcement of the event, the date, and the place - who, when, and where.

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More



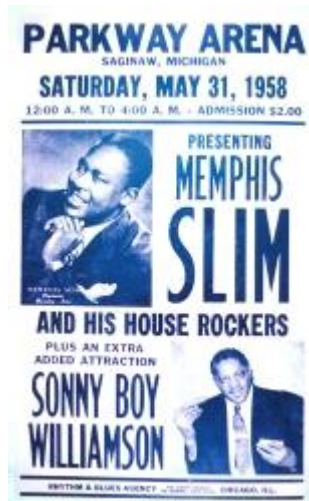
*Boxing-style Boxing Poster*



*Typical Music Boxing-style Poster*

For Black or 'race' music and performers, there was no such thing as radio play on the White stations. Traveling Black performers depended almost exclusively on posters and handbills to announce music events.

The Black sections of town would be peppered with posters, at all times.



*One-Color Boxing-Style Poster*

When the budget would afford it, a second color (and pass through the press) was added to highlight key information on the poster, like the performer, the date, and the venue.



*2-color Boxing-style Poster*

Since every additional color mean an additional pass through the letterpress, and thus more expense, printers often used a one-pass printing technique called "split-fountain" to achieve more than one color in a single pass of the

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

press. They would put different colors of ink on the same plate, mix them together in the center and let them sort themselves out during the run, producing a rainbow-type effect.



*Boxing-style Poster using the Split-fountain process*

One thing missing from the early boxing-style poster was "Art." And while they have a beauty all their own, part of that beauty is the absence of any attempt to stylize them or introduce flowing design, lines, and form. They were blocks of type, maybe a photo, and at the most probably two colors.

The Globe Printing Company on the East Coast introduced vivid colors to boxing-style style posters in the 1950s and these brilliant colors came to be associated with Black performers, for the most part. Of course, modern poster artists use these colors all the time.

*Right: Multi-colored R&B Style Poster*



*Vivid-color Poster from Globe Printing*

### R&B Style-Posters

In time, these boxing-style posters took on some color, and a few artistic flourishes, but still were pretty much straight-ahead information presentation. The majority of these posters were printed by only a handful of large printing companies around the country, including the Hatch Show Print Company in Nashville (covered country and southern cities), the Tribune Press in Indiana (Chicago and surrounding states), the Globe Printing Company in Baltimore (East-Coast posters and handbills), Tilghman Press in California (West-Coast coverage), and others.



# Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

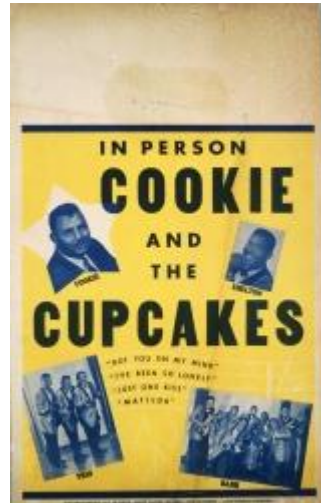
## Early Poster Printing Methods

by Michael Erlewine

The early history of concert-music posters in America is mostly one of economics - the least expensive path, the better, mostly due to the demands of the available printing methods. Many early posters were silk-screened and then overprinted, either by letterpress or by writing dates & places in by hand with a marker.

Keep in mind that with letterpress printing, illustrations (if present at all) were difficult to handle. Most printed posters largely made use of a bed of type, which had to be fitted together into a block, clamped together, the block inked, and paper pressed against it. Type was tough enough to set, but each picture that had to be hand prepared, and bound into the bed of type, so pictures and illustrations were kept to a minimum, if used at all.

This can perhaps best be seen in the early circus and carnival posters, where a template poster with some sort of bright circus image on it was offset printed or silk-screened in large quantities, but with room left at the bottom/top or in some marquee-like frame for text to be overprinted (or hand written) later.



*Poster with space for overprinting*

These master posters were run through the press a second time, putting in the date and venue for a specific town or county, thus saving time and money over printing separate posters for each gig. This is not only how it was done a century ago; it is not that much different (at least with circus posters) today. We still see a single generic poster printed, and then individualized for a given town. In other words, the same poster is used all over the country, but the specific town and date information is overprinted.

This method of printing twice, one master and any number of individual second printings carried over from the circus and carnivals into sports and concert music events. The so-called boxing-style poster had one central image (if it had any at all) and the rest was large type commanding your attention. It was the same with the early music concert posters, where you would have (at best) an image of the group and a place to overprint the date and place. Even the most sophisticated music groups, with their tour posters produced by the record companies, had

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

little more than slick generic posters, with a white space at the bottom where the time and place of an event could be hand-written.



*Early Music-concert poster with overprinting*

# Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

## Meet the Poster Experts

by Michael Erlewine

Every field has its experts, those who care enough to document and study the details, the fine points, and posters is no exception. These are the folks who learn all the details, and to which we turn whenever we have questions. Here is a brief overview of the experts I am aware of.

In the beginning there were just the posters and a lot of them got pulled down and put up on the wall. A lot of them just got tossed out. Of the many people I have interviewed, not one really knew these posters were going to be worth what they are today. For many, they were just 'really nice' and you just pulled them down, took them home, and stashed them away.

Among the artists themselves, none of them became what we would call an archivist and expert for the whole genre, with the exception of Randy Tuten. Not only was he one the finest artists back then (and still is now!), but all seem to agree that he alone among the artists had the most incredible collection and actually was into the fine points of their seeming endless variations and editions. He has to be the first serious collector, at least among those actually creating this genre.

Among the experts that I have been able to discover, the next earliest collector/expert seems to be Eric King, who reports encountering some of the Family Dog posters, quite early in that series, along Telegraph Avenue in Berkeley. This was early in 1966. King, who had some training in archiving, readily admits he had no idea at the time that these posters would become

as valuable as they are today. He just liked them and picked them up, here and there, and began to attend some of the dances. It was the art that interested him in the flyers and posters.

It was not until the fall of 1966 that Eric King began to seriously collect the numbers in the various sets that he was missing. He stored them in flats, by venue, and began to compare notes with other collectors. According to King, he made no written notes, kept no records, and was able to keep this knowledge in his memory.

At some point, he met Greg Davidson, who was buying and selling these posters at the Marin Flea Market. Davidson like, King before him, also was drawn to the posters by the art. At some point in the 1970s, King and Davidson got together and compared notes. It must have been quite a series of meetings. Here are two of a very few experts in the world, sitting down and going through the various series, poster by poster, and comparing notes on the variations, relative rarity, and so forth. When they finished, it was Eric King who went on to actually write this material down for the very first time and distribute it.

King was not the only person who had this kind of knowledge, but he was the first to care enough about it to publish it, so that all could better understand this emerging field. And he did this at the encouragement of the artists themselves, whom he had been interviewing and had come to know. Around this time, the sale of the posters had reached a point where pirates and unauthorized reprints had begun to appear. Unless there was some guide that clearly stated which were the

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

originals and which the reprints, the now-emerging market could quickly become stained and confused. King was told by the artists themselves that he owed it to them, the artists, to write his knowledge down and make it available. And he did this.

It took six months and he published his first guide in 1977, a slim 100-page edition (today it is more like 500 pages). King readily admits that first volume was very rough and incomplete in many ways, but it was eagerly received by the poster community nevertheless.

On a parallel course was Berkeley collector Dennis King, who also can remember posters from the 1966 period of time. By the early 1970s, he too was buying and selling posters. In 1976, King found a little nook of a place along Telegraph Avenue, that he used as a shop. He was soon selling flyers and posters, along with baseball cards and what not. Soon graduating to a larger store, the D.K. Gallery is still open for business in Berkeley.

So we have a couple of "Kings" here, both who lived (and still operate) in Berkeley, and who are two of our most expert poster people. Dennis King is co-authoring the "The Art of Modern Rock" with author Paul Grushkin, which should be out very soon.

Jacaeber Kastor was raised in Berkeley and Eric King and Kastor remember meeting each other, when Kastor was just a school kid, running around with a cigar box full of handbills. It was King who helped Kastor, years later, replenish his collections, when rats gnawed through a bunch of it. Kastor began buying collections in the mid-1980s, feeling these valuable posters

were undervalued. In 1986, he opened the Psychedelic Solution Gallery, which was to become the largest poster gallery on the East Coast. Over the years, Kastor has developed pretty much of an encyclopedic knowledge of the entire field, and according to Eric King, Kastor knows more about the whole genre of concert-music posters than anyone he has met, including himself. That is quite a compliment coming from King.

From another whole direction came Phil Cushway, not Bay-Area bred, but from the Midwest, Ann Arbor in particular. Cushway too had fallen in love with poster art and, fearing that he had already entirely missed the boat (that it was too late), set about to create a company that not only collected posters but also published them. This was in the late 1980s and the company was ArtRock, which has become the largest concert-music poster business in the world, at least until very recently. We will get to that later.

Phil Cushway systematically set about to purchase these now-somewhat-rare posters, wherever he could. He soon found himself moving to San Francisco, where he bought out legendary poster dealer Ben Friedman (who had in turn bought huge quantities of the Family Dog from Chet Helms and the Bill Graham Presents series from Bill Graham), and many other large stashed. Cushway also went to the artists themselves, in many cases buying all they would sell. And to top it all off, he began to publish his own poster series, using the best artists available and helping to launch a number of careers, like those of Mark Arminski and Frank Kozik. I have been told that Cushway had over a million

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

posters at the height of his collecting period. But there is more.

Since Cushway was sitting on 'the' mountain of posters, he was in a position to control their sale, availability, and pricing. And he set about to do just that. He was the first to publish full-color catalogs that pitched these posters as art. I understand he has distributed millions of these catalogs, and they had the desired effect of consolidating the market and raising prices. And Cushway himself was not the only one to benefit from all this. It affected the entire field and helped to raise posters as collectables to a new level of sophistication and cost.

Meanwhile, about the same time that Cushway was building ArtRock, Ed Walker, also in San Francisco, found himself in the same business. S.F. Rock is one of the two main concert-music poster stores in San Francisco. Walker along with his partner Grant Mechinan, both poster experts, continue to operate one of the most popular stores in the country. Both are very knowledgeable and their emphasis is on original posters, not reprints.

And just to round this story out, in the early 2000s, entrepreneur Bill Sagan purchased the entire Bill Graham Archives, including all their posters, going all the way back to the beginning. In addition, he purchased all the FD and BG material from ArtRock's Phil Cushway (which was a lot), making him the owner of the largest collection of music-concert posters that we are aware of. He is now the king of the poster hill.

Well, that is a brief account and a few details about some of the principle

figures in the history of poster experts. There are others, of course, and young ones coming up like Oakland's (J.C. Hall, and Jacob Grosse on the East Coast. And there are a lot of experts out there that have moved to the side, for one reason or another, and done other things.



# Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

## Natural Habitat of the Poster

By Michael Erlewine

The idea of banking on the wall may seem a little Kooky at first; I know it was to my wife. But, after the downturn in the stock market these last number of years, it seems much less so today.

So you want to save your money and make interest on it? Me too, but where are you going to put it where it will be safe? Stocks, bonds, mutual funds, CDs. Yeah, ok. But you will still worry, worry, worry? And the market will go up, down, and around. That's life.

So I took some of that money, that retirement stuff, and invested it in posters, and put some of those posters on the wall, where I and my family and friends can enjoy them.

When I was younger, I remember having some prints by Van Gogh, Modigliani, and others on the wall, things like that. That was cool, then. But there is something about an original that is a lot more satisfying. And if you are reading this, there is a chance you can already

## Stalking the Wild Poster



Let us not forget the natural habitat of the poster, out there, somewhere -- the telephone pole, storefront, and bulletin board. If you have never gone out, found a poster, taken it down, and collected it, you need to do that, at least once!



*A typical poster frenzy on Berkeley Campus*

# Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

## **Poster Sets: I Never Met a Set I Did Not Like**

by Michael Erlewine

I never met a set I did not like, but that's just me. What is it about having a complete set of something that is so satisfying? I have no idea, but I am an addict, that's for sure, which is not to suggest I don't collect posters in ones - singly. I am an addict for those too! But, let's just talk about sets.

Before we get too far, let's be clear that aside from those sets numbered by the publisher, what constitutes a set is something more or less agreed upon by senior collectors, rather than a simple process of counting them up. There are very few numbered sets that are that simple. Even the so-called classic numbered sets of the Family Dog and Bill Graham Original Series are based on what collectors consider the numbered set, a particular set of posters, but not necessarily every piece of paper with 'Bill Graham Presents' on it.

The same is true for the Family Dog Numbered Series, which consists of some 147 events, complete with their particular posters, handbills, and cards. And this is just what is called the 'original series,' and does not include all the pre-Family Dog dance series, the Family Dog at the Great Highway, and the Family Dog series at Maritime Hall. These are not considered part of the main set, although there is no absolute reason why they could not be, since the same promoter, Chet Helms, holds all the copyrights. They are considered mini sets of their own.

The Bill Graham situation is even more complicated, as most of you reading this already know. Let's review it:

Bill Graham Original Series of posters, handbills, and postcards, some 289 events

Bill Graham Presents (over 300 posters)

Bill Graham New Fillmore (over 500 posters)

Bill Graham Special Events (about 31 posters)

Bill Graham Fillmore East ( a dozen or so posters)

The above are all quite distinct series, but, in addition, there are any number of flyers and handbills and what-nots for special event shows. How about all the B&W flyers by artist Randy Tuten for Bill Graham? Where do they fit in?

Anyway, you get the idea. We have somewhat of a clear idea as to what the main sets are, but we are walking on kind of shaky ground here, should we decide to look down at all of the pieces of paper that may have fallen through the cracks. Collectors agree to ignore those.

## **Non-California Sets by Michael Erlewine**

There are other posters that are collected as a set, such as the Kaleidoscope series of round posters from Los Angeles, but even this set has a couple of items that may or may not be considered necessary as part of that set, and they are square. And then there is the Grande Ballroom, that very much collected series from Detroit.

With the Grande Ballroom, we have a choice of collecting full posters, handbills, and cards or any one of them.

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

A lot of people collect the cards, and the posters are also widely collected, but some of the posters are quite rare. With the handbills, which are very rare, there are some numbers with as few as perhaps a single known copy. The handbills have fewer adherents, but they are a very determined lot. And like all the venues mentioned above, there is the falloff factor to consider. It is kind of like walking out into a lake and reaching a drop off. Do you keep going and declare more and more as part of what you collect or stay with where you are, and call it a set?

Using the Grande Ballroom as an example, do we collect only the Russ Gibb events at the Grande Ballroom itself, or do we collect all the Russ Gibb events, even those held out of state and out-of-country? Do we collect some of the shows held there after Gibb's tenure, like the Grande Family shows, various John Sinclair-oriented fund-raisers, or just any event held there? Do we collect posters for events held at the Grande Ballroom (after all, it was in use for decades before Russ Gibb) before the Russ Gibb Grande shows? These are questions that only you, the collector, can answer.

However collectors of Grande Material more or less agree that the Russ Gibb material is what they will collect, with perhaps the three Grande Family cards thrown in for good measure, if you can find them.

### **Two Types of Sets by Michael Erlewine**

To clarify: there are two types of sets generally collected, those numbered by the original publisher, and those numbered by collectors. Of all the sets

numbered by the original publisher, perhaps only the Neon Rose is locked-in-stone as a fixed set. There are 26 Neon Rose. Period. The artist, Victor Moscoso, numbered them.

When you get into the other numbered sets, there are 147 numbered Family Dog events and 289 numbered events in the Bill Graham Original series. With both of these venues, there are all kinds of variations, with respectful arguments or discussions about what is the first printing and what was printed after the event, for aftermarket sales.

What is the point of all this? It is that in all but a very few cases, the numbered sets are held together by the intent of the original publisher's numbering system (and these are sometimes miss-numbered) or by the glue of collectors' agreements as to what constitutes a set. However you look at it, it all works out and the system seems to be working.

### **The Value of Sets Compared to Selling Them Individually**

There is some argument as to the value of sets. One would think that a complete set, with all the missing spots filled, would be worth more than selling the same set piecemeal. We have adherents on both sides. Some collectors state that a complete set is worth something extra, a premium to cover the expense and time to hunt down and collect all posters in that set, while others think that, because there are fewer buyers available for the really large and expensive sets, that it is better to break up the set and sell it off that way. Those who would break up sets and sell them figure that there are those few buyers for the really expensive pieces, who (ironically enough) will buy

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

them to complete their own sets. The rest (smaller pieces) can be sold off elsewhere, with the net result being, so they say, more total dollars. The sell-as-a-set folks feel that, while there may be fewer buyers able to afford a complete set, you only need to find that one buyer who appreciates the work involved in building a set and the beauty of having the entire set on hand. And they are out there. Having a complete set is very satisfying and something to behold. It is also a good investment, in most cases. These things appreciate.

### **Downside of Set Collecting**

However, one of the downsides of collecting a set is you end up buying a certain amount of really ugly posters, or posters of no real consequence (as to the bands at the gig, or the artwork itself), posters you would never collect otherwise. You have to fill those empty spots to complete a set.

And rarity of a numbered set is totally dependent on the weakest link in the set: whichever poster happens to be the rarest - fewer copies exist. And these most-rare posters can be rare because everyone like them and took them home to keep (and won't sell them), or because they were ugly and no one took them home and they were left as trash in the street. An even more fickle reason for a poster to be rare, and this is probably the most common one, is that something happened to that poster on the way to the event, like a printing mishap, an under-run, or whatever. In one case (The Who/Toronto card in the Grande Ballroom series), that card is rare because custom officials refused to allow it to cross the border into Canada from the U.S. because they were protecting Canadian printers and

advertisers. There are all kinds of reasons why a poster can be rare.

Whatever the reason, that one weak link in the set, that "most rare" poster limits the total amount of sets that can exist. Period. Of course, some collectors, anxious to complete their sets, have tried to declare this poster or that poster as not needed for a complete set, but these mostly-bogus reasons have not held up and reason has prevailed. Any poster, handbill, or card that was printed BEFORE an event to advertise that event is to be considered part of the full set. And the fact of the matter is that all these collectors who try to disqualify a really difficult poster to find, fight like mad to add that same poster to their collection. End of story.

### **Image Sets**

Another very popular practice is to collect an 'image set'. An image set is a complete set or run of the posters, but not with original printings. Instead, any printing (reprint) is considered fair game to build an image set, whether it be a poster, handbill, or card. The key is to have all the images. An image set usually contains both originals and reprints as part of a set. Image sets can bring real bucks too.

There are probably as few as 10 near-complete sets of the original Grande posters known. No less an expert than archivist Eric King says there may be as few as 30 complete sets of originals for the Family Dog and Bill Graham series of posters. In the Family Dog series, the numbers 1, 2, and 7 are very rare. In the Bill Graham Originals, that first poster with the Peter Bailey "East Wind Printers" on it is very rare, as is the 2nd, the original Batman poster.

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

Poster collectors will continue to argue the merits or lack thereof of collecting sets. For my part, I say: there is something very nice about a set.

### **Some Major Sets**

So, some posters that are collected in sets or runs include:

Bill Graham Original Posters, Handbills, and Cards (289 main events), Bill Graham Original Series

Bill Graham Fillmore East Posters, Set: Fillmore East Posters

Bill Graham Presents (larger non-Fillmore events, 200+ items), Set: Bill Graham Presents BGP

Bill Graham New Fillmore Events (560+ events), See: Bill Graham New Fillmores BGF

Bill Graham Special Events (29+ events), Set: Bill Graham Special Events

Family Dog Pre-series Events (9 or so events), Set: Pre-family Dog

Family Dog Original Posters, Handbills, and Cards (147 main events), Set: Family Dog Series

Family Dog at Denver (13 events), Set: Family Dog Denver

Family Dog at the Great Highway (perhaps 80 pieces), Family Dog Great Highway

Family Dog at Maritime Hall (20 or so pieces), Family Dog at Maritime Hall

Retinal Circus Cards (32 cards), Set: Retinal Circus Cards

Kaleidoscope Venue (20 pieces), Set: Kaleidoscope L.A.

Neon Rose (26 posters), Set: Neon Rose

Mountain Aire Festival (20 or so piece), Set: Mountain Aire

Charlatans Triptych in the Family Dog See, Set: Charlatans Triptych

Alton Kelley's Dinosaurs (11 or so pieces), Set: Dinosaurs

Grande Ballroom Posters, Handbills, and Cards, Set: Grande Ballroom Cards

Collectors also collect the complete numbered series for artists like:

Mark Arminski

Derek Hess

### **What Items Comprise the Major Sets**

Below, we will present the required elements in most of the major sets that are collected. If you are serious about collecting the Bill Graham Series, the Family Dog Series, the Neon Rose Series, and the Grande Ballroom series, you will need to invest in what is the definitive book that provides the details to discriminate between originals, reprints, pirates, and bootlegs of these important series. This is the book by poster archivist Eric King. You can get details here: See: Collector's Guide to Psychedelic Rock Concert Posters (BOOK)

### **The Family Dog Original Series Set: Defined**

Since I am asked what constitutes a complete set of Family Dog, I will include it here, thanks in part to Jacaeber Kastor, Phil Cushway, and most of all to Eric King for clarifying this material. As mentioned above, if you do not have Erik Kings indispensable book on this venue, then you have no way to discriminate properly all the variations and difference between originals and reprints.

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

Numbers 1 through and including 147

Denver Family Dog at Family Dog at Denver at 1601 West Evans Street

It is considered necessary to have BOTH color variations of FD-121

Within the 1 to 147 set are three of the Denver posters, and they are FD-79 (FDD-01), FD-82 (FDD-03), and FD-84 (FDD-04)

The 13 Denver Posters that are not in the set:

That leaves numbers: 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, and 18. There is no FDD-17, and while FDD-16 exists in plate form, it was never printed. It is rumored that this poster will be printed in a special edition.

### **Family Dog Handbills**

There are 41 handbills, running from FD-001 to FD-041. According to Eric King, a set is complete with one image, and variations are not considered necessary. Also Eric King states that the alternate (and rejected design) for FD-02 is NOT considered necessary, as it was never distributed, and distribution to advertise an event is considered a requirement for inclusion.

### **Family Dog Postcards**

The postcards start at Family Dog FD-042 and continue to FD-147, and also include all of the Denver (FDD) events, with one exception, that there is no FDD-09 card.

After FD-147

Eric King's book makes it clear that, although many items exist after FD-147, there is no way of defining a complete set beyond that number. There are many problems. Although Chet Helms

went on to hold events at "Playland," which were called "Family Dog at the Great Highway," some of the events went organized by Helms, and others were events where he loaned the venue for a particular night to another promoter. Some have the Family Dog logo, some do not. There is a lot of disagreement here and I suggest (once again) that those interested order King's book for complete details.

There are also problems with the Family Dog at Denver, where other promoters held concerts and even used Chet Helm's logo, but without his knowledge or consent.

### **Bill Graham Original Series Set: Defined**

Many of you have asked why we have no images for the Bill Graham series of posters, at least for the earlier dates, so some explanation is in order. It is not because we have not researched this series. We have, of course.

The Bill Graham archives, including the copyrights to all the Bill Graham posters up to the year 2001 were purchased from the Bill Graham organization, which itself is now owned by Clear Channel. The new owner of these copyrights has notified us that these images are his copyrights and that we are not to show any of these images on our site, even in the thumbnail size we use. We respect his right to do so, but feel sorry that this is the case, because of the part these posters have played in the lives of many of us who grew up in the sixties. We hope that they will reconsider this decision.

Thanks for the following, in part to Jacaeber Kastor, Phil Cushway, and most of all to Eric King for clarifying this.

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

If you do not have Erik Kings indispensable book on this venue, then you have no way to discriminate properly all the variations and difference between originals and reprints.

Here is what a set consists of:

### Posters

The Bill Graham Original Series set begins with "0," rather than "1," which is simply out of order, and runs to number 289.

There is no BG-234

A number of these items have alternates, so you also must have: BG-140-A, BG-215-A, and BG-232-A.

Also, with BG-276, it is acceptable to have either version 'A' or 'B' to complete a set.

### Bill Graham Card Set

To hold a complete set of Bill Graham cards, it is necessary to have BG-274-A, which was only issued in a card format.

There are NO CARDS for BG-000, BG-004, BG-014, BG-017, BG-019, and BG-021.

A complete BG card set also requires that you have the three-color variants for cards printed with the split-fountain technique, and these are:

BG-053, BG-056, BG-062, BG-235, BG-236, BG-273, and BG-274. Also needed is the polychrome reprint of BG-062.

Here is an article by poster expert Jacaeber Kastor on the BG set and sets in general. !A CP000040 001 "Lines in Tomorrow's Sand by Jacaeber Kastor"

### The Bill Graham New Fillmore (BGF) : Defined

The original Bill Graham series ended in early July of 1971, with two additional concerts, one in June of 1972 and another in June of 1973. That was the end of the original scene at the Fillmore West. In March of 1988, the Fillmore West was reopened and the series began once more. It is still going strong today and boasts over 500 posters. Now, that's a set! Here is what constitutes a set for BGP:

Starts with number 1 and runs sequentially through

BGF-112 and BGF-112-A, An event for the B-52's on 1989-07-28

BGF-118-A Bodeans on 1989-10-04

BGF-118-B George Clinton on 1989-10-20

BGF-120 NO SUCH POSTER EXISTS

BGF-277 Los Van Van 1997-06-21

BGF-277-A Alice 97.3 1997-06-24

BGF-299 NO SUCH POSTER EXISTS

BGF-394-A Stroke-9 2000-01-20

BGF-395-A Pretenders, 2000-02-14

BGF-462-A Badly Drawn Boy, 2001-05-19

BGF-479-A, Ween, 2001-08-28

BGF-479-B, Megadeth, 2001-09-14

BGF-530 Breeders, 2002-07-11

BGF-520 Vida Blue, 2002-07-11

... The list goes on

### The Bill Graham Presents BGP:

The Bill Graham Presents series started in 1985 and is still running today. It boasts over 300 posters. It differs from the BGF series (which is held at the Fillmore West) in that all of these events

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

are held anywhere but at the Fillmore venue. Usually, these are large-scale events, requiring a stadium or coliseum, for groups like the Rolling Stones and so forth. And, unlike the New Fillmore Series, which hold events every week, the Bill Graham Presents BGP series is periodic, as needed, and correspondingly there are fewer of them. Some of these posters are oversize, very rare, and thus hard to find, for example:

BGP-032-A Who, 1987-08-29

BGP-032-B, Royal Danish Ballet, 1989-06-07

BGP-039, New Kids on the Block, 1991-02-10

BGP-039-A, Paul Simon, 1990-02-10

BGP-128, Steve Miller, 1995-08-24

BGP-128-A, Horde Festival, 1995-09-03

### **BGSE: Bill Graham Special Events:**

The Bill Graham Special Events pieces are just that, shows put together by the Bill Graham folks for some special, often private, event or VIP gathering. There are about 29 of them at this point in time. Hard ones to find include:

BGSE-007, Eastern Acoustic Works, 1998-09-27

BGSE-007-A, KPMG, 1998-09-27

BGSE-016 Casey-Werner Distribution

BGSE-016-A Gore 2000, 2002-09-17

BGSE-024, Musicmania, 2000-04-29

BGSE-024-A, Goo Goo Dolls, 2000-04-29

BGSE-026, Who VIP Party, 2000-10-03

BGSE-026-A, MGD, 2000-10-26

### **The Fillmore East**

I don't have a firm handle on the Fillmore East situation. I know there were about 65 events during the run at the Fillmore East, but I don't know how many had their separate posters, shared a poster, and so forth. The expert on the Fillmore East is Jacaeber Kastor and I am looking to him for guidance in his area. I have never collected this venue.

### **Grande Ballroom Set**

A standard set of Grande Cards is said to consist of the 81 postcards starting with the Southbound Freeway show on 2000-09-22 and ending with the Frost show on 1969-08-06. But there are a number of other items that could be collected, some of them very rare like the Terry Reid card (1969-01-10/12), which is a Russ Gibb event at the Grande Ballroom. This is NOT generally considered part of the series, because it was for a scheduled event that was cancelled. There were five printer's proofs made, and these were never distributed. There are perhaps two known copies.

There is also some argument about including what is called Grande Card #7, since it was not actually a Russ Gibb event, but rather a Trans-Love event. Trans-Love figures in a number of Grande/Gibb productions and was very much part of that whole scene and it should be included. Most collectors I know (myself included) certainly consider the #7 card part of the set and collect it assiduously.

There is also much discussion about the various shows that were held in places like, Cincinnati and St. Louis, Chicago, and Cleveland. As Eric King correctly points out in his definitive treatment of this venue: ""Since no one wants to



## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

include them (everyone wants the cards. They just do not want them required for a set to be complete.)"

I totally agree with Eric King. No one wants them required, but EVERY collector (save one) that I have met desperately wants to find them for their own collection.

The Grande posters and handbills are much more rare than most of the cards. We can pretty much say that we know what comprises a complete collection of Grande posters, and this would include both the St. Louis and Cincinnati Pop Festivals, both cards and posters.

With the handbills, it is much more difficult. There are only a few hardcore collectors of the handbills, and new items continue to be discovered, as recently as within the last few years, and most of them are very rare.

# Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

## Psychedelic Lettering of the Sixties

By Michael Erlewine

Another issue that I wondered about is where did all that crazy lettering come from? We know that Wes Wilson was the first to develop it, and it spread like wildfire after that. But where did he come across it? Wes Wilson is quick to point out how he happened on it.

In November of 1965, the University of California at Berkeley had a show on German Expressionist graphics, titled "Jugendstil and Expressionism." As we pointed out earlier, "Jugendstil" was the German equivalent of Art Nouveau. In that show was an artist and stage designer by the name of Alfred Roller, perhaps best known for his wonderful opera and theater set designs. Wilson, who attended the exhibit, came across some lettering on a poster by Alfred Roller that sparked his imagination.



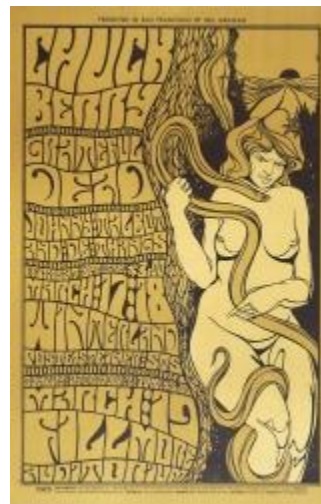
*Poster by Alfred Roller*

Here is another sample of Roller's type:



*Poster by Alfred Roller*

Wes Wilson incorporated it into his poster work and soon took it to new and wonderful heights.



*Poster by Wes Wilson*

This lettering, which has come to be called 'psychedelic' lettering has even inspired a number of type faces that feature this general style.

*'Mojo' Adobe Typeface*

There are a number other psychedelic-style type faces on the market, but Adobe's is probably the best of them.

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

There are many other early influences that are fun to look at and must have brought ideas of one kind or another to the Bay Area artists. A couple of cool artists to check out include Gustav Klimt and A.M. Cassandre, both with very different styles. Here are a couple of samples.



*M.A. Cassandre Poster*



*Gustav Klimt Poster*

The above comments are restricted for the most part to outlining some of the direct influences from earlier artists on the sixties artists. Of course, they brought a whole lot of their own -- of our own -- times to their work. The influence

of consciousness-expanding drugs on the sixties and their art cannot be underestimated. Drugs like peyote and LSD, not only interrupted the linear sense of life that extended from the 1950's, but it brought with it a wide range of ideas, in particular of a spiritual, if not downright religious (whatever that is) nature. This opening in consciousness, these radical views of reality, really was the glue that held all of the images -- past and present -- together and made the posters effective. Through the sixties poster art, we were able to share and communicate a vision and draw together similar minds from all walks of life. Those posters were a signal of a common experience, not just an announcement for a music event.

Searching through art books or on the web for the above-named artists, some of the early influences of psychedelic art is satisfying and helps to put the whole sixties era into perspective, bringing a sense of continuity to what appears to some of us almost as a singularity.

# Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

## The Roots of Sixties Poster Art

by Michael Erlewine

Something I always wondered about was where all of the sixties posters art came from. Did people like Stanley Mouse and the others just make it up or were they reflecting art from a previous time into the present. Well, the answer is both. They made a lot up and they also were inspired by artists (even poster artists) from around the turn of the century.

The earliest posters that resemble what we would today call posters were created in the late 1890s and early twentieth century, in a artistic period that has been termed the "Belle Epoque," and some of the major artists of that period include Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and Jules Cheret.



Poster by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec

Cheret liked to have his collection of butterfly wings by his drawing board, to inspire him in the brightness and clarity of colors.



Poster by Jules Cheret

More important as a direct influence on San Francisco art of the '60s, was Art Nouveau, which arose around the turn of the century, and was decidedly modern and different. Art Nouveau made use of fluid, organic shapes, often used in an highly decorative and ornamental manner. Art Nouveau was not something intrinsic to just the United States and the U.K. In Germany, it was called "Jugendstil," after the magazine "Die Jugend," which arose in Munich in 1896, while in Austria this style of art was linked to the Secessionist movement. French termed it 'Le style moderne,' in Spain "Modernista," and in Italy, 'Stile Liberty.'

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More



*Poster by Alphonse Mucha*

Some of its main artists included Eugene Grasset and, above all, Alphonse Mucha. In all its forms, the accent was on the 'nouveau', the "new." And 'new' here did not just refer to new art forms, but also to new cultural trends, and shifts in mass consciousness. This movement, and its influence lasted beyond the turn of the century, until well into the early 1930s, although the organic/floral motifs gradually became more and more abstract. The discovery of Eastern art, in particular that of Japan, had an enormous influence on Art Nouveau.



*Poster by Alphonse Mucha*

Of course, the poster work Jules Cheret is still popular and the posters of Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec are known to everyone, even though Toulouse-Lautrec only made some 30 or so posters in his entire life. But more important to the roots of sixties posters are Art Nouveau artists like Alphonse Mucha and Aubrey Beardsley, since their influence can clearly be seen in the work of sixties artists like Stanley Mouse and Bob Masse.



*Poster by Aubrey Beardsley*

To really follow the history of the rise of commercial posters would require a book of its own, and there are plenty of those already written. Here we will just make sure that readers can get a look at some of the earlier posters that affected the sixties artists.

In passing, however, it may be important to note that there was a great poster heyday in the 1890s, that spread all over Europe and subsequently to the United States. During this time posters were prized by the general public, as well as by the hardened collector and connoisseur. There were numerous

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

exhibitions and many articles on posters and even poster collecting. It is estimated that in 1896 there were over 6,000 poster collectors in the U.S. alone, with the average collection being some 500 or more posters. And the U.S. was slow on the uptake on this fad.

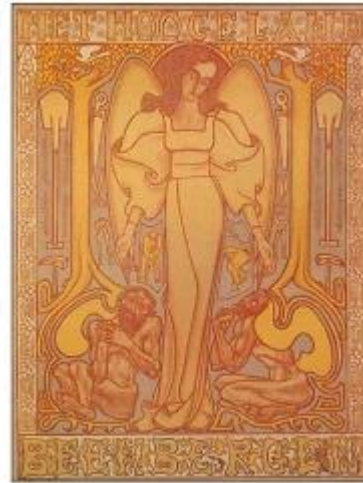
Another interesting fact is that the poster that adorned the streets of Paris and London in the late 1890s, were not all the telephone pole-sized sheets that we collect. Many were huge, by our standards, stretching 10 or 15 feet high and 10 feet wide. Few of use would have a wall large enough to display them.

"



*Poster by Jan Toorop*

Aside from the impact of Art Nouveau on sixties posters, the other great influence came from the Symbolist movement, in France and throughout Europe. In brief, the Symbolists sought to take the organic shapes and fluid forms of Art Nouveau and apply them to spiritual matters, something beyond the ordinary, the profane. This can be seen in the works of the Dutch artists Jan Toorop.



*Poster by Jan Toorop*

So, the two greatest influences on the emerging San Francisco poster scene were the organic forms and ornamentation of the Art Nouveau period brought to bear on spiritual or meaningful topics.



*Poster by Alphonse Mucha*

As for influences, Stanley Mouse and Alton Kelley roamed the stacks of the San Francisco Public Library searching for images that they could incorporate into their poster work. It was often more than inspiration, such as direct pulls from old images, giving them extended life and sometimes very much renewed

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

life, reaching a whole new audience and generation. Witness the Family Dog poster FD-29, which features the Mucha print above.



Poster by Stanley Mouse FD-29

Or Vancouver artist Bob Masse, who makes no apologies for his love of Art Nouveau in general and Alphonse Mucha in particular. Here is a Mucha poster.



Poster by Alphonse Mucha

The Masse version of the same pose.



Poster by Bob Masse

Many of the artists in the San Francisco poster scene were searching for inspiration and images in the past, not just Mouse and Kelley, artists like Randy Tuten, Victor Moscoso, and many others. It was what was happening. And, of course, there is David Singer, who was creating montages throughout the entire period, all composed of images that he carefully collected from past publications.

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

### **The Seed: The Start of the Dance Hall Scene**

by Michael Erlewine

Here is the poster that most experts agree launched the '60s era of alternative culture. This poster features the band "The Charlatans" at an extended gig in Virginia City, Nevada at the Red Dog Saloon. It was designed by members of the band.



*The Seed*

"The Seed" was printed in two versions, one with a date of "June 1-16, 1965" and the second (and final) version with "June 21." Apparently the Red Dog Saloon had not finished their redecorating in time for that first poster, so the second was printed, and in many respects the art was redrawn. Version one is said to have been printed originally in blue, but was then printed in black, which is considered the standard version.

The poster was created by two of the Charlatan's members, George Hunter and Michael Ferguson, with Hunter having devised the logo, and Ferguson doing most of the actual drawing, including the portraits.

Poster expert Walter Medeiros wrote the following in a catalog for a poster show that was produced from the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 1976:

"The Seed is unique for being completely hand-drawn, in a densely patterned format, and was much different from rock posters that existed then. Yet it is reminiscent of nineteenth-century carnival, medicine show, and music hall posters, in that it boldly heralds a spectacular event that shouldn't be missed. It has a funky character about it, and 'funkiness' was one of the most prominent characteristics of hippie sensibility. And the poster carries off this feeling because of the lightness and capriciousness which permeates the whole work."

The poster was given the name, "The Seed" by the authors of "Eureka, The Great Poster Trip," the first book on psychedelic posters, published in 1968. It is a fact that the Charlatans were the heralds of the coming of the alternative culture that was about to emerge in San Francisco, and the "The Seed" was the first poster that broke with the tradition of the boxing-style posters in use at the time.

There is no question that the interest in Victorian clothes, old-time music, and the style and embellishments of an earlier era are reflected in this poster.

While I can see in these two posters the elements of the hippie culture that loves old clothes and the like, what is entirely missing to my eyes is any sign of the kind of consciousness shift (that was already present in the community) typical of hallucinogens like peyote and LSD, although these drugs were very



## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

available in 1965, and had been for some years. The closest to anything new age or signifying a new consciousness are the few symbols and signs that were drawn in, like the planet Saturn, the Moon, an Iron Cross, and a swastika (first version only).

One of my main interests is to trace the history of the psychedelic influence in '60s art and music. After all, the whole genre of posters is often called "psychedelic posters," and I don't see much of the psychedelic in "The Seed."

For that, you have to look at that first Family Dog dance flyer by artist Alton Kelley, for October 16, 1965, a gig with the Jefferson Airplane and Charlatans at Longshoremen's Hall. There you see the Tibetan-style flames throughout the poster, something commonly used throughout the era to represent the intensity and awareness of altered consciousness.



*Family Dog First Dance*

And if we want to have no doubt whatsoever of the advent of the psychedelic element in posters, then just move right to the "Can You Pass the Acid Test?" poster by artist Norman

Hartweg, an event on December 18, 1965 held at Muir Beach. The poster is all about LSD, and the poster is unquestionably psychedelic.

My point is that, although "The Seed" serves to mark the advent of the new culture and a different (but still mostly retro) approach to posters, it does not really put the word 'psychedelic' into psychedelic posters. It took a few more months for that to take place.

# Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

## POSTER COLLECTOR FAQs

by Michael Erlewine

### HOW DO I START COLLECTING?

Most people start by collecting posters for their favorite bands and put them on the wall, either tacked up or matted and framed. It could be that poster on the telephone pole you grabbed coming out of a concert. Or, you might just want to browse through a site like this, looking for a great poster with your favorite group on it. Once you get that special poster on the wall and see how much you enjoy it, you may want others. In my case, I found myself taking down some abstract modern art prints (copies, of course) and putting up original concert posters. And I like that better and so do my friends.

### I SEE SOME POSTERS ARE WORTH REAL MONEY. HOW IS THAT?

Music posters started as pure nostalgia, memorabilia from that once-in-a-lifetime concert you took in, something to remember that time. But unlike promotional posters, which are endlessly reprinted, there are only so many original concert posters printed for an event and most of them get torn down and trashed after the show. The ones that remain fall into the hands of fans and later are passed on to collectors. Since there are a limited number of these posters, and that number never increases, their value starts to go up, in particular if it is a favorite artist like Jimi Hendrix or the Grateful Dead.

Nostalgia is only as good as those that can remember. As fans pass away, the posters are no longer pure memorabilia, but become objects that also have a

certain value and are collected. In the last analysis, many of these early rock and roll posters are now considered as representative art of the 20th Century, much like the posters of Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec in France are now rare, much collected, and valuable. The same thing is happening with that old Jimi Hendrix Poster. Some posters are now not only nostalgia, not only art, but are something that has monetary value and are invested in.

### WHAT POSTERS SHOULD I BUY?

As mentioned above, buy poster for bands that you love or with art on them that you want to put on the wall. Buy something fun and affordable. I spent years trying to find various art prints for my home, always to be a little disappointed in what I managed to put up, and they were just reproductions of famous art. Something was missing. But as soon as I started putting up concert posters for my favorite groups, all that was history. Concert posters look great on the wall and made the statement I had been trying to make. So get something that expresses the music you love. If you are looking at posters as investment, read about that below.

### ARE POSTERS A GOOD INVESTMENT?

Posters, at least the early posters for certain bands or certain venues, are very much collected and rising in value. Don't get me wrong. Not every poster that you tear from a telephone pole is going to appreciate in value, at least anytime soon. But a careful investment in posters, just like collectors invest in stamps or coins, is now a pretty safe bet. But remember, an investment in posters is not liquid, like cash. You may

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

have to wait to get your money out of them, should you decide to sell them. But in the meantime, not only can they appreciate in value, but they are also fun to look at and put on the wall.

For many of the posters that are currently collected, we have tried to put approximate prices on our web site. These give you a rough idea on what a mint (perfect) copy of that poster might be worth, but these prices fluctuate, yet over time have on the average increased. If you would like to read more about collecting posters as an investment, check out these two articles.

Article: "Collecting Posters as Investments"

Article: "A Tale of a Poster Investor"

### **WHAT ARE MY OLD POSTERS WORTH?**

Everyone wants to know what the stash of old posters they have under their bed or in their closet is now worth. Posters have sold for \$50,000 and more. It all depends on finding a buyer who wants it that badly. In today's market, many posters have become a commodity that you can invest in. The first step in finding the value of your posters is to have them appraised. We have done our best to list approximate prices for many collectible posters on our web site. This may help some, but remember that a lot depends on the condition of the poster. The prices we list on our site are for MINT (perfect) posters, and most show some wear the moment they are touched by human hands. We also can help you appraise your posters. Email us at [info@ClassicPosters.com](mailto:info@ClassicPosters.com) and place "APPRAISAL" as the subject heading. We will send you more information.

### **HOW DO I SELL MY OLD POSTERS?**

Once you have appraised your posters, so you know what they are worth, you can approach any poster dealer or sell them yourself on a site like [ClassicPosters.com](http://ClassicPosters.com).

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

### **Rick Griffin: Psychedelics, and the Tibetan Tradition**

by Michael Erlewine

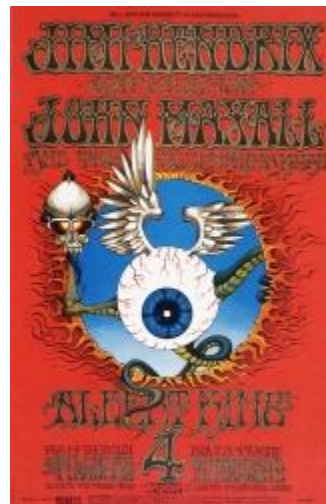
It is a kind of unspoken fact that Rick Griffin is considered the heavyweight when it comes to who put the 'Psychedelic' in psychedelic posters. Every art form has its nadir or point of greatest specific gravity and, when it comes to serious posters, Griffin is pretty much the undisputed king. He is the only poster artist of that era to have spawned a number of essays (here is one now!) trying to figure out what he meant -- what he was all about.

To give you some musical parallels: Every blues lover knows that Robert Johnson is THE heavyweight, when it comes to that genre. There are all kinds of essays on Johnson too, how he sold his soul to the devil, and so on. Some claim that is the reason why he can sing so that the hairs stand up on your neck. With female jazz singers, the heavyweight title usually goes to Billie Holiday. No one has more substance or soul than she does. And most of us know Muhammad Ali is the heavyweight champion of boxing. Pele is the king with soccer, Tiger Woods has a head start on holding the title with golf, and so on. Every art form has its heavyweight.

I even believe that most poster buffs more or less agree that Rick Griffin is the (or one of the) heavyweight(s) when it comes to the substance or meaning of psychedelic posters. Where we are going to run into some real differences is the part where we attempt to say just what it is about Griffin's work that makes it so poignant, seminal, or whatever words we could agree on.

Those of us who have taken acid trips that managed to strip us of our everyday habit of ignoring just about everything that is going on around us will see in the symbolism of Griffin, something we can recognize as of greater moment, not surreal, but more real than everyday reality.

Many say Griffin's special qualities come from his early exposure to the lore and legends of Native Americans. His father, who was an amateur archeologist, often took him on digs -- trips to the American Southwest. I would agree with those that state the Griffin somehow absorbed and was able to express some of what is essential about the Native American spiritual views. It seems correct to me that Griffin's art, at its most poignant, resonates to the words of Carlos Casteneda and the very real magic of his teacher, Don Juan. These two seem to be reading from the same book, but this still does not really explain it. They share a vision that we can but peek at. They both point to the same thing, Rick Griffin and Carlos Casteneda, but what is it that they are pointing at? Perhaps the best-known Griffin piece is BG-105, the Flying Eyeball.

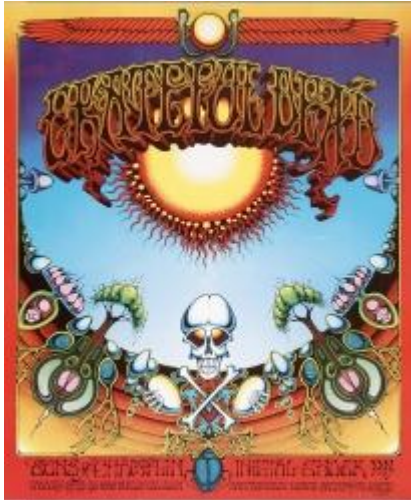


## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

### *The Flying Eyeball*

Of these, the archetype of the Griffin style (for me) is the Axomoxoa. The Axomoxoa contains in one image all the elements that I most associate with Griffin, minus what is probably the image most connected with Griffin, the Flying Eyeball. In fact, BG-105, the Flying Eyeball, may be the single most recognizable poster from that era. While I am not, in any way, dismissing that poster, still, I find the most perfect, the most complete expression of Griffin in the Soundproof Productions poster for the Grateful Dead, that has been nicknamed the Axomoxoa. It is this poster that most perfectly, for me, also expresses the essence of what is compelling in the work of Rick Griffin, not to mention Carlos Castaneda.



*Rick Griffin's 'Axomoxoa'*

The image of the skull and skeletons is an intrinsic part of the psychedelic poster scene and the psychedelic scene, in general. Witness the Grateful Dead, the most popular band (the most in-demand posters) of that era.

It is axiomatic at this point that the psychedelic experience quite often is

pictured as a process of letting go, a symbolic dying to be reborn, letting go of a confining current view and taking a new grip on life. Whole books have been written about this experience.

Griffin's imagery seems to capture that realm beyond everyday life, a kind of eternal present, in which the everlasting nature of the life/death process is forever taking place.

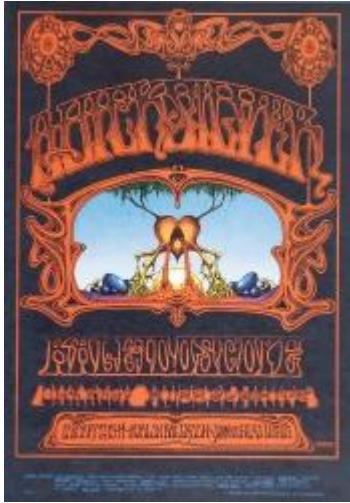
For any readers who have had a profound psychedelic experience, in particular, one involving casting off the bonds of guilt and psychological blinders, the imagery of Griffin is hardly news. It is a reminder of what may well be the most imprinting and powerful experience that we can know, short of permanent realization or true awakening.

What I hope to bring to this discussion is the result of some 35 years of experience with Tibetan Buddhism and its very similar imagery.

I have read and heard from many people who find the Griffin imagery troubling or even frightening. The accent on the skull and death is viewed by some as threatening. Death has a long history as the gatekeeper to the eternal life, the everlasting process of life that Griffin depicts.

1968-01-12 FD-101 Eternal Reservoir, bleeding heart (important in this context)

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More



*The Eternal Reservoir*

We see the same kind of imagery in Tibetan Buddhism, where any number of fierce protectors, with garlands of skulls, protect the essential truth from those who would ignore or degrade it.

In Griffin's Aoxomoxoa, through the veil of death and ignorance, the eternal sun is drawing forth life from the ground. Womb-like images giving birth to living trees. Embryos in wombs with lotus-like flowers are taking in the sun's rays.

Those of you reading this, who have had creative experiences, those who have created music or art (or whatever) that has been fresh enough, good enough to last for some time, know all too well that the best art is not created with a conceptual understanding of what the artist is doing. All too often the artist places as a central motif what he or she themselves don't fully understand.

From deep within, we bring out that which fascinates us, that which will withstand the onslaught of time, and not something we already have listened to or seen a thousand times, from which we have sucked all the sense from. Instead, we place whatever is fresh from

us, that which we too are still trying to grasp or fathom. We place it for all to see, including ourselves, for us to appreciate and figure out as well as the public, together, to enjoy together.

1967-12-26 2.230 Grope for Peace [1258] (a sign of things to come)



*Grove for Peace*

This is what I feel Griffin has done, placed for everyone to see, including himself, what was most essential, what would last the longest. In short, I am certain he was as knocked out by the Aoxomoxoa as we are.

It is documented that Griffin had a strong interest in occult and esoteric studies, in particular the Theosophical Movement of Madame Blavatsky, Annie Besant, and, most of all, C.W. Leadbetter. The Theosophical movement in its totality has often been described as a form of esoteric Buddhism. The use of the word 'esoteric' here is somewhat misleading. The theosophical movement drew its inspiration from Buddhism and most of its leaders had actually journeyed to Tibet or at least to India and that part of the world. They did their best to make

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

sense of the form of Buddhism they found (mostly Tibetan Buddhism), but their take on it was only esoteric, because it was provisional, a first approach. The Theosophists labored to translate what they were learning, what they felt and intuited into something that would be recognizable to a Western audience. In that sense, it was esoteric. In a very real way, the Theosophical movement was Buddhism "Through a glass darkly," as the Bible says.

1969-02-07 Winged Eyeball,  
Soundproof (important in this context)



*The Winged Eyeball*

It was this form of esoteric knowledge that Griffin studied, with all of its conscious symbolism, graphic signs, motifs, and so on. It is a lore of avatars, Eastern adepts, Brothers of the White Lodge, Mahatmas, and so on. And of all the rather heady writers in the movement, none made more practical sense in words than C.W. Leadbetter. It was he whom Griffin is reported to have most studied. The Theosophical movement and writings are one of the mainstays of Western occultism in the early 20th Century. I say this with some experience. I served as vice-president of the Michigan Theosophists in the early '70s and have gone on to study Tibetan Buddhism, in practice, over the last 30 years or so. I can say that the Theosophists could but guess at and

attempt to fathom the centuries-old ideas of Tibetan Buddhism. It has been said that it takes Buddhism something like 300 years to come into a county. Well, Blavatsky was just making contact at that point. We are maybe a century into the process in North America, and Buddhism is still just beginning to be understood.

In the mid '70s, the Karmapa who, like the Dalai Lama, is the leader of an entire (but separate) lineage of Tibetan Buddhism traveled to the Southwest to meet with the leaders of the Hopi Nation. The Hopis' had a legend that one day men with red hats would come (the Tibetan lamas wore red hats), who would be their true brothers. The Hopis believed these men in red hats were the Tibetan lamas who came. And it is said by the Hopi, that these lamas created a rainstorm in the middle of an extensive period of drought. They had a kind of reunion.

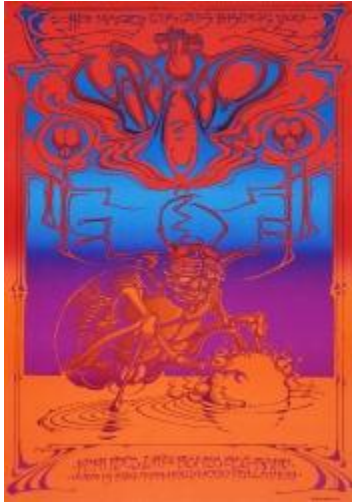
It seems that the Hopis and the Tibetans found they had a lot in common, that they shared a common vision. And I am not saying, simply, that Rick Griffin was reaching for the concepts of Tibetan Buddhism or those of the Native Americans he had studied. What I am saying is that both these groups have something in common with the psychedelic experience, a belief and (and they would say) a knowledge that death and, particularly, the fear of death, is something that blinds us from a truer reality. And that by overcoming that fear, by somehow (even temporarily) dying to it, there is an extraordinary reality to be known. It is this realization, this extraordinary reality that Griffin, the Theosophists, the Native Americans, and the Tibetan Buddhist all point to in

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

their traditions. This same experience is integral to the psychedelic experience for many. This is what they share in common and it is this landscape we see in posters like the Aoxomoxoa.

1969-06-13 Who Poco ( (important in this context, but different)



*Who/Poco*

My point is that Rick Griffin not only had an solid introduction to the folklore and imagery of the Native Americans of the Southwest, but also a strong dose of metaphysics, in the form of Theosophical ideas, a potent combination. More important than either of these influences is the fact that Griffin obviously had a strong psychedelic experience and a penchant for religion. Witness his re-conversion experience to Christianity later in life.

Griffin seems to have had a very strong psychedelic experience, complete with visions into extraordinary reality. He attempted to make sense of it and conceptualize it through means like his Theosophical studies. Unfortunately, the fabric of that organization was not sufficiently developed to contain his entire experience. It is my view that

when he was not able to contain his experience within this theoretical framework, and when this esoteric construct failed him, he reverted to his native Christianity in an attempt to find a framework or base that was more stable. While Christianity did not support the psychedelic signatures he had developed, it did provide a solid framework within which to live and raise a family. I say this because there were no more Aoxomoxoas after his conversion. That psychedelic element, the Native American motifs and the strong psychedelic vision are absent or are watered down or even made humorous in later works. We still have the flying eyeballs, but they have become little comic characters. No more do we find the stark Castaneda-like landscapes that we see in the Aoxomoxoa posters and the Flying Eyeball. I am not complaining; just trying to understand how it might have went down.

We can agree that there is something special about the prose of Carlos Castaneda, the songs of Robert Johnson, Billie Holiday, or Bob Dylan, for that matter. The same is true for those classic Griffin psychedelic posters. Our interest in them is something more than just a tribute to their persons. It is something that points beyond any person to a common reality that we all share, whether we realize it or not. Posters like Griffin's, songs like Holiday's and Dylan's help to point out or remind us of this inner or sacred landscape. These artists help us to, for a moment, pause from our ingrained habit of ignoring this part of ourselves and somehow focus beyond our normal patterns of ignorance to something more



## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

permanent, call it an inner landscape,  
whatever.

Those few great psychedelic posters of  
Rick Griffin remains as landmarks in the  
landscape of the '60s.



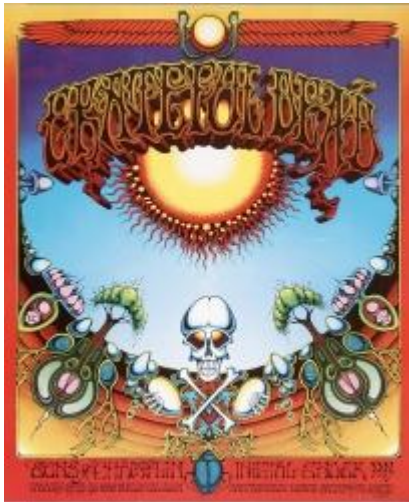
*Hawaiian Aoxomoxo*

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

### Rick Griffin's AOXOMOXOA

by Michael Erlewine

If there is one artist who put the psychedelic in the psychedelic era, in my opinion that artist is Rick Griffin. And if there is a single poster of Griffin's that best sums up his psychedelic statement, it has to be this one, which has been nicknamed the "AOXOMOXOA." Griffin's flying eyeball (BG-105) may be the most universally recognized of all the psychedelic era posters, but the AOXOMOXOA most perfectly represents what that era was all about.



*Rick Griffin's AOXOMOXOA*

The word "AOXOMOXOA," is a double palindrome, meaning not only does it read the same forward and backward, but also each letter in the word is also reversible, and when flipped horizontally also reads the same either way. As the story goes, "AOXOMOXOA," was an idea given to Rick Griffin by Grateful Dead lyricist Robert Hunter, when Griffin phoned him up and asked him for a possible title for the new Grateful Dead album cover Griffin was working on. Hunter suggested that he put a lot of the palindromes that Griffin had been

playing with (words like 'mom,' etc.,) together to form a larger word.

Dead Heads have speculated as to the possible meaning of the word, with thoughts like the "AO" means "Alpha and Omega," the sacred seed syllable "OM" is in the center, "X" is a mysterious number to be solved for, and so on. Others have speculated that this is an Aztec or Mayan word. Beyond the word is the actual imagery created by Rick Griffin.

Griffin's incredible sun (an egg surrounded by sperm wriggling to get in), burning in a clear blue sky, endlessly radiating light and warmth above, warming the earth below, where the most dark womb of the earth receives that light and (also endlessly) brings forth life. Here is the mystery of life and death drawn out in psychedelic imagery worthy of Carlos Castaneda and the mysterious world of Don Juan. This poster has an immediate and a lasting impact on our consciousness. For me, it is unique in the world of psychedelic posters and is the single most important graphic from that era.

And if these incredible graphics don't speak for themselves, Griffin thought to literally spell it out for us in the very type on the poster itself, the name: Grateful Dead. If you cover the lower two-thirds portion of the name "Grateful Dead," the very top third spells out for all of us the very truth of that time, the very essence of the psychedelic experience. It clearly says "We Ate The Acid," and that says it all. We ate the acid and it changed our life and set the tone for a generation.

### The Hawaiian AOXOMOXOA

Called the "Hawaiian AOXOMOXOA," this is a poster for a show that never

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

took place. Rick Griffin hand carried 25 back from Hawaii himself on the plane. The printer destroyed all the other copies because he was never paid for the gig. Of the 25 that were salvaged, there were four printer's proofs, three on the same stock as the posters and one on a slightly different stock. These 25 were the only originals of this most classic poster. There have been two reprints, one that is smaller.



*The Hawaiian AOXOMOXOA*

The AOXOMOXOA for the Grateful Dead Avalon show on January 24, 1969 is considered by many collectors (including myself) to be the quintessential statement of psychedelic art. This Hawaiian show is the only other Griffin poster that reflects the same Carlos-Castaneda-style psychedelic landscape and sun, first seen in the poster for the 1969 Avalon show and later on the Grateful Dead album "AOXOMOXOA," released in June of 1969. Although elements of what can be seen in the AOXOMOXOA posters can be found in other griffin works, these two posters are his only work with a fully developed sun and surrounding landscape.

The Hawaiian Aoxomoxa is one of a few (and perhaps tops that list) of the most coveted and rare psychedelic posters. One poster collector that I know, a man who personally assembled the largest collection of rare psychedelic posters in existence, is reputed to have the Hawaiian AOXOMOXOA framed and showcased above his mantle. This can be said to be a quintessential piece.

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

### Sex, Rock, & Optical Illusions, Victor Moscoso, Master of Psychedelic Posters & Comix

A book by Victor Moscoso

Reviewed by Michael Erlewine

Printed on a Xerox Docucolor 12 copier, from paper masters, gathered sewn, and bound by Victor Moscoso.

Preface by Milton Glaser

Introduction by Steven Heller

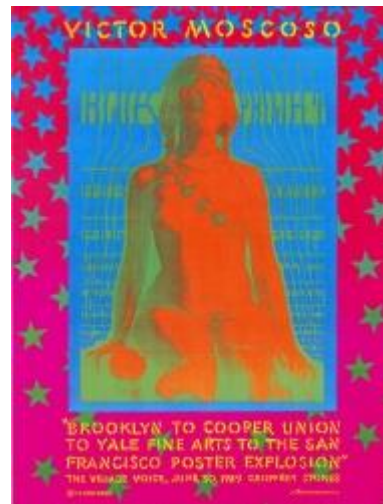
8-1/8 x 10-5/8"

143 pages



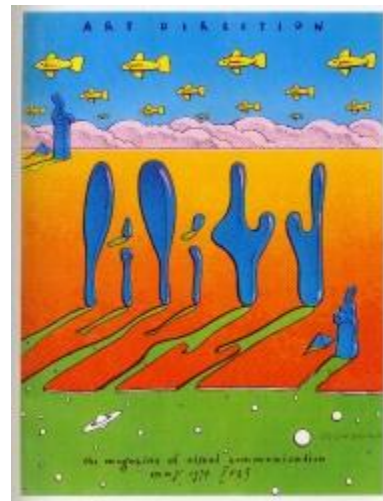
*Cover of Moscoso Book*

This book was designed, printed, put together, and published by Victor Moscoso. This first limited edition of 24 copies was available for \$1000 each, personally numbered and signed by the artist. Being a huge fan of Moscoso, I just had to put my money down on a copy, and in advance. I must confess that there were questions in my mind what it would be like, so for those of you who may never see a copy, I am writing this.



*Back Cover Moscoso Book*

The book is well done and in full color. It has a varnished cover and is sewn and glued. While the color is not as good as if it were offset-printed, it is quite adequate, in particular since quite a lot of the book contains drawings and rough sketches. What is in it?



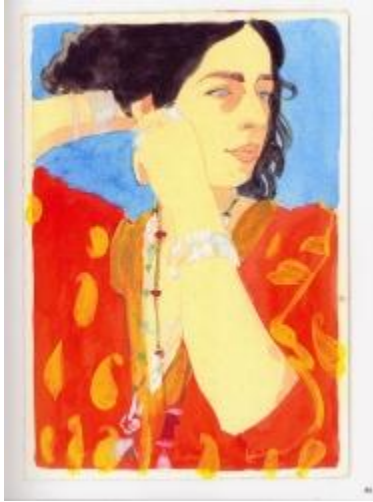
*Lettering from Moscoso Book*

You will find most of the major Moscoso images in the book, such as those he did for the Family Dog and the Neon Rose series, plus a lot I had never seen before. In some cases, like the "Man with the Spiral Eyes," FD-38 (Family Dog Series), pages of preliminary

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

sketches are reproduced, to great effect. There is considerable attention given to Moscoso's comix, both in single frames and running strips.



*Portrait of the Artist's Wife*

In addition are paintings, abstract art, innovative lettering, collage, and what-not - most things I have never seen. As an archivist I was pleasantly surprised to find a complete annotated list of each image in the back of the book, complete with dates, sized, printing info, and so on. That is unusual.



*Summer of Love, Memorabilia Auction 1997*

It is obvious, this is a special book. I applaud Moscoso for making himself, the book we should have made for him. He has a sense of humor, that is for sure. It is certain these books, in such a limited edition, will be much collected.

# Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

## **The Grande Ballroom**

By Michael Erlewine

### **The Beginnings**

San Francisco was where the 1960's dance-hall culture budded and bloomed, but it was not the only area of the country where the alternative ("hippie") culture flowered. While New York City (surprisingly!) never really got with it, there were major dance-halls and alternative culture scenes in both Texas and Detroit. After San Francisco, the next big scene to take root was in Detroit, with the advent of the Grande Ballroom and its owner Russ Gibb.

Russ Gibb, who was raised in the Detroit area, came up listening to pop music, but also was exposed to race music and began attending concerts at places like the Paradise Theater and the Graystone Ballroom in Detroit in the late 1940s. It was here that he heard acts like Moms Mabley, Ivory Joe Hunter, and Count Basie.

Russ Gibb:

"I remember, that Nellie Lutcher was the first black artist that I think, in my mind, crossed over to White radio...and Ivory Joe Hunter and Ed MacKenzie were playing. Ed was known as 'Jack the Bellboy' back then. Nellie Lutcher had records called, "Hurry On Down to My House" and "Fine Brown Frame," and that was really one of the first black artists that I heard on what we called regular radio, on pop radio."

Gibb was an elementary-school teacher, working in Howell, Michigan, a very conservative school district northwest of Detroit. In fact, so conservative was it that no dancing was allowed in the school, and all teachers had written into

their contracts that they were to drive 20 miles from Howell to take a drink and must attend church at least twice a week! Gibb, who had witnessed the success of teen-age sock hops in Detroit by DJs like Robin Seymour of Keener (WKNR) radio, thought he would try his hand at it putting on some dances.

Russ Gibb:

" So, I said I'll rent the ...I want to call it the Elks Club on Michigan and Grand River Avenue. It may have been the VFW. I can't remember. But I rented it and I put on a dance up there on a Saturday, and I made more money than I made in two weeks of teaching."

This was in the mid-to-late 1950s. Soon Russ Gibb was active as a radio DJ for WKNR on Sundays, and doing record hops ("Sock Hops") on Fridays or Saturday nights. The sock hops really made money, and before long Gibb had teamed up with Keener-DJ Gary Stevens and rented a UAW hall on Van Born Road in Detroit. They called the club the "Pink Pussycat, and it was open every Friday and Saturday night." They did not have a live band. Aside from Gary Stevens as DJ, the club featured whatever recording artists were in town that week, who would drop by and lip-synch to their records. So by the time the 1960s rolled around, Russ Gibb was very familiar with running dances, and appreciated the extra income. His teaching job paid something like \$2200 a year.

### **The Trip to San Francisco**

In the late summer of 1966, Russ Gibb flew out to San Francisco to attend the wedding of his old friend Jim Dunbar, a radio announcer who went on to be

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

enshrined in the Radio Hall of Fame. Dunbar was already an important figure in the Bay Area and had hosted Bill Graham as a guest on his show. Graham, who valued the publicity and was courting Dunbar, saw to it that the radio host had plenty of complimentary tickets to the Fillmore Auditorium.

Dunbar decided to use some of those tickets and take his old friend Russ Gibb with him to the event. And Bill Graham, who wanted to impress Dunbar, gave them the royal tour, personally escorting them everywhere, both out front and behind the stage. Russ Gibb, coming from the 1950s-style sock hops of Detroit, was blown away by the whole scene. From the moment he walked into the Fillmore and experienced his first light show, Gibb was smitten. This was something else!

With the wheels of Russ Gibb's mind already turning, he began to ask Graham all kinds of questions about how this kind of setup worked. Bill Graham's first question to Russ Gibb was: "Where are you from?" When Gibb said, "Detroit," Graham asked him "How far away is that?" "Oh, about 2500 miles," said Gibb. Only then, did Bill Graham agree to answer his questions and show him some of the inner working of the dance-hall venue. Russ Gibb clearly remembers seeing the equipment of the Byrds being loaded or unloaded backstage, and registered the odd spelling of the group's name. This places his night at the Fillmore to be September 16, 1966, since that was the first time the Byrds had played there.

### **Back in Detroit**

Russ Gibb, who was taking all this in, was already converted, and was making

plans in his mind to implement this kind of scene back home. In fact he no sooner got back to Detroit, than he set about looking for a building where he could create his own version of what he had seen and experienced at the Fillmore, the light show, the posters, the new-style music -- the works. The older ballroom scene in Detroit had just about faded, with many venues closed, and the few big bands still left being reduced to playing at places like the Edgewater Amusement Park.

Gibb looked at several venues and finally settled on the Grande Ballroom, a dance hall/ballroom used since the 1940's for everything from your standard ballroom dancing, to a roller rink, and even by Detroit DJ Frantic Ernie Durham. In 1966, it was standing idle, and had been closed for some time, filled with old mattresses. Gibb sought out the landlord, managed to pull together the \$700 it would take to rent it on an ongoing basis, and set about cleaning it up. In 1966, \$700 was still a nice bit of change. The only painting that was done was to paint the walls white on either side of the stage, so the lightshow would have something to project on. The rest was just cleaning out the place. But finding the Grande was only part of the solution. Russ Gibb knew next to nothing about the hippie scene, the music, art, and the alternative culture that he had experienced at the Fillmore in San Francisco.

He knew that his patrons would be college-age kids, but the crowd at the Fillmore was anything but conservative, so Gibb headed on down to Wayne State University and to the alternative-press tabloid, the Fifth Estate. It was

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

through this contact that he first met John Sinclair. From that point onward, he was in good hands. Sinclair was already a local guru of alternative everything and more than happy to help out.

Sinclair soon took Gibb to see a local band he was considering managing, the MC5, at the Wayne Civic Center. Gibb says the group were all dressed in suits, and looked like The Beatles. Sinclair would soon rectify that. The MC5 became pretty much the house band at the Grande and John Sinclair the resident master of the hip scene. In an interview I did with Gibb, he went on and on about how grateful he was to Sinclair, for helping the Grande Ballroom to be 'cool'. While Russ Gibb handled the concessions and the books, Sinclair, who was never paid for his work (he got his band book there pretty much steadily), was glad to take over the creative ambiance for the Grande, including the light show, the booking of local bands, the atmosphere, and, of course, the posters. It was Sinclair who introduced Gibb to Rob Tyner, whose high-school friend Gary Grimshaw just happened to be visiting. And it was Grimshaw who would do that first poster, with almost no notice, turning it around literally overnight.

According to Russ Gibb, it was about three weeks from when he saw the Byrds in San Francisco (September 16, 1966) and had some sort of epiphany at the Fillmore Auditorium, to when the Grande opened on October 7th. That is some fast footwork. It took a few more weeks before the specially ordered Strobe light arrived from California, but the place was already growing by then.

And it is pretty remarkable that a Detroit schoolteacher, who put on local sock hops, and had not dropped LSD or smoked a single joint (never has since, either) could take in that whole 1960's scene in San Francisco and come back and do a solid rendition of it in straight Detroit in something like three weeks. Even with John Sinclair's help, this is no mean feat. And its trajectory was not to be without bumps.

### **Posters, Handbills, and Cards**

Although Gibb started with full-sized posters, after a few weeks it was clear that although posters worked fine on the streets of San Francisco, the same was not true for Detroit. It was not just that they were expensive; it was hard to find places to post them, and what places there were did not attract the kind of clientele the Grande was aiming for. Gibb was looking for the youth, college kids, and the alternative scene in general. Posters were soon supplemented and eventually pretty much eclipsed by handbills, and later still, by postcards.

After the first three posters, Gibb switched to handbills, punctuated by the occasional poster. Then, almost a year after the Grande opened, the handbills gave way to postcards. From that time forward (September of 1967), there were almost always cards, with the occasional poster, and the very occasional handbill. In time, the cards pretty much dominated and it was not only because they were less expensive to produce. The key to the cards was that they reached the audience the Grande wanted to reach, the youth. It was easy for Russ Gibb to give school kids and volunteers a big fistful of postcards and a free pass to the Grande



## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

for that event and have them go and hand out the cards to the right people, whether in the schools or on the street. And this seemed to actually work. While there was no 'right' place for the posters and not even enough places for the handbills, passing out cards on a one-to-one basis and in the schools seemed to bring in the crowds.

Yet, no matter how hard they tried, the Grande had trouble rising above the just-paying-your-bills level. While the local scene was active and dedicated, it was still too small to break through the threshold of break-even. What to do?

### **National Acts**

Russ Gibb decided to take a risk and reach out for some national acts. He stopped booking only local acts such as the MC5, the Rationals, the Prime Movers, and began to book national acts like Cream, the Fugs, the Grateful Dead, Jimi Hendrix, and so on. This began in late June of 1967, just as the 'Summer of Love' was taking off, when the "Jefferson Airplane" was booked into the larger Ford Auditorium in Detroit. As luck would have it, the 'Airplane' gained some real national attention between the time it was booked and the date of the performance. They got full press coverage and the whole thing just worked. People came and money was made. The Grande was transitioning to another level.

The advent of national acts, meant that local headliners like the MC5 were relegated to just opening the show, and this was at first viewed as a demotion. But the truth was that there was nothing these local groups would have rather done than to play on the same stage with their idols, groups like Jimi Hendrix,

Cream, the Grateful Dead, and others, so it was soon cool with everyone. With the addition of national headliners, the Grande Ballroom reached a new and more lucrative level.

### **The Poster Artists**

What the addition of extra cash meant for the graphic artists was the more-frequent return of the full-sized poster, and work for some of the main artists, in particular Gary Grimshaw. By the end of the summer of 1967, Grimshaw was once again at the artistic helm and producing significant work for the Grande. Grimshaw's Grande work is stunning, and there is no question that he set the poster standard for this venue. Please see the section of Grimshaw for more detail.

Although Gary Grimshaw is considered the primary artist, when the Grande is discussed, he is by no means the only artist that produced significant work for that venue. Carl Lundgren and Donnie Dope (AKA Don Forsyth) both made major contributions to the venue and each took over as the major Grande artist at different times in its history.

Although Lundgren plays it down, collectors never cease to marvel at the magnificent "Vanessa" poster. It is both very large and very striking, and while originals are hard to come by, the reprint is generally still available. The same goes for the Jeff Beck (1968-11-01) and the Jefferson Airplane (1968-11-21) cards, both of which have been reprinted as full posters. These are stunning pieces and there are a lot of others as well.

Don Forsyth, today going under the name 'Max Elbow', and known in the Grande years as 'Donnie Dope' has also

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

provided significant work for the venue, perhaps most noted for the Canned Heat Blues Band postcard (1968-12-06), which collectors still wish would be reissued as a full poster.

By the early 1970s, much of the dancehall scene had declined and vanished, with the Family Dog leading the way in the end of 1968. The Grande Ballroom kind of sputtered out early in 1970, while the Fillmore series struggled on until the spring of 1972. An era had ended.

As someone who was there at the beginning, with our band, the Prime Movers Blues Band, on a number of posters, and having been there many more times, just jamming or hanging out, the Grande was to us what the Avalon Ballroom and Fillmore were for San Francisco. And it was not a just a poor imitation, thanks to the resolve of Russ Gibb, the 'hip ness' of John Sinclair and others, and the sheer youth and need for some space like this on the part of the rest of us. Detroit was no San Francisco, which makes it all the more remarkable that the Grande Ballroom was as free spirited and wonderful as it was. But pot and LSD, which most of us had partaken of, was pretty much the same, and the psychedelic vision was the same from coast to coast. The Grande was plenty hip and the place to be in the Midwest in those years.

And much of the poster art holds up as well. No less of a poster-art expert than Eric King states in his guide that the Grande art rivals the best work of the major San Francisco artists, and deserves to be considered in the same league. Posters like Gary Grimshaw's first 'Cream' poster and Lundgren's beautiful "Vanessa" are lasting

examples of the posters of that entire era.

### **The Grande Collectables**

The Grande material, which was never printed in large quantities (often 1000 or less), has a solid following among collectors, who continue to seek it out. Since the cards were the mainstay of the venue and exist in larger quantities (and are less expensive), they remain the most popular. The set of 81 'main' cards is still pretty much attainable, with a couple of difficult ones, and one more-or-less impossible card, the "Who/Toronto."

As for how many items exist to collect in the Grande series, there is not complete agreement. Collectors argue and agree to argue about what should or should not be included as part of this venue. And there is the fact that the venue kind of petered out, with a few shows being held under that name, but not by Russ Gibb, and so on. And then some shows were held years later, etc. You get the idea. Eric King, the generally acknowledged expert on this venue, includes a variety of events that are Russ Gibb related or loosely attached to the Grande or to that whole scene in his valuable guide to this venue. (See: Eric King Guide)

But to put you in the ballpark, there are approximately 47 posters, 51 handbills, and something like 101 collectable cards. The posters and cards are vigorously collected, because of their art and primarily because most are in color. The handbills are almost an acquired taste. There are a quite a lot of them, what are for the most part monochromatic, and the majority of them are not very artistically interesting.

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

And they have not survived in appreciable quantities, a few as a single copy. Still, for those who develop a taste for them, they can be addicting, and a fierce ongoing interest in them survives among a small group of collectors.

The posters are very collectable and many are stunning, in particular those of artist Gary Grimshaw. Many collectors feel that this is Grimshaw's finest work. For my money, I prefer his 1970's period, but who cares. I enjoy and collect them both.

The set of 81 cards, which is commonly considered the main set for the Grande, includes the Southbound Freeway gig on September 22/24, 1967 as #1 (the "Shiva" card) to #81, which is the "Frost" on a date for August 6/7, 1969. Many of these cards are often available on this site. Hard ones to find include the #7 card (MC5/Gold) and, of course, the near impossible "Who/Toronto."

### **Grande Free Pass**

The "Good for One Free Trip at the Grande" pass has more than passing meaning. It was the key to distributing the Grande postcards on the street and in schools. Volunteers, mostly high-school-aged kids, would get a stack of cards to pass out, plus a free pass to the Grande for themselves. Russ Gibb, who ran the Grande Ballroom, says that this was the ticket, so to speak, to bring in the crowds. While posters in Detroit did not have the effect that posters in San Francisco had, and handbills were only somewhat better, the cards turned out to actually work best. These cards are quite rare.

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

### The Poster Style of Gary Grimshaw

by Michael Erlewine

Gary Grimshaw is probably the first non-West Coast artist to join the ranks of the major psychedelic artists like Wes Wilson and Rick Griffin. Although Grimshaw now lives in the Bay Area and has, over the years, spent considerable time there, he is first and foremost a Michigan artist. For the most part, Grimshaw's finest work was done for venues in the Midwest, in Michigan and sometimes Ohio.

And here is a working artist, in the finest sense of the word. Coming from a family of draftsman, illustrators, and printers, Grimshaw was immersed in colors and form from an early age. And while his poster work can be divided into several distinct periods, we should not forget that Grimshaw also produced an almost endless variety of flyers, advertisement, handbills, and what-have-you for the alternative community. I am not aware of any artist in psychedelic era that has produced more work than Gary Grimshaw. Randy Tuten is the only one in contention.

While some of the San Francisco artists were lucky enough to fall into the pretty lucrative market for psychedelia on the West Coast, such was not the case in the Midwest. Payment for poster art in the Detroit area was very low, \$75 being the most Grimshaw made at the peak of his Grande Ballroom work. And, in Detroit -- the motor city -- posters were not that effective and soon gave way to radio ads, relegating much of the printed work to handbills and cards. At the end of the Grande run there were very few posters, mostly just cards.

An artist, like Grimshaw, had to turn elsewhere to make a living with his art. Hard for Grimshaw, but lucky for poster lovers, he broadcast his skills through dozens of venues, with hundreds of handbills and flyers, with art not just for music events, but for whatever was needed by the counterculture. In a true sense, his art served the community in which he lived.

Grimshaw's style is easy to recognize. Unlike many of his contemporaries, he does not fill up every last bit of paper with content, but leaves plenty of space around his design elements. Sometimes this is achieved by having no detail on the border of the poster -- leaving it blank. At other times, he will place a frame around the edge of the poster, fill the frame with color, and float his design elements within that color pool. Grimshaw does not often use elaborate decoration. Instead, his decorative elements tend to be simple and fluid, sometimes almost gestures. He, like poster artist Bob Fried, is a master of understatement, and his posters, in general, have a calming, rather than an inciting, effect on the mind. And his work wears well on the wall.

Grimshaw's treatment of type is also somewhat unusual. While many '60s artists morph the type to fill the space, Grimshaw tends to float his type in plenty of space, as he would any other design element. Where there is more than a little text (many bands on one gig), he sometimes makes a simple paragraph-like block of text and then reduces the size of the type, with the headlines larger and the opening acts progressively smaller, like a chart at the eye doctor. He treats this whole

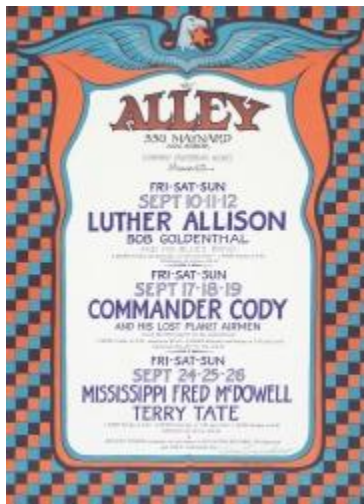
## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

paragraph block as a design element. It works well.



*Detroit Rock and Roll Revival*

In fact, it would be fair to say that Grimshaw has taken the traditional marquee-style poster format (not much used in psychedelic posters) and raised it to another level. Examples of this would be the Detroit Rock and Roll Revival, the Mt. Clemens Pop Festival, and the posters he did for The Alley, among others. This effect is very satisfying.



*Poster for 'The Alley'*

Grimshaw's sense of color and space is profound, and he often devotes large areas of his posters to a single area of color. A good example of his sense of color, his spacious use of that color, and his fluid, but simple, decorative motifs is the poster for Curtis Mayfield at Grand Valley Field House. Posters don't get much better than this. Sure, this poster served a purpose, but what you have here, first and foremost, is a fine piece of art or, as time will prove, a piece of fine art.



*Curtis Mayfield*

Gary Grimshaw did not produce many posters for the San Francisco venues. He served the Midwest, and it has taken some time for him to be granted equal status with the major West Coast artists. But he has that status now. Further, there are elements to his work that are only now beginning to be valued and recognized. Grimshaw's love for and dedication to the community and times in which he lived brings to his work a special quality that has its own unique signature, one that, in this critic's opinion, is only now beginning to be appreciated.

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

A few years ago, I managed to dig up from my basement an original copy of Grimshaw's first poster, nicknamed "The Seagull." There it had sat ever since the day in October of 1966, when it was first used at the Grande Ballroom. I had all but forgotten about it for some 30 years. It has the same punch today as when I first viewed it. Originals are very tough to come across, but a reprint is available.



*The Seagull -- Grimshaw's First Poster*

Grimshaw's third poster for the Grande Ballroom, nicknamed the "Zebaman." Now, this poster is good sized, measuring something like 17.5x2.5, but it seems, in person, larger than that. It is very striking. The image came from a Time Magazine cover and was first used by Alton Kelley and Stanley Mouse for FD-28 of the Family Dog series, something like a month earlier. This is a sentimental favorite for me, because I played at that gig and my band, The Prime Movers Blues Band, is on the poster. Nostalgia aside, this is a powerful poster when seen on the wall.



*The Zebaman*

The 5th poster in the Grande Ballroom series, nicknamed the "Woman with Hair," this large (and rare) poster is more in the West Coast tradition, with a kind of Native American or Eskimo sensibility. The soft earth tones make this a very elegant wall piece. It has never been reprinted and is almost impossible to find.



*Woman with Hair*

The 8th poster in the Grande Ballroom series, nicknamed the "Light Bulb," is a gig for the Ann Arbor Group, The Rationals, among others. It is a large piece (17x22) and the colors are soft

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

and very rich. Gorgeous is a fair word for what this poster is. Like many of the early Grande posters, this poster has never been reprinted, but deserves to be. Grimshaw's gentle sense for color and space is already apparent.



*The Lightbulb*

Called "Mind Zap," this is the 12th poster in the Grande Ballroom series. Grimshaw's non-frenetic sense of form and color are clearly apparent. While this is clearly of the psychedelic variety, you will notice that it is not cramped or tight feeling. Instead, a sense of space, something Grimshaw will use more as time goes on, calms the mind.



### *Mind Zap*

Here is a quality of Grimshaw's that separates him from many of the psychedelic artists, the fact that his posters, rather than excite or incite, tend to be calming. They have a sense of space that calms, rather than excites, the mind.

A lovely handbill for the MC5 and the Spike Drivers at the See, a venue in the Detroit area. Although somewhat in the style of many West Coast posters, the cool colors and expansiveness -- the sense of space -- makes this poster very attractive.



*The See*

One of Grimshaw's more popular posters for a classic group, Cream. This is available in reprint; the originals are very hard to find. The characteristic subtle Grimshaw colors are there. Note the sense of space created by the open border, surrounding the central image.

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More



*The Cream*

A classic Grimshaw poster, the 30th in the Grande Ballroom series, is very hard to find and never been reprinted. Once again, as in many Grimshaw posters, there is a sense of spaciousness, mostly achieved by placing the central image in a field of red. Although perhaps not obvious from this thumbnail, this is a very effective and lovely poster. The colors are superb.



*John Mayall*

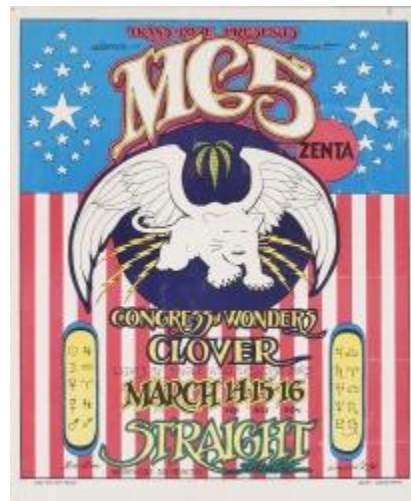
One of the most popular Grimshaw pieces with the public, this is the 31st poster in the Grande Ballroom series, a gig for the Jimi Hendrix Experience in

Toronto. While originals are scarce, the reprint is readily available.



*Jimi Hendrix in Toronto*

A classic poster, created by Grimshaw for the Straight Theater in San Francisco for his close friends, the MC5. Lucky for us, a reprint is available, since the originals are practically impossible to discover. Grimshaw seems to have a special style for posters dealing with the MC5 or John Sinclair. This is an example of that style.



*MC5 at the Straight Theater*

Grimshaw uses type as a graphic, as did many of the psychedelic artists, but



## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

with a twist. Grimshaw often makes no attempt to disguise the type as anything but a square block of lettering. Nevertheless, by varying the size and fluidity of the lettering, he manages to achieve a graphic effect. The elements of most Grimshaw designs are set in an expanse of color and space.



*Mt. Clemens Pop Festival*

Due to its overall darkness, this large poster does not really show well as a thumbnail. Using nothing but type as design elements, you might think this would be boring. Not the case. This is an extremely successful poster, one best seen in person.

An example of Grimshaw's dedicated work to free John Sinclair, who was given a 10-year prison sentence for possessing two joints. This is a lovely piece.



*Free John Now!*

Grimshaw did several posters for the Alley (formerly the Canterbury House) in Ann Arbor, using this marquee format and this design, changing only the venues. Not easy to find, these are great posters on the wall.



*Poster for 'The Alley'*

This is one of the classic posters in the UAC/Daystar series. Don't be misled by its simplicity. This large poster is an example of a style that is pretty much unique to Grimshaw. Just look at the space! Instead of filling in every square inch of poster, Grimshaw floats the

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

lettering and the photo image. This piece just continues to grow on you.



*UAC/Daystar with John Lee Hooker*

Another classic UAC/Daystar piece from Grimshaw, a concert with B.B. King and Howlin' Wolf at Hill Auditorium. The colors are rich and, like many in this series, there is the sense of spaciousness and rich colors.



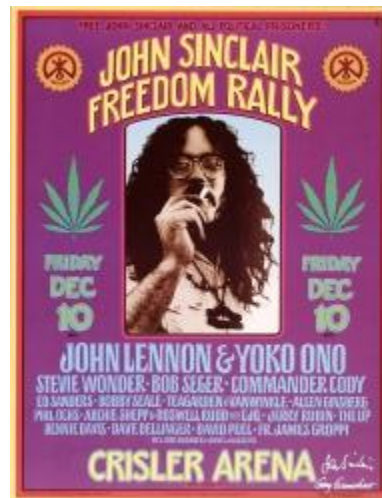
*B.B. King and Howlin' Wolf*

What a great poster -- Simple, elegant, cosmic! Once again, Grimshaw dares to be uncluttered.



*Quicksilver at the Ohio Theater*

This poster is a great piece of art and also an historic document.

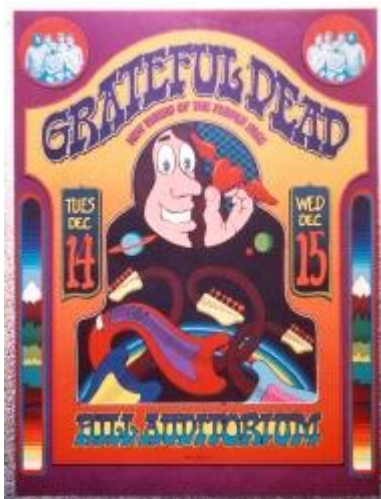


*John Sinclair Freedom Rally*

And just to close this brief section, here is a Grimshaw poster that he did for the Grateful Dead at Hill Auditorium.

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---



*Grateful Dead at Hill Auditorium*

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

### Wes Wilson Images for Classic Posters

by Michael Erlewine

When I thought of creating Classic Posters, one of the first artists I approached to do a treatment for the site was Wes Wilson, generally acknowledged as the father of psychedelic posters. Somehow it made sense to ask Wilson, since he helped to start it all, and I liked the idea of the whole thing coming full circle and back to him. He was very gracious in accepting and I asked him to come up with some ideas for an image.



The first image he sent was this one, with "Classic Posters" in his no-famous style and a picture of an aging hippie. Wilson said it reminded him of his friend Chet Helms.



This was soon followed by an equally interesting one, with the face of a woman. Everyone like the woman, because Wilson is famous for his wonderful treatment of women in his whole run of Fillmore posters. He told me he wanted to do some more work on the woman's face, and pretty soon this showed up.



We all loved it, and Wes Wilson set about to finish the sketch and put color

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

to it. The finished piece is included below. This was the 'seed" and part of the vision that helped fuel this project. As it turned out, when we went to the web, it was not convenient for the web builders to use such a large image, because we needed all kinds of navigation buttons and what not. I wanted to show this sketch in full, and will use it around the site, wherever we can. I want to thank Wes Wilson for helping us out and for doing all that he has done for the poster community. Thanks Wes!



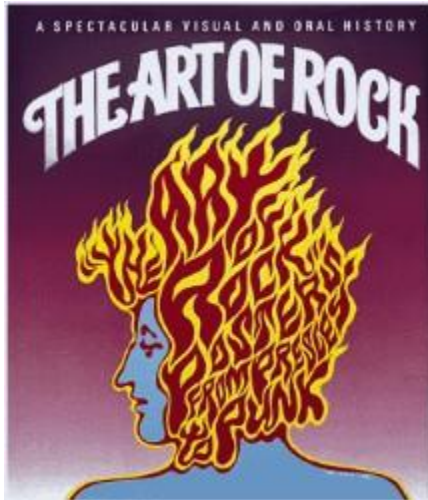
## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

### The "Art of Rock" by Paul Grushkin

by Michael Erlewine

Most fields have at least one indispensable book, something that every collector has to own. If there is an indispensable book for the concert-music-poster collector, than it has to be the "The Art of Rock," by Paul Grushkin. The fact that there is no other book remotely similar makes this true by default. But even if there were many competitive books, I cannot imagine there being a better book, more information in a single volume about rock posters, their history and culture, and the whole collecting scene, in general. Period. This is the Muhammad Ali of poster books, the one and the only, so far.



*The Art of Rock by Paul Grushkin*

Well-known author Paul Grushkin has some thirty years of experience working with posters, including a stint as archivist for Bill Graham Presents, and many years working with Winterland Productions. He was a founding director of the Bay Area Music Archives and the Museum of Rock and Roll in San Francisco.

From my viewpoint, Grushkin's approach is outstanding for two main reasons, the first is posters, posters, and more images of posters -- over 1500 in all. And second is his liberal use of the interview style, real-life quotes and articles from the actual people who made the history themselves. This makes the book so much more than just one author's viewpoint. The majority of the text is in the words of the individuals who created all this, the artist, promoters, printers, collectors -- just about anyone of importance who was on the scene at the time. What there is of the author's commentary serves to knit all the interviews together, enhancing what is presented.

And the book is massive, a very much oversized volume (11 x 13 inches) of over 500 pages. It weighs a ton. The publishing of this book single-handedly transformed the world of rock posters and poster collecting. It shows clearly what great pieces of art rock posters are. Far more than just pieces of nostalgia, Grushkin's book points out that rock concert posters are not only important historical documents, but valuable and collectable pieces of art.

The book manages to cover everything from the boxing-style posters from the 1950s all the way up through the punk and new-wave posters of the late 1980s. Paul Grushkin and poster-guru Dennis King are working on a second volume "Art of Modern Rock," due out perhaps as early as the Fall of 2003.

I have never met a serious collector who does not have a copy of this book close at hand. The bottom line is this is just one great book on posters. Check it out and see what I am talking about.

# Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

## Banking On the Wall

### Posters around the House

Concert-music posters are informal and can be put up almost anywhere, in the home or at the business

At some point, I decided to take down the Klee prints, the O'Keefe, and the little batiks we had picked up at the flea markets and replace them, at least in some rooms, with rock and roll art - concert music posters. For one, I had to have some of the concert posters that I had designed and printed for my own band, back in the sixties, on the wall.



*Canned Heat poster by Bob Fried*

And of course, the music room would not really be cool without at least a touch of Woodstock, at least for an old hippie like myself.



*My Own Posters*

I think that this Bob Fried piece, another favorite of mine, looks great over the fireplace, too.



*Woodstock*

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

### Well, Perhaps not Palaces Yet



*Well, perhaps palaces are not ready for concert posters*

My house happens to be pretty funky, but many of these posters are just elegant and look right at home in more elegant settings. True, you have to be just a little daring to do it, but who is looking, anyway? Who cares what we do in our own home? The two photos below give you some idea of how posters could look in what we might agree are very elegant homes.



*A Moscoso Adds a Touch of Elegance*



*A Collage from David Singer on the Wall*



## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More



*Get Them on the Wall*

moved it to Ann Arbor, I bought hundreds of posters and had them matted and framed. They lined the halls and meeting rooms and looked just great, everything from Boss Hog to Bob Dylan.



*Posters Liven up Businesses*



*Viewing*

### **Posters in Business**

When I decorated the new headquarters of AMG (the All-Music Guide), when we

While I tend to be pretty sparing as to how many posters I want to put on any given wall, this is not always the most successful approach. Many folks like to fill every available space with posters and they look pretty great at that. Here are three views of San Francisco's S.F. Rock, one of the main stores for posters on the West Coast. As you can see, the walls are filled, but it is all very tastefully and effectively done. There is a lot to see.

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More



*S.F. Rock in San Francisco*



*S.F. Rock Gallery*

### Stash Rooms and Artist's Studios

Every serious poster collector has his stash of posters, whether it is under the bed, in the back of a closet, or in a special room. These special stash rooms, sometimes called "vaults" are always fascinating to visit.



*S.F. Rock Gallery*



*A Stash Room*

Just for interest's sake, here is a poster "stash" room of a famous artist, we won't say who this is, but some of you may be able to have a guess or two. These stash rooms or poster vaults are

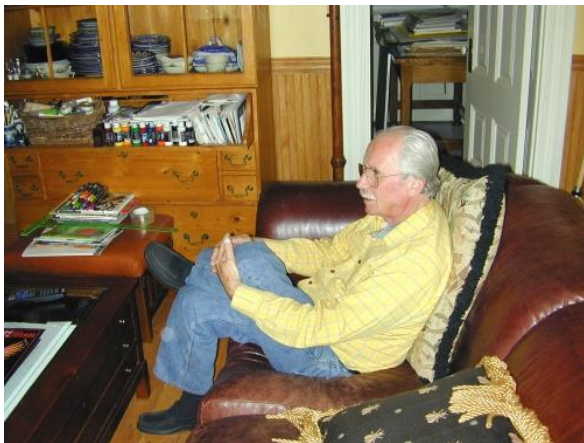
## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

always a lot of fun to visit and always crammed full of fascinating items.



*Moscoso's Studio*

Artist's studios are another fascinating thing to observe. The photo above is a part of Victor Moscoso's studio, a wonderful place, every wall just filled with art, from floor to ceiling.



*Alton Kelley's Studio*

Alton Kelley's studio is right in his living room, where he sits on a fine leather couch. In front of him is a glass-topped table on which he works. He is surrounded by pens, papers, and inks. Apparently Rick Griffin worked a lot at the kitchen table.



*Randy Tuten's Studio*

Another wonderful (and very neatly kept) studio is that of poster artist Randy Tuten. He works at a wooden drafting table, surrounded by carefully framed pieces of art, bookshelves, and various things he has collected.

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---



*Stanley Mouse's Studio*

Here is a shot of Stanley Mouse's studio. On the one hand you have a roomful of the most sophisticated computer printing equipment, large machines capable of printing off one perfect poster after another. Yet, as you can see, here is a canvas on which the artist is working, in a style about as ancient as you might imagine. What a contrast.



*David Singer's Studio*

The very neatest studio I have ever visited is that of legendary Fillmore artist, David Singer. Everything here is neat as a pin, clean as a whistle. You could eat of these floors.



*Grimshaw's Gallery*

Poster shows and exhibits are another place where lots of posters have to be displayed in a small space. Here is a part of artist Gary Grimshaw's wonderful store in Oakland, "Paper Song."

Hopefully, the photos above will hel

# Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

## Collectables as Investments

by Michael Erlewine

There are certain basic minimum landmarks that need to be met for something to become a collectable so that it appreciates in value. For one, we have to know what it is. There has to be some organization of the material, preferably a catalog of what exists and, if possible, in what quantities.

People collect everything, but not all collectables appreciate in value, much less are considered investment opportunities. To be considered for investments, we need to know what the item is and some idea as to what is the total number out there -- how rare it is. The rarer the item, in general, the more valuable it is considered, aside from what bands, venue, or artist is on the poster. This is mainly true with sets, where to have a complete set, you need all the numbers.

A set is only as strong as its weakest link. Invariably, one poster in a set was printed in a short run or some of them were destroyed. If we know the limiting item, then we know the universe of complete sets. So, whether a poster is beautiful or not, has a great band on it or not, if it is a limiting factor in a set, it is rare and by that virtue, valuable.

There are scads of articles and comments encouraging us to collect what we like, and not to be concerned with sets and the completing of them. Despite all of these high thoughts, the fact of business is that these rare (and often drab) items are collectable and collected, and for big bucks.

The moral of this story is that we owe a vote of thanks to those archivist-minded

collectors among us, who have paved the way for poster collections to be not only beautiful and satisfying on their own merits, but also to be worth money. They have helped to define the universe of posters, sets or singles.

## How Do They Appreciate?

I like the idea of putting my investments on the wall, where I can see them, and watch them appreciate. But what are the facts? How much have these posters appreciated over, say, the last ten years. I set out to find some numbers, which was not all that easy to find. For one, for all the talk, I have yet to find anyone who has really done the math on this. Sure, there are plenty of "Posters are a great investment. Never going down, always going up." I hear that everywhere, but when I asked for any studies, I have yet to find even one.

I managed to piece together some price information from 1991 and compare it to what these same items are worth today, in 2003. And the result, with some caveats, is encouraging. All in all, they do go up, as a whole, but there are exceptions. And there seem to be some rules to pay attention to.

I did not pursue the maverick venues or the odd collectibles, but stuck with, for this analysis, the tried and true Bill Graham and Family Dog original series, and I only looked at originals -- first editions.

For example, I managed to find prices for 68 Bill Graham original posters from around the year 1991. I then compared these prices to the value for these same posters in 2001-2002. The sample was a fairly random group of high value and low value posters. In fact, I could not find a number of the higher value BG

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

posters for sale in 1991, so this study does not include, things like BG-1, BG-2, BG-3, BG-74, BG-222, BG-118, BG-105, in fact many of the higher value posters. So if this study is skewed, it is in the direction of including too many low value posters, since they were readily available back in 1991, while the rare ones were already spoken for. This means that the numbers below would be higher in favor of posters as investments than they are, provided you collect valuable posters.

At any rate, the group of 68 BG posters that I could find data on, if purchased around 1991, would have cost you \$10,250. In 2002, this same group would cost you something like \$34,525. If we had taken that \$10,250 and invested it in a fund that returned 10%, compounded yearly, we would have \$26,586 in the bank, almost \$8,000 less than the return on the poster investment. So the posters increased by 3.36x the original investment, while the same investment at 10% compounded interest would have returned at 2.59%. These days, it would be hard to get 10% anywhere, and if the investment had been in stocks/mutual funds, the value might be considerably less.

So the bottom line is that these posters have appreciated at a rate significantly higher than if we had been able to invest the same money at 10% and survived the bearish stock market.

I am not giving you investment advice, since I am not a financial expert. I was amazed that these kind of analyses have not been done, published, and circulated. Sometimes I tend to think that poster investors like their posters so much, that they don't want to really

know whether they are making money or not.

Well, I love posters too, but there is a part of me that does want to have at least some idea of whether these are reasonable investments or not. In my own little non-scientific study, it looks to me that my investments in posters are not totally a waste of money. In fact, if I pick the posters I invest in carefully, I might make a little money and these investments are outside of the stock market, which right now looks kind of good to me. I hope some of you out there will do more complete studies of this stuff and let me know what you find out.

In fact, as a group, these poster have appreciated on average about 3.35 times their original price. In other words, a poster that cost \$40 in 1991 might be worth somewhere in the vicinity of \$140-150 today. That was the average. Some posters sell today for 20 times their original value! I also found posters that had not appreciated at all. One example had Tiny Tim as one of the performers, so the band does seem to have some relation to value. Grateful Dead posters are uniformly high, above the average rate of appreciation.

I want to make clear that my study was not scientific. I simply took some posters at random, based on being able to find posters where I could locate a value in 1991 and the same poster's value in 2003. I did not try to pick better bands or worse.

What makes a poster a safe bet for investing. Most collectors mention several factors. First, there is the wild card: a poster can be valuable solely do to it's scarcity. In other words,

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

regardless of what band is on it or how lovely the art is, if it is one of a very few available, it is worth more money. We could all figure that out, right?

Second, is the nostalgia factor: what is the band? Bands like the Grateful Dead and Jimi Hendrix are way more collectible than those with Tiny Tim. Sorry Tim. In fact, not only are Grateful Dead posters popular, but they also played more gigs than any other band in my database, almost twice as many as the next in line.

And last, but not least for me, is the quality of the art. A striking poster looks really good on the wall, and such posters are more in demand and command more money than one that is just average or drab.

"Beauty is in the eye of the beholder." One man's treasure is another man's trash. I agree with that, but must point out that as a group, we humans seem to more-or-less agree on what is beautiful. Beauty is not a random thing, where each of us prizes something different. We tend to school, like fish, and we seem to like the same art or be impressed by the same striking art. Take the "Flying Eyeball" poster by Rick Griffin, BG-105. Everyone likes it, wants it, and original copies are VERY expensive in today's market.

The same goes for FD-26, the "Skull and Roses" by Alton Kelley and Stanley Mouse. These babies are worth a bundle, if you can find one.

### **Today's Market**

The way the current market looks, posters are not such a crazy investment, if you pick your pieces with care. As a collector told me once, "They ain't

makin' any more of them." A word of caution: some of these very expensive posters have been reprinted, so you do need to be able to tell the different printings apart, if you are looking to invest in them. They all look the same on the wall, but they are not the same when you sell them.

For serious collectors, you need to work with a reputable dealer or have a copy of the collector's bible, "The Collector's Guide to Psychedelic Rock Concert Posters (BOOK)," by Eric King. This large volume covers some of the main collectible venues, such as the Bill Graham and Family Dog series, as well as the Neon Rose and the Grande Ballroom, all in extreme detail. At \$65 for the guide, this is not an impulse purchase, but no serious collector, especially one looking to invest in posters, should be without it. It is indispensable. If you are getting into collecting the most collected series of posters (Bill Graham and Family Dog), just bite the bullet and buy a copy. Everyone does. It is also very educational to understand all the ins and outs of poster printing, editions, papers, measurements, and so forth. It should go right up on the shelf next to the "The Art of Rock."

Most posters were only printed once, so there is no problem with making sure you have the real thing. It is only with the most-sought-after posters, particular a few in the Bill Graham and Family Dog series, that there are reprints, and even pirates and forgeries. Provided you work with a reputable dealer or know how use Eric King's book (which is pretty easy), you can make sure that the money you invest in posters goes into the real thing.

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

The money I have invested in posters was somewhat of a questionable thing, when the stock market was soaring. The way things are today, when I have seen any mutual funds that I have and my 401-K kind of melt away, I am not sorry to have some money sitting in posters. This is aside from the enjoyment I get from owning and looking at them, talking about them, showing them to others, and being part of an odd little community of folks who love these colored pieces of paper.

And there are sobering thoughts too. As I meet and get to know some of the more ardent collectors and catalogers of posters, I am struck at how compulsive and exacting these folks are. But I like them anyway. Then, every once in awhile, I catch just a glimpse of myself in that same mirror. I am just like them!

to encourage readers to break out some posters, get them framed and on the wall, so that you and your family can enjoy them.



# Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

## 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.

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

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

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.

# Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

## **The Art of the Deal**

by Michael Erlewine

### **Dealing for Art**

First, let me be clear. This is probably not the article you are looking for. Perhaps one of you reading this, with years of poster-negotiating experience, can help out here and write something for us.

I am not an expert on poster dealing, having never (to this day) sold a single poster, but only bought them -- collected them. And I must confess that I am not a good negotiator myself, tending to set what I consider a fair price on something and stick with it. On the collecting end, I know a little about the rules for poster bargaining, and I will say something about my experience there.

In the world of posters, as I have come to know it, keeping your word is very important. Since up to now, this entire field has been loosely organized and a little like a wild-west town, one's word is perhaps your most valuable asset. Still, in the course of events, one has to discuss and arrive at an arrangement that will satisfy both parties.

There are a great many stories of poster collectors finding huge stashes, sometimes many feet high, at a flea market or in a basement and negotiating a fantastic deal, as in: less than pennies per dollar. Of course, the seller had no idea of what the poster was worth. The question as to whether the buyer has an obligation to inform the seller of a poster's value is one that has been debated and will be debated into the distant future.

Many collectors' secret joy is in getting a fantastic deal and they won't buy a poster unless that is the case.

However, my take on the poster community of dealers is that most reputable dealers and collectors seem to have a self-imposed ethic: offer a reasonable price to a seller, even when you could just as easily avoid doing so. In other words, they could get it for a song, since the seller has no idea as to what it is worth. Instead, they will advise the seller that they have a valuable poster, and offer a fair (often wholesale) price. This is not always even just fairness on their parts, but rather a sound business practice. You can take advantage of a customer perhaps once, but you can bet once they find out what a bad deal they got, you won't be doing that again anytime soon. And, of course, in some cases, neither party has any real idea of a poster's actual worth.

I can attest to at least one very well known dealer, who was selling a series of posters on Ebay that is a little out of the mainstream, who obviously had no idea which posters in the series were worth more and which less. When I asked him about it, he said he did not care. He just wanted to move them out the door. Of course, I bought a bunch.

My point here is that there are several ways the sharp collector can find a good or even great deal. Looking for dealers like the one described above is just one of them.

Another approach is to try to figure out which posters will be more valuable down the road, and there can be different reasons for this appreciation. The easiest to count on is physical scarcity. If a poster printing was

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

accidentally destroyed and there are only a few copies that have survived AND it is part of a series or important venue, then you can more or less count on these posters appreciating in value.

For example, posters featuring a popular band like the "Grateful Dead" can generally be counted on to go up in value, so that is another approach.

And last, and perhaps most dangerous (and most seductive), is to try and figure out which posters as 'works of art' will be most collectable and thereby valuable. It seems to me that we all feel that we can see the beauty in these items and therefore buy them on that basis. I know I do. And we can agree that we all have different concepts of what is beautiful. Simple probability theory would suggest that we can't all be right, but perhaps we can, more or less.

### **The Negotiations**

Negotiation is no-doubt an art. Buyer and seller tend to dance around a price, neither wanting to be the first to draw blood - to dare offend the other. But we all manage to get around to the nitty-gritty sooner or later.

A typical trick of the unscrupulous negotiator is to try to pin you down and hold you to a price, before you have agreed to it, to kind of draw you into a situation, where they can declare: "Deal!," and hold you to it. One way to avoid this is to announce up front that you will not be held to a price until you say to the other: "We have a deal." Anything and everything up to that point is all foreplay. You must say: "I agree to this," and the other person has also to say "I agree to this." Then you have a deal.

Many times these negotiations can go on for hours, days, weeks, months, and years. I know of collectors who have been trying to strike a deal for years on a particular piece.

One way to determine a price is to have a third party that both seller and buyer accept as an authority look at the item and suggest what they think it is worth, at least as a starting point for discussion.

But always keep in mind the difference between retail and wholesale. Is the expert quoting the price he would buy it at or the price it would sell at? I had one problematical deal, where we had two experts, one who was quoting the retail price and the other the wholesale price. Of course, the seller wanted to go with the retail price and the buyer with the wholesale price.

A rule of thumb is that if you only are looking for the big killing, you don't want to trade, buy, and sell with other poster collectors or dealers. Instead, you want to find an ignorant rube, who does not know what these things are worth.

If you are going to work with the community of collectors, than you had better resign yourself to getting a fair deal, perhaps occasionally a good deal, but probably not a fantastic deal. One can build a great collection, one that appreciates in value on getting fair and good deals. These things do increase in value, particularly if you exercise care in selecting which posters to invest in, paying attention to scarcity, the bands involved, and the artistic value of the piece.

And you will find better deals on posters if you look for those that are out of the mainstream a bit. If you are going after

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

the rare Family Dog posters, be prepared to pay for them, because these things have an established value. However, if you are poking around for out-of-the-way sets of posters or venues, you may have a better chance of finding a very good deal, particularly if a seller has reached the point where they don't want to collect them anymore or just want to sell their entire holdings. And this happens all the time.

And of course, if a seller needs cash, the deal can get better and if you buy more from a seller, you can almost always get a sweeter deal.

What you cannot do is to tell a buyer you will sell a particular poster at a particular price one day and then the next morning, want to continue negotiations. That is a no-go, and a sure way to ruin your reputation in the business. It is best to approach this whole business of negotiation with the attitude that the person you are dealing with is someone like yourself and that you will be working with this person and the community of persons like them for a long time into the future. That is a good approach.

When you discuss price, that is a good time to look at the condition of the poster, to point out the tears, tack holes, adhesives, fading, and any other physical detriments to that particular piece. And you can also focus on relative rarity or lack of rarity in a piece. Is it signed? Can anybody attest to its authenticity? Is it common or rare? All of these things figure into either raising or lowering the final price.

If you are negotiating by email, be sure to figure out who picks of the shipping costs and whether the item is being

shipped flat or in a tube. If the poster is not in excellent condition, it may be important to have the seller agree to take it back if you feel the condition is not as advertised.

### Haggling

And, yes, I believe there is an art to price haggling, knowing just when to point out this or that blemish, when to comment on how common the poster is, or how it is (or is not) artistic. I just don't know that art. How about some of you out there who do, write something for us on this topic.

I am not a haggler, but here are some standard haggling rules:

- (1)Article: Never say yes to the first offer. Let them worry.
- (2)Article: Always flinch at the offer.
- (3)Article: Ask for more.
- (4)Article: Never split the difference on the first pass.
- (5)Article: Save some concession for last.
- (6)Article: Stop when you get a fair deal; don't squeeze

### Overall Strategy

It is good to have some sort of strategy, and plenty of patience. It can be helpful to decide in your mind how much you will pay for the poster or how much you will accept for a poster. Have you done your research? Are you certain what printing or edition of the poster you have? Have you checked to see what a fair price for this poster is or what it has sold for in recent history?

If the seller's price is way out-of-line, do you have a higher authority that you can

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

refer them to, who will quote a fair price?

And money is not everything. Sometimes it is more satisfying to pay more for a poster and actually have it in your collection, than it is to wait on the off chance that another one will show up. This is true, in particular, if the poster is very rare. You may never see another copy and the premium in price you pay may be trivial in ten years time or if the poster helps to complete a set, and you passed up your one chance to get it. There are some posters you just have to have. You can expect to pay a premium for them.

### **My Rules for Negotiating**

In summary, my advice is to remember to treat every deal as a doorway to future deals. In other words, both sides must be satisfied. Keep your options open by making sure your dealings are two sided. Put yourself in the place of the other person. These are rules I try to follow:

#### Rules for Negotiations

(1)Article: The buyer is always in control.

(2)Article: Don't stain the relationship by running down the deal or the dealer.

(3)Article: Be nice. It costs you nothing and feels better.

(4)Article: Don't ask for a 'bottom-line price' and then make a lower offer.

(5)Article: If the price is declared "Firm," accept that.

(6)Article: Buy more and ask for a larger discount.

(7)Article: Always leave the door open to the future

(8)Article: Don't forget to say "Thank You."

Good hunting!

### **Classic Posters - Wall Banking: Put Your Investments on the Wall**

by Michael Erlewine

One of the best investments I ever made was to take put some money into posters, instead of into the bank. Not only has my investment appreciated at a higher rate than in the bank (especially these days!), but I get to see some of my investment on the wall, 24x7.

Concert-music posters are not only great historical documents, but great art for the home. What could be better than to have a poster for a favorite band that you love, that looks great, hangs on your wall, and is quietly appreciating -- making money. I am not suggesting that you put all your money into concert-music posters, but that you might enjoy having some on the wall that are also appreciating in value.

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More



*Poster as a centerpiece*



*Every House Should Have a Woodstock Poster*



*Matted and Framed Posters*

### **Insurance or Vaults?**

Insuring your posters is expensive and usually requires a special rider. The insurance companies don't know what posters are or why they are worth what they can be worth, so they tend to err on the side of charging you a fee to replace the dollar amount you claim the posters are worth. They also, in most cases, require that you place them in a safe-deposit vault or in a secure safe.

If you wish to go this route, there are many good-sized gun safes that can double as poster safes, for insurance purposes.

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More



*Where Posters Are Safe*

Inside this safe, are specially-placed rods that act as racks to hold posters stored in flat boxes. This would be the place to store your most expensive pieces. The flat file boxes are only 1.5" high, so that posters are not piled too high. In the picture, you can see the handbills are stored at the top.



*Inside Layout*

### Flat File Storage



*Flat-file Storage*

I store most of my personal collection in flat-file boxes, interleaved for the most



## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

part. Here is a typical shot of how I organize things. Posters stored this way are not as easy to look at, as are the glossy display albums, but in truth, very few people ever want to see more than a few posters. Even collectors are not that curious, having seen it all before or not being into that particular venue. There are exceptions.

I had poster artist Mark Arminski visit me for a day or so, recently, and I found out he like Texas posters, a real favorite of mine. We actually went through all the Texas poster I have, many hundreds of them. It was great to find someone as interested in this very special style of poster, as I was. And, although it was perhaps not as easy as looking through the albums, there was a certain beauty to going through the boxes, handling each poster, and placing it to the side. It is a nice way to see the posters, just not something that happens too often. It was fun.

# Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

## **A Tale of a Poster Investor**

**By Michael Erlewine**

This is the heretofore never-before-told story of how I got into investing in posters. First of all, from my perspective, I have collected posters virtually forever, at first when I was a musician back in the day and wanted to have the posters for the gigs where my band performed. Lucky for me, some of those posters turned out to be worth a lot, almost 40 years later. I dug out Gary Grimshaw's first poster for the Grande Ballroom (the "Seagull") from my basement years ago, still looking pretty darn good, and now worth about \$3000, much to my surprise. Of course, I wish I had made more of a habit back then of grabbing the posters. Oh, well.

I didn't have a lot of cash to invest, but I had a great thirst to collect. I was tired of moving what little savings I had from bank to bank, trying to get some meager amount of interest, so that my money, such as it was, would grow. When economic times got tougher, the percentage a bank would pay me to appreciate my cash was almost nothing.

And the vagaries of the stock market and the economy were taking all of us on a roller-coaster ride, mostly downhill. Friends all around me lost their savings one way or another. I had my own way of losing mine, but that would be another story.

I am not a financial wizard or even very good at that sort of thing, but the more I thought about it, the more I wished I could put my savings into rock-concert posters. First of all, I love music and I love the simplicity of commercial art, like advertising for a one-night event. After all, I could see by checking the history of

poster sales, that these little babies were headed upward in price, at least whenever I want to buy one. I traced some of the average and the key posters for the Bill Graham and Family Dog posters series back a good bunch of years, and then compared those prices to what these same pieces were selling today for. Sure enough, they had gone up. More importantly, if you choose your posters carefully, they can go up more than if you had invested that same money at compounded interest in the local bank at 10%. And where could anyone get 10% those days. 2% or less was more like it, and unless you had a lot to deposit, it was more like nothing. And then I did a foolish or wise thing, depending on how you look at it.

### **COMMITTING THE TABOO**

Since I had no real money to invest, I did a forbidden thing. I borrowed against my life insurance policy to invest in posters. Now don't get me wrong, I never put my family at risk. If I died, they would get the big bucks, minus what I had borrowed, which was small in comparison. But borrow I did.

In the beginning, I invested that money in solid well-known posters, mostly in the Bill Graham and Family Dog series. As time went on, whenever I got any extra money, I bought a few more posters. I began to build sets and I bought whole sets. My hope was that these investments would appreciate, and that I would actually make more money from these posters than I put in. And I must admit, I loved the idea of putting my money into something that not only appreciated, but that you could use and enjoy. "Banking on the wall" was what I called it. I did that.

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

Well, years have gone by, and I have not regretted my decision. I love posters, and like Uncle Scrooge in the money bin, I love to look at my posters and to just know they are sitting there, waiting to be viewed, and appreciating in value at the same time. Posters are not what I would call a liquid asset, but they are also outside of the stock market, which might be up today, but could be down tomorrow. You never know. How many of us have watched an investment in stocks circling the drain? Not fun.

### **JUST WHAT ARE WISE INVESTMENTS?**

What are wise investments? For one, I consider it wise to have posters, at least some, that you just plain like, whether they are currently appreciating and worth something or not. Who cares? I have some of this type and I like to have them on the wall or at least I plan to get them up there. In this case, I am investing in my own joy in these particular posters.

Another way to invest, and the one I recommend those of you who want to make sure your investment does not reach the point of no return, is to invest in posters that you like AND that are generally considered to have, historically speaking, appreciated in value. It is a rule of thumb among poster investors that it is better to invest in a few high-value posters than in a lot of lower value ones. The rare, high-value posters are just that, rare and already have real value. Unless someone turns up a stash of hundreds of these (and it happens!), your investment is pretty secure. You can look on [ClassicPosters.cm](http://ClassicPosters.cm) to see which posters are expensive and which are not. You

can also seek out an expert and, for a fee, have them help you pick out a portfolio to invest in.

However, let me toss in a disclaimer here. I am not an investment counselor and I am not recommending that you do or do not invest your hard-earned money in posters. What I am, is someone who has invested his own hard-earned money in posters, with no regrets, so far. I am telling you here what I understand it is that the community of poster collectors, in fact, do.

### **GAMBLING ON THE UNDERVALUED**

Another, and far more risky approach, but one that is also a lot of fun, is to invest in the posters that are undervalued now, but which you think (in your infinite wisdom) will appreciate in value over time. And the reason could be that the poster is simply (to your eyes) too beautiful not to become scarce, as more and more folks snap them up for their living room walls. You feel you can spot good art. Can you? We shall see. And there also is the fact that you might be too sophisticated for the market, which will be quite happy with something less subtle.

Or, a poster could simply be rare because only a few were printed, or much of the printing was lost or has become unavailable for one reason or another. Here you are betting on the physical rarity of the poster. Of course, this only really works if that poster is part of a set, a venue, includes a particular popular band, or what have you? There are legions of posters that have been simply forgotten, regardless of how rare or not they happen to be.

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

And then there is the nostalgia factor. Some bands bring more money than others, Period. A Grateful Dead piece will probably always be worth more than a Tiny Tim poster, all other things being equal. So betting on a band or an artist, like the Grateful Dead, like Jimi Hendrix, and so on, usually works out. But keep in mind, that the nostalgia factor only lasts as long as the group that loves this lives, as long as they remember. When that generation dies off: no more nostalgia. So that is something to keep in mind too, as you invest.

Come what may, my personal all-time favorite reason for investing in a poster just happens to be the artistic merits of the piece. I like art and I particularly like commercial art. I am sorry, but fine art is just too refined for my taste, plus I could never afford originals. Having cloned images of Rembrandt on my wall just does not cut it for me, even though that is great art. I can see it as great art. I just don't want it on my walls.

### **FRESHNESS OF COMMERCIAL ART**

I like the freshness and straightforwardness of commercial art, and concert music posters have just the right mix for me. I tried movie posters (I love movies), but gave them up. They are too generic, and cover too long a time span - the length of the run of that movie. Music concerts are, wham!, one night. I like that about them.

And one last thing, you better be willing to hang on to your investment in posters. They are not liquid, like cash. It can take a while for them to turn over, after you have decided to sell them or need the cash. So there you have it, probably more than you wanted to know

about how I see posters and investing in them.

As I understand it, the world of poster collecting is poised for a major change, a move away from posters as nostalgia and memorabilia, and a move toward posters as an art commodity, just like the posters of Toulouse Lautrec went from being street art to museum art. That is happening now with concert-music posters, at least with the psychedelic posters from the sixties era. There is less nostalgia (and memory, for us geezers!) and more of the commodity approach, as more of these little items get out of the closets and hands of those of us who were there then and into the hands of the investors and museum curators.

To me this is neither good or bad, but just the course things like this take. If you miss the good old days of poster collecting, when you got the great poster on the cheap, those days exist right now for some other generation's posters. Jump in and speculate. I may just do that myself.

# Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

## Easy Poster-Measure Boards

by Michael Erlewine

Tired of holding the poster with one hand (and my elbow), while trying to extend a measuring tape with the other, I set out on a voyage to the hardware store in search of a better plan. Behold: the poster-measuring board.



*Poster Measuring Board*

Now, probably not many of you reading this will have the need to do all that much poster measurement, but there are some souls out there destined for this fate. We know for a fact that Eric King is one, because he measured everything in his book, down to 1/64 of an inch. It was so fine that I had to go out and buy a 1/64-inch ruler, just to use his book!

My measurement needs were simpler. I am happy with measurement to 1/16 of an inch and even 1/8 inch is good enough for my needs. And, these are increments I understand and that fit my rulers. 8-23/64" just does not quickly resolve itself in my mind. I can do it, but I have to figure it out each time in my head.

For those of you with time on your hands or a real need to measure posters, here is a pretty simple device that makes repetitive poster measurement easier.

I used 3/8-inch plywood, good one side. Since I am sure to get it out of square, I went to a lumberyard (Home Depot will do it), where they would cut it (out of square) for me. They did pretty well, actually.

Next I lightly sanded it and sprayed some varnish on both sides. I made several boards, but probably one would be all you need. The aluminum rulers I got on the Dick Blick Art Supplies web site. They were inexpensive and all matched. I got lengths of 36", 24", 18", and 12", but you can get just the ones you need for the size board you might construct. I also got some Gorilla Glue, but any strong glue that will bond metal to wood is fine.

The, using a carpenter square (right-angle), I positioned the rulers so that their point of origin matched the point in the inside lower-left-hand side of the rulers, where they meet. Leaving plenty of wiggle room, I glued the first ruler down and clamped it. Next, using the carpenter square, I positioned the second piece or ruler and glued and clamped it. I had to scrape away some glue ooze and even after it dried, I had to chisel a little more off.

But the end result is a simple but useful way to quickly measure posters. My only question is who in the world needs to do this?

# Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

## **How to Evaluate Posters - Nostalgia**

**by Michael Erlewine**

Let's be clear on this. We all have nostalgia of one kind or another and posters as memorabilia is a big thing. Probably the greatest number of event posters sold today are as memorabilia - pure nostalgia. There is nothing wrong with posters as memorabilia. We all do it, and if our particular kind of nostalgia happens to be what others also want to remember, it can also be a good investment.

The only downside of investing in memorabilia for memory's sake is very simple. When the person dies with the memory, so does the nostalgia. In other words, memorabilia for its own sake is temporary and that along may not be a reason to invest in a poster, IF (and it is an 'if') you want to attempt to secure a return on your investment.

If you don't care about that, no problem. If you do, then the following sections may be worth going over, since they deal with the other reasons, aside from nostalgia, that one might want to consider when investing in posters.

## **How to Evaluate Posters: The Music**

If the poster is just for you, perhaps a band you remember and love from back in the day, you have no choice. You have to have some of that. I have a bunch of posters from my band and those posters were designed, printed, and posted by yours truly, so you know I have one wall for that. However, once past that, if you are looking to invest in a poster and hope for a return on that investment, then it can make a big difference what bands are on the poster.

A really great band today is going to be remembered as just that, years from now. For a variety of reasons, the Grateful Dead seems to be the most collected band from the psychedelic years. For one, they were almost the first on the scene. In addition, they were pretty much omnipresent, playing all the time and at all the venues. And they kind of typify the spirit of the times. For whatever the reasons, they have proved to be a good investment. Grateful Dead posters have increased in value. So one thing to keep in mind is the actual acts on the poster, the music, not only the music, but how dedicated are their fans? You get the idea.

Musicians like Bob Dylan, Jimi Hendrix, Grateful Dead, and any really big-name group are almost always better investments that a group than you never heard of, all things being equal. So if it is ROI you seek, pick the major musicians.

## **How to Evaluate Posters: The Art**

A really great piece of art is just that, and it is going to be that, years from now, when the smoke of nostalgia clears. It may not be the most famous band, but if the art is great, it might be worth investing in. If you don't trust your judgment, there are plenty of experts who are only too happy to tell you what is good art. A site like ClassicPosters.com should help a lot. And don't forget the artist. A poor piece of art by a great poster artist will always be worth more than a poor piece of art by a not-so-great artist. And conversely, a great work of art by a great poster artist, and so on.

Artists like Rick Griffin, Stanley Mouse, Wes Wilson are always in demand. The same goes for many of the younger

# Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

artists, like Frank Kozik, Mark Arminski, Jermaine Rogers, and Emek.

## **How to Evaluate Posters: Historical Value**

It just may be that the poster is not by a great artist and does not have a great band on it, but it may mark some significant event. For example, some people like to collect the posters done for the annual "Hash Bash" at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. It is the event they are collecting, not the entertainment, and not the artist. There are all kinds of events and some of them have historic importance.

For example, there have been a number of 'Be-in' posters, and all kinds of benefit concerts, benefits for just about every cause you could imagine. Or you might want to collect the first or last poster for a significant venue. The last concert at the Fillmore West, BG-287 is very much collected. All decisions of this kind involve some kind of risk. You are in the drivers seat. You are deciding whether this or that event alone makes a poster valuable.

## **How to Evaluate Posters: Physical Scarcity**

Sometimes accidents happen and most of a printing of a poster is lost or destroyed. Or there may only be a few of a particular color variation. So a poster can be stone ugly, with the worst band, and by the least-known artist and still be worth a bundle, just because it is physically rare, there are too few of them. One example of this is the Who/Toronto card in the Grande Ballroom series. It was for a show held in Toronto, and most of the cards were confiscated by the custom authorities, who did not want stuff printed in the U.S.

going into Canada. And there are many other posters that are rare only because there are so few of them. These seem to almost always a safe bet for investment. After all, there are only so many of them available, and unless the bottom drops out of the collectibles market, the price should go up. At least it has up to now.

Those are some of the points to keep in mind, if you are collecting as an investment. Of course, it is not necessary to do that. You can just buy what you like and not worry about what they will be worth as an investment. Many people do that.

But more and more collectors, it seems to me, like to combine their love of music/art/history with a sense of investing their money in something that will give some return. When we get to the point of no return in collecting, then we are either just having one heck of a good time or we are throwing our money away.

I happen to do some of both. I try to invest in posters that I like AND which will have some return. Of course, sometimes I just buy something because I like it and the heck with it being worth one cent, ten years from now.

So, you can collect a little or a lot, invest a little or a lot. The community of posters collectors can also be an important factor. It is fun to share information with someone who cares as much about this stuff as you do. It is a very special group of people that share your love of a particular venue or series.

## **Summary**

Those are some of the points to keep in mind, if you are collecting as an

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

investment. Of course, it is not necessary to do that. You can just buy what you like and not worry about what they will be worth as an investment.

Many people do that.

But more and more collectors, it seems to me, like to combine their love of music/art/history with a sense of investing their money in something that will give some return. When we get to the point of no return in collecting, then we are either just having one heck of a good time or we are throwing our money away.

I happen to do some of both. I try to invest in posters that I like AND which will have some return. Of course, sometimes I just buy something because I like it and the heck with it being worth one cent, ten years from now.

So, you can collect a little or a lot, invest a little or a lot. The community of posters collectors can also be an important factor. It is fun to share information with someone who cares as much about this stuff as you do. It is a very special group of people that share your love of a particular venue or series.



## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

### Photo Archiving of Concert Music Posters

I then decided to design and build a vacuum frame: a large board upon which posters could be placed (like on a wall), held in place by the suction of a vacuum. My first attempt at building a vacuum board was not too successful, but I kept on trying until we got it right. Thanks to the engineering skills of my friend Bill Schriver, what we have at this point is a large flat and hollow board, capable of holding even the largest posters. It has a perforated surface, with small holes evenly spaced, beneath which is a hollow chamber connected to a ShopVac (6 HP peak load), located in an adjacent room (the noise is otherwise deafening) and connected by a series of 2.5-inch hoses hooked together. The surface of the vacuum frame has been painted a neutral gray. The net effect is that this board can hold anything from a postcard to the largest poster, with ease. The overall suction can be adjusted to tenderly handle decaying newsprint or force the most obstinate curl to flatten out.



*Vacuum board in operation*

### Tripod Heads for Suitable for Poster Photo Documentation

Using the vacuum frame, posters can be displayed for documentation without anything near or on their edges -- a decided advantage for photo documentation.

With the vacuum frame, we are back to using a standard tripod and it should be as solid and stable as possible. The granddaddy of the stable tripod is the German Linhof, which often appears on Ebay. Tripods with a central column that moves vertically (which are very handy for this kind of work) are to be avoided, unless they are very stable. Attention also has to be paid to the question of how do you level the camera on the tripod.

If you get serious about this, one of the most attractive features of a tripod for this kind of work should be to have a ball-mounted tripod head.



*Ball-mounted head*

A ball-mounted head has a handle underneath the top of the tripod (as

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

shown here), which can be tightened. The value of a ball-mounted tripod head is that, by loosening and tightening the handle under the top of the tripod, one can level the whole head and camera. Most of the better tripod heads have a build-in bubble level. A bubble level and an adjustable ball-mount mean that you can absolutely level the camera, which is essential for photo-documenting posters.



*Bubble level as part of the tripod head*

### **Lens Distortion Problems**

Next, we need to discuss camera lenses. If we set out to deliberately frustrate camera optics, we could probably do no better than to offer up the poster -- essentially a 2-dimensional surface that requires precise focusing at the center as well as at all points extending out from that center. And to test us in this, a poster also offers precise straight-line edges in all four directions. In a word, it is physically impossible to optically serve all the masters here. But that is the task.

For those of us who have tried to shoot full-sized posters with small digital cameras, we soon discover the problems I alluded to above. A quick refresher trip to Ebay poster images can make this point. Technically, the problem is called barrel distortion and pincushion distortion. These forms of distortion cause the corners of a photographed poster to stray from where we might like them to be and the four connecting sides to either bow outward (Barrel distortion) or bent inward (Pincushion distortion). In either case, the image of a perfectly ordinary rectangular poster becomes distorted to a greater or lesser degree. Frustrating.



*Lens distortion -- barrel and pincushion*

And the problem with the inexpensive digital cameras is that their small lenses, while fine for photographing just about any old thing, are frustrated when faced with the impossible task presented by a poster. This is a fact. Even their big brothers, the 35 mm single-lens reflex and medium format cameras struggle with these kinds of distortion.

I worked for a couple of years trying to get around this fact. I played with the tripod. I measured and re-measured the angle from lens to poster. I bought and tried out all kinds of lights. I built special light stands. While everything helped a little, the total amount of help did not

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

add up to an image that could be used (seriously speaking) for a book like "The Art of Rock" -- a permanent archive.

I built a small setup with banks of fluorescent lights that would fit in a car, and traveled to different libraries and collectors, to photo-document collections. In the long run, the images from this kind of setup were just not good enough.



*Portable photo-documenting setup*

### **Larger Digital Cameras**

In the end, I abandoned the small camera and launched out on the sea of larger cameras. However, I had in the meantime become spoiled by the ease of use of the digital medium and was loath to return to the world of film and processing fees, not to mention scanning the resulting prints or negatives.

And it was not a question of just buying a digital camera a couple of clicks higher up on the dollar scale. They did not exist. Even the very expensive digital cameras were not all that interesting for our purposes. And then Nikon released the D1x.



*Nikon D1x and portrait lens*

The Nikon D1x is essentially a single-lens reflex camera (like the 35mm varieties), but with much greater resolution than most of the other digital cameras on the market, some 5.4 mega pixels. What this means for us is that the D1x is capable of capturing and storing an image that will reproduce as a 6x10-inch full-color photo at 300 dpi. In other words, it produces an excellent image the size of about the largest image in a book like "The Art of Rock." The fact that most posters are much less complex than, for example, nature photos suggests that poster images could probably be expanding to an even larger size, with no visible loss. Certainly that is all that we need.

Since it is not our goal to produce something equivalent to the original poster (which even these hi-res digital images cannot do), an 8x10 glossy is more than enough for the purposes of creating publications and examining images for flaws, details, marks -- archival information purposes.

A word of caution: in all cases, should you decide to write a book or article about an artist, no large images can be

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

used without the artist's expressed permission. Small thumbnail images can be used for cataloging purposes, and come under the fair-use umbrella.

The Nikon D1x, at highest resolution, produces the equivalent of a 40-megabyte TIFF file, which can be compressed (without any loss) to a file slightly less than 8 megabytes. If you are photographing many posters, be sure to have a lot of hard-drive space, because it fills up fast.

For each poster to be documented, I archive the following files: An 8 MB loss-less file, a 1 MG JPG (lossy) file, and a thumbnail file. The 8 MB file is stored in what is called Nikon Native Format (NEF) files, which means that the raw pixels are stored in one section of the file, with any camera settings, etc. stored separately at the bottom of the file. The advantage of this is that years from now these raw images can be processed in ways that we can't imagine now, to pull the very most from the initial shot.

As for backup, I am storing them on CD-ROMs and on DVD, using a DVD authoring system that I just got running. When you archive images, you need to keep at least two copies, each stored at a separate location.

### Camera Lenses for Photo Documentation

The Nikon DX1 uses the standard 35mm-style Nikkor-mount lenses. However, for documenting posters, all lenses are not created equal. Lenses used for documenting work like this have to have an extremely flat focal plane. As mentioned above, it is very difficult for any lens to cope with posters and artwork.



*Interchangeable lenses for the Nikon D1x*

In fact only a few of the finest lenses are fit to be used for this kind of work. These are typically called Macro lenses and are generally of a fixed focal length. In other words: no zoom lenses. I experimented with a number of lenses, some fixed and some zoom. In every case, the fixed focal-length lens beat out the zoom for absolute clarity. What this meant for the photographer (which in this case was me) is that posters of a different size meant moving and leveling the camera and tripod each time a different sized poster was encountered - a major pain. But I went to the trouble, because the end result dictated that this was the way to go.

Note: I should add that those of you looking to do this be aware that digital single-lens reflex cameras behave differently than standard 35mm film cameras. This is due to the fact that the CCD sensor in the back of the digital cameras is smaller than a 35mm film frame. Therefore, if you buy a given lens for use on a digital camera (the D1x in this case), you multiply the lens by 1.5 to find out its size on the digital. For example, if I purchase a 90mm portrait

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

lens, it will behave as a 135mm lens on the digital camera, and so forth.

### **Lighting is Crucial by Michael Erlewine**

Lighting is perhaps the most difficult part of the whole equation. It is not easy to light posters and artwork, without getting what are called "hot spots" -- little areas of glare in the image. I must thank two professional photographers, Stanley Livingston and Thomas Erlewine, for answering my many questions and taking the time to help me find a suitable solution. It took weeks for me to learn to get proper lighting. In this short introduction, I can only go over the high points of what I have learned, but they should be useful.

First, you will need some space. It proved much more helpful to pull the lights farther back than to work with them up close. The goal is to get even lighting across the poster, with no hot spots. This is not as easy as you might think. In fact, it is just plain difficult. For my work, I used halogen lamps on stands with umbrella reflectors. In other words, the lights face away from the art into small photo umbrellas and the reflected light from the umbrellas is what plays upon the artwork. There can be no guesswork here. You have to measure the exact distance of each light from the center of the artwork. The angle of the light to the plane of the board on which the artwork is mounted must also be calculated. For example, each light might be seven feet from the center of the art work and at a 40-degree angle to the plane of the artwork. I used two Lowel Tota-Lights with 500 Watt (3200K) halogen lamps.



*Halogen light on stand, with umbrella*

In addition, the lights must be mounted on their stands to the same height as the center of the artwork. Much experimenting must take place. This is how it is done:

Position the lights by eye and then measure the distance at a 40-degree angle from the plane of the poster, one on each side of the artwork, until they look even. Dangle a paperclip or something from above the artwork and out from the board so that a shadow can be seen. There should be two shadows, one from each of the lights or from each bank of lights. Adjust the lights until the shadows appear by eye to be identical in degree.

Next, shoot an image, not of a poster, but of a white or gray sheet of paper. Take this image into Adobe Photoshop and perform one of the following tests:

Use Photoshop's Eyedropper Tool and watch it's info palette, which shows changes in image density as the tool moves over the image. It may help to

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

convert the image to grayscale, so that you need only watch one number, the black level, rather than all three (RGB). By moving the tool around the image from the center to all four corners, you will quickly see how balanced is your lighting. If the levels are not balanced, then repeat the whole process: rearrange the lights, take another photo, bring it into Photoshop, check the numbers, and so forth.

Another (easier, but less accurate) method is to go into Photoshop's Levels Menu and adjust the slider arrows (back and forth) to force contrast in the image, deliberately making it look awful in order to emphasize variations. In this way, hotspots are easier to spot.

This whole process takes time, but it is essential. When you have roughly even measurement in the center and at all four corners of the area of your photographed image, your lights are balanced. Don't move them!. Lock the room when you leave.

### Camera Placement Tips

The camera must be precisely in front of the center of the artwork. To achieve this, it is best to draw a coordinate grid across the background board (vacuum frame) upon which you will be placing the posters. From the center of the floor in front of the vacuum frame, place a strip of tape from the exact center out to and beyond where you will be placing the camera. This strip is at a right angle to the poster. The camera tripod will then move up and down (closer and farther) that line, depending on the size of the poster being documented.



*Keep the camera in line with the board*

The camera also needs to be leveled on the tripod, both from right to left and from forward to back. In my case, I purchased a special eyepiece lens that had a grid engraved on it, which allowed me to better balance the camera, from right to left. As for front and back, I used a small (8 inch) carpenter's level, which I placed vertically against the front of the camera lens hood. The plane of the camera and the plane upon which the poster is placed must be parallel.

Some tripods have built in levels that take care of the right to left leveling, the handiest being the kind that lets you adjust the entire tripod head, from underneath, using a built-in level. You will still need to level the camera lens, forward and backward, using the small level, as I described above. This will make sure the lens is parallel to the board on which the poster is placed.

In addition, it is recommended to use a remote-device cord to trigger the camera.

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

### Camera Settings Count by Michael Erlewine

As for camera settings, you will have to experiment. The rule of thumb for getting the most out of your lens is to open it up as wide as you can and take shots of some detailed pattern, type, or poster. Then gradually close the aperture, taking shots as you step it down. The idea is to try different apertures with different lens speeds. Take notes for each photo of what aperture and speed the lens is set at. Then take these shots into Photoshop and examine them. You will quickly see what combination of aperture and lens-speed produces the greatest clarity. Look for the fine print. Depending on the type of camera you use, some attention must be paid to the matter of White Balance, using a white or gray sheet of paper.



*Vacuum board, camera, and lights*

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

### Poster Archiving, Packaging, and Shipment

by Michael Erlewine

There are many ways to store your posters. In the old days, many of us stored them on the walls, with a tack in each corner. In the '60s, very few thought to organize their collection. In fact, perhaps the second most common place for your poster collection in those days was in a box shoved under the bed.



*Early poster archival system*

There are some real horror stories about original sets of Family Dog and Bill Graham posters, stored under the bed, being destroyed in one way or another. In one case, the entire collection was eaten by rats, without the owner's knowledge. What a shock! Today, many of these items are too valuable to put under the bed, much less tack to walls, although I think it is healthy to tack one up every once in a while. So how should we store them?

Today, perhaps the favorite methods of storing posters are either in a glorified version of the box (no longer under the bed) or in a display album of one kind or another. Both have their advantages and disadvantages.

### The Display Album



*Deluxe Display Album 18x24*

Display albums are multi-ring binders that can contain up to 20 (I use 25 without problems) pages. Each page is clear plastic, with a white (or black) heavy-paper insert enclosed by the plastic, allowing for a poster to be inserted on each side.

Display albums come in several sizes, that are capable of holding posters from 8.5 x 11" up to about 18 x 24".

"LightImpressionsDirect.com" has lovely albums with natural-tweed fabric, and leather corners. The larger ones cost around \$200, complete with 25 Melinex (similar to Mylar) pages, so they are not inexpensive.

The advantages of display albums like these is that you can protect your



## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

posters from greasy fingers and show them to anyone willing to sit through the look-see process. Just a comment: I find very, very few people interested in seeing more than a few posters. I'm sure that does not extend to most of those reading this, but the average friend enjoys maybe seeing ten posters or so, and then they are ready to move on to see something else.



*Album holds about 50 posters*

Display albums are very much used by dealers, and are ubiquitous at almost all posters shows. Again, not all (or even many) of these display albums use archival-friendly plastic in their pages, so be aware that long-term storage of posters in non-archival plastic is not recommended, in particular, if the poster is valuable. Display pages usually come in either white or black. Choose white, since the black pages is much more acidic than is the white.

Pros: Display albums are a handy and easy way to show folks your collection. People can see them, but oily hands can't touch them.

Cons: Display albums are expensive, and the fully loaded big ones are heavy to move around. These albums are designed to be stored vertically, like a book, and that brings up another problem with display albums: slippage.

Slippage: When posters are placed in a display album, they are held against the page by the clear plastic cover. When you store these books vertically, there is inevitably some slippage. The posters tend to slide to the bottom or (worse) against the rings, where (if you are not careful), they can get chewed up or dog-eared. Even if the albums are stored flat, there can be slippage, as the pages are turned.



*Poster slippage in display album*

In addition, the multi-ring binder pages are tricky to turn, involving occasionally opening and adjusting the page and closing the ring. Better are display albums with permanent, fixed rings. These fixed ring albums do not have the turning problem, but do have the slippage problems.

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

Don't let this sound too negative. Display albums, with their crystal-clear protective pages, are great at shows or if you show your posters often. And there are work-arounds for the problems. Most important is to handle the albums with great care, in storing, lifting, carrying, opening, turning pages, and closing. If you are very careful, you can avoid most pitfalls. However, most of us can't concentrate that well for that long.

A solution to the slippage problem is to use clear corners to position the poster on the page, so that it cannot slip. These work well, but introduce problems of their own.



*Clear corners can eliminate slippage*

The clear corners (available from Light Impressions) have adhesive on one side, so that they can adhere to the paper page. One has to position these corners, while manipulating the posters on the page, so that the four corners actually fit the particular poster. This works pretty well, but is very time consuming and introduces the added danger of twisting or slipping with a corner and causing the corner to adhere to the poster. The corners are VERY

sticky and once on the poster, are hard to remove without some poster paper coming off. Which brings us to boxes.

### Flat Boxes for Permanent Storage

Some of the disadvantages of display albums leads many of us to use flat boxes, sometimes called newspaper storage boxes or flats. These too come in two flavors, boxes that are archivally friendly and those which are not.



*Typical flat storage box*

The typical box is made of .060 board with a pH of 8.5-10.0 or thereabouts. Typically, these boxes are buffered with calcium carbonate, 3% reserve, and are acid-free and lignin-free. In other words, they will not react with the various inks and whatnot on the posters.

These flat boxes typically are held together by metal edge, and the better ones have a drop front in the lower half of the box, making it easier to get at the posters.

The advantages of using flat storage boxes is that your posters are safe, and if carried carefully, free from slippage and its problems. In addition, these boxes, if ordered from a company like the Hollinger Corporation 1-800

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

634-0491 are relatively inexpensive and very durable.



*Cards and Handbill Storage*

The disadvantage of this method of storage is that it is hard to show the posters and there is no plastic barrier, meaning they are touched each time you show them to someone. White cotton gloves are helpful, for the really rare posters, and even a glove on one hand makes a difference in how much body oils are transferred to the posters.

Using gloves may sound too hoity-toity for most of you, but just try examining 40-year old underground newspapers or newsprint posters without them and you will learn the value of keeping the hand oils off old paper.

### **Interleafing Protects Posters**

Posters stored in flat boxes should, at some point, be interleaved with some sort of buffered paper, to prevent the inks on the posters from chemically reacting with the paper from the one above.



*Interleafing handbills*

Many collectors do not interleaf, preferring just to keep a pile of posters in a box. Or, they interleaf the more expensive posters, but not the more common ones. It is up to you how much interleafing you want to do.

It is more important to interleaf silk-screened posters as opposed to offset-printed posters, since the silk-screened inks are less stable and more chemically reactive. If you have a collection of expensive silk-screened posters, you might want to consider using interleafing.

Interleafing is most often done using an archivaly -safe bond paper. A semitransparent paper, called "Glassine" is also used, but should not be used for storing color photographs. It can be used for posters, but a good archival bond is preferred.

### **Plastic Sheets and Mylar Sleeves**

A very common way to store posters is in one sort or another of plastic polyethylene storage bag. These come in all sizes and weights, but most are not archivaly safe. Frequently these bags are used only for temporary storage and shipping posters.

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

Polyethylene bags are commonly used for shipping posters. The poster is put in the plastic bag, the bag is folded to fit the posters, and then taped to a cardboard blank. Polyethylene bags, once taped, are dangerous in that it is easy, when opening the poster bag, to lose sight of the transparent tape tabs, which can catch and tear a poster very quickly. Beware.

### Hard-shell Sleeves

Another handy item are rigid plastic sleeves, into which a poster can be slipped. They are clear, tough, and can't be bent or folded. They are perfect for passing a poster around in a group. However, they are not archival safe, so use of these for long-term storage is not recommended.



*Hard-shell Plastic Sleeve*

### Mylar-D

Poster experts, like Dennis King of D. King Galleries, recommend that only

Mylar (or its equivalent) are archival safe for postage storage. King writes:

"Plastics, vinyls, and other storage materials slowly oxidize, releasing harmful acids, which slowly EAT YOUR POSTERS ALIVE. Mylar-D is a storage material specifically developed for the long-term storage of historically important documents. It is the same archival material in which the Declaration of Independence and the Magna Carta are stored and is used by leading museums worldwide. While other materials may not begin to noticeably damage your posters for 2, 3, or even 5 years, Mylar-D is considered completely inert for up to 400 years "



*Mylar-D sleeves -- almost invisible here*

### Flat File Storage Cabinets by Michael Erlewine

And last, but not least, are the large flat-file drawer-type storage cabinet. Sooner or later, you have to get one of these. Either that or don't bother to collect oversize posters. These cabinets will accept even the largest posters, or almost all. I have a Derek Hess poster that is larger than the largest cabinet I know of.

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

These multi-drawer cabinets are wonderful for poster storage. They come in wooden and metal formats, the metal being more desirable, because it is more inert than wood. I have some of both kinds.

The advantages of flat-file cabinets are many. You can put almost anything in it, large or small. You can put piles of little posters next to piles of big ones or devote a whole drawer to huge posters. You can interleave or not, as you need.



*Interleafing in a flat-file drawer*

In fact, shuffling posters around, from drawer to drawer, is almost something of an art, sliding a poster in here, pulling another out over here, and slipping it into another drawer. Those who have flat-file cabinets will know what I refer to here. It is safe to say that these cabinets are the preferred method of storage for most dealers and collectors, which is not to say there are no disadvantages.

The main disadvantage of these cabinets is that the very breadth and depth of these drawers can lead to things sliding around, brushing up against the sides or into an adjacent pile. The worst thing is when placing a new poster into a drawer somehow floats or pushes a poster farther back up

against the back wall or even into the back of the cabinet. Posters can easily be damaged or torn, when this happens.

### **Climate Control**

Some attention is required as to the climate for the room where you store your posters. A temperature of around 70 degrees is just about right, with not too great a swing above or below that point. As for relative humidity, it should be somewhere around 50%, not too wet or too dry.

As mentioned above, when looking for containers, the preference is for acid-free boxes, which means that the containers will not react chemically with the posters. Cheap storage containers will definitely react with the poster inks, to the detriment of your collection. Another keyword is "Buffered." Materials that have been buffered, means that additional alkaline substances have been added to the containers in advance to soak up excess acid, much like you might take an antacid tablet for excess stomach acid. It is a preventative measure.

Perhaps of equal importance: don't touch your posters with unwashed or oily hands, and don't let anyone else do so either. Wash your hands or use a pair of thin cotton gloves available from most archival supply houses.

### **Storage Summary by Michael Erlewine**

So there you have a quick survey of the more popular methods to store posters. Select one that best fits your needs. There is no reason to have expensive archival storage methods, if your posters are not that valuable. But then again, you never know what a poster

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

may be worth 20 years from today.  
There is a flyer that I have seen that  
advertises many of the Grande Ballroom  
Poster, all you want, for \$1 apiece. If  
only I had known!

### ATTACHMENTS



*Flat-file storage cabinets*

# Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

## Poster Glossary Terms

By Michael Erlewine

Included below is a very loose glossary of poster-related terms, organized by groups

## Collecting Posters as a Business

Ebay

Shipping Posters

## Collecting Posters: Display

Adhesives for Framing Posters

Archival Glass

ClearHold Corners

Dry Mount

Mat Board -- Archival

Plexiglas

## Collecting Posters: Tools

Gloves for handling posters

Micrometer

Starrett Steel Rules

## Collecting Posters: Storage

Archival

Drop-Front Storage Boxes

Flat-File Cabinets

Glassine

Interleaving

Laminating Posters

Museum Barrier Paper

Neutral Glassine

Oxford Display Albums

Polyethylene Storage Bags

Portfolio Boxes

Steel Safes

Taped Plastic Bags

## Poster Terms:

Bindweed

Combo

Lobby Cards

Music Memorabilia

Price guide

Signed by Plate

Signed By The Artist

Loupe

Ticket Outlet Strip

Grading

Dots Per Inch

Point Size

Hairline

Imprint

## Posters: Cards

Card Set

Grande Card

Mailer

Postcard

Postcard -- Ad Back

Postcard -- Blank Back

Postcard -- Bulk Rate

Postcard -- Cut Double

Postcard -- Double

Postcard -- Place Stamp Here

Postcard -- Single

Uncut Double

## Posters: Editions

1st Printing Set

Bootleg

Counterfeit

Forgery

Original Art

Pirate Printing

Reprint

Unauthorized Poster

Variant

Artist's Proof

Color Variant

Concert Poster

Edition

Format

Image Set

Limited Edition

Numbered Edition

Numbered Poster

Numbered Series

Original

Original Printing

# Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

Progressive Proof

Set

Ticket Set

## **Posters: Handbills**

Flier

Handbill

## **Posters: Types**

Boxing Style Posters

Silkscreen

## **Venues**

Venues: Family Dog

Avalon Ballroom

Family Dog Dances

FD

Bill Graham

BG

BGP

Fillmore

Fillmore Poster

New Fillmore

The Fillmore

## **Printing: Anomalies**

Blistering

Chalking

Drop Out

Ghosting

Moire Pattern

Off Register

Overprinting

Pin or Tack Hole

Pinholing

Posterization

Press Hickey

Set Off

Show Through

Walk-off

Crease

Dog Ear

## **Printing: Additive Colors**

Additive Colors

Color Bar

Color Wheel

## **Printing: Folding**

Folding: Concertina

Folding: Continuous

Folding: Double Gate

Folding: Parallel

Folding: Right-angle Fold

Folding: Single Fold

## **Printing: Paper**

Cover Paper

Grain of the paper

Self-cover

Paper Stock

Bond

Brown Paper

Card Stock

Cardboard

Coated Stock

Glossy Stock

Index -- Coated

Index -- Uncoated

Matte Finish

Newsprint

Thin Paper

Varnish

Vellum

## **Printing: The Press**

Back to Back

Back Up

Blanket

Bleed

Broadside or Broadsheet

Butt Fit

Cylinder Press

Dye-Based Ink

Embossing

Gang

Ganging

Grippers

Monochromatic

Overun



# Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

Paper Plate  
Platen Press  
PMS

Press Number  
Process Inks  
Process Printing  
Rotary Press  
Run On  
Split Fountain  
Trapping  
Trimming  
Under-run  
Work and Tumble  
Work and Turn  
Work and Twist

## **Printing: Press Marks**

Corner Marks  
Crop Mark  
Fold Marks  
Register Marks  
Trim Marks

## **Printing: Pre-Press**

Artwork (Mechanical)  
Break for Color (Color Break)  
Burn  
Color Separating  
Color Transparency  
Duotone  
Emulsion  
Flat  
Halftone  
Image Area  
Keyline  
Knock Out  
Lay out  
Line Art  
Negative  
Overlay  
Plate  
Positive  
Registration  
Screened Print  
Stripping

Vacuum Frame

## **Printing: Proofs**

Blue-line  
Brownline Proof  
Digital Proof  
Match Print  
Press Sheet  
Printers Proof  
Proofs  
Proofsheet  
Silverprint

## **Printing: Types of**

Giclee  
Iris Print  
Litho  
Lithograph  
Offset  
Screen Print  
Seriograph

## **Printing Type**

Intaglio and Etching  
Gravure (photogravure)  
Metal Engraving

## **Printing: No Impression**

Printing Type: None Impression  
Inkjet  
Laser Printer  
Xerography (photostatic)  
Printing Type: Planographic

## **Printing: Planographic**

Offset Printing  
Collotype  
Hectography (gelatin)  
Lithography

## **Printing: Relief**

Printing Type: Relief Printing  
Letterpress  
Linocut  
Woodcut

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

### **Printing: Stencil**

Printing Type: Stencil

Mimeography

Silkscreen (Seriography)

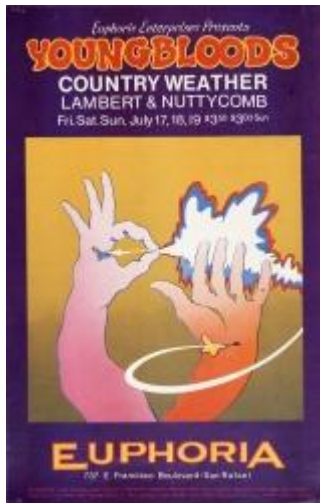
# Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

## Poster Numbering Systems

by Michael Erlewine

How do we keep track of and refer to posters? What is the best method to identify posters? If music-concert posters are to become known to a wider audience, what systems will make it easier for newcomers to indicate which poster they are referring to? These are questions worth examining.

Before we get into it, let me give you the result of all the talk that will follow now, so those of you who don't want to reason through it, can just get on with using it.



*Youngbloods at Euphoria July 17, 1970*

We need to quickly and accurately identify this poster, so if I email you the identification number, you have a very good chance of knowing what I am talking about.

The Euphoria Youngbloods poster for 1970-07-17 by Bob Fried.

The CPC ID for this poster is:

EUP 1970-07-17 P-1

Here is how to read it.

EUP = Acronym for the venue, which I made up, without adding much of my own.

1970-07-17 = Date of the Event, in sortable order

P = poster

1 = 1st printing or edition

Now for the discussion:

As you know, there are several methods for identifying posters in use. Here are the most popular:

### SERIES AND NUMBER

Only the best-known poster series have been given consecutive numbers, most notably the original Family Dog and Bill Graham, numbered series. For example, we have the Family Dog series, numbered FD-1, FD-2, and so on. It is important to note that these numbers were given by the promoters themselves, not by collectors. This is an important fact.

Despite its shortcomings, this is without a doubt the most popular and universally used of all the systems. However, most venues have not yet been numbered, and may never be numbered in any sequential fashion.

The main problem with fixed numbering posters in a series includes the fact that as new posters, handbills, cards, etc. for the series are discovered, there are no numbers for them. If I find a poster that was issued between FD-10 and FD-11, I cannot issue it a unique number, but must call it FD-10-A or something like that. When you have many newly discovered posters, this becomes very cumbersome.

When numbered systems run into the many hundreds, like the original Bill

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

Graham (BG) and the New Fillmore (NF) and Bill Graham Presents (BGP), with the exception of a few numbers, even these numbers are not easily retained in memory. We have to look them up. If I ask you about the New Fillmore Series poster # 471, how many of you out there will know that this was an Indigo Girls concert? Not many, if any. You will have to look it up from a list, if you can find a complete one.

And then there are the countless posters that don't fit into a series or for which it is not common to count the series. Small series, like the Neon Rose or the Kaleidoscope, lend themselves to numbering, but even here collectors prefer nicknames or tend to refer to the musical acts or nicknames (Chambers Brothers, Blushing Peony, Clean-In, etc.).

### **NICKNAMES**

We have given names to the very best known posters, so that when I say the "King Kong," you know I am talking about the second poster or handbill in the Family Dog series and so forth. While this system is excellent for a relatively small number of items, it does not work when we get into the many hundreds and thousands of posters. Most of us cannot remember that many words, with accuracy. There are also alternate nicknames for the same poster in use, which only adds to the confusion.

### **BAND and VENUE and ARTIST**

Many posters are referred to by the band that played the gig. For example, everyone wants the "Who-Toronto" card in the Grande Ballroom Series. Most of you will know what poster I am talking about, if I say the "Who-Poco" or

perhaps I should qualify it and say "Griffin's Who-Poco."

### **DATE AND VENUE**

This is a popular method, where the date of the performance is linked to a particular venue. Eric King has used this successfully to label the Russ Gibb/Grande Ballroom series. The advantage of this method is that as new items are found, they are integrated into the series by their date. While this is without-a-doubt one of the best ways to organize posters for academic purposes, this method is seldom used in ordinary conversation, since it requires that we look the numbers up.

For example, everyone seems to say BG-105, some call it the "Flying Eyeball," but I have yet to hear ANYONE say the Bill Graham poster from February 1 through 4, 1967 with Jimi Hendrix, or using Eric King's method, "Bill Graham Fillmore 19670201." This fact speaks somewhat loudly in favor of the habit of referring to posters by nicknames or numbers of one kind or another, if we can manage it.

All of the above conventions are in use and there are no-doubt others too. This is really an academic argument I am presenting. When we get out of the common territory of the BG-105s and into the many, many thousands of posters there are to be catalogued, then these academic considerations become valuable. In the world of collections and libraries, perhaps the most universal method for identifying any kind of collection is the unique sequential ID, which is very straightforward. At this point, music-concert poster identification does not have this feature as part of its

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

system. We need to include this method along with the others.

### **PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER**

To date, the most flexible system is one that combines the venue acronym, date, type, edition, and variant. Eric King has used this method in his guide to label venues like the Russ Gibb/Grande Ballroom series and others. Example:

G/G-661021-P-1

G/G = Russ Gibb/Grande Ballroom

661021 = October 21, 1966

P = Original Poster

1 = First Edition

This is the most flexible system in use. However, it is not perfect. In the above example, the "661021" does not reflect that the actual event was held on October 21 and 22. We could remedy this by adding:

661021/22 = October 21, 1966 through and including October 22, 1966

And as long as we have to deal with a string of date numbers, why not expand the date format to make it more readable, we get:

G/G 1966-12-21/22 P-1

There are posters that have a schedule for events for a month or more on them. In this case, one is forced to use the first date on the schedule, but this is not particularly helpful. At best, we kind of get in the ballpark. It is somewhat more helpful if we use the above method to handle this:

MH 1997-03-03/21 P-1 (Maritime Hall, dates from the third through the twenty-first )

Or is a concert is held on two separate dates, we could have:

MH 1997-03-03+21 P-1 (Maritime Hall, events on the 3rd and on the 21st))

### **MORE NUMBERED SERIES**

Here I am going to suggest something that may be very unpopular with some of you and I will offer my reasons for doing so. In addition to the above numbering conventions, I feel we should attempt to number (as in the FD and BG series) all major venues that appear to be in more or less stable condition - no new posters have been discovered for some years.

My reasoning is very simple: the crowds of newcomers we expect to bring into this field would be better served if they could confidently identify an event by a venue and number. Having long strings of date-numbers and codes, while decipherable and understandable to all of us, is just plain off-putting. It does not make things easier for the uninitiated.

I suggest that we would have for the Kaleidoscope series in Los Angeles, a KAL-1, KAL-2, and so forth. The same system would be applied to other identifiable venues and promoters, at least from the vintage '60s era. We have to weigh the advantages against the disadvantages. Thus we would have:

KAL-01 1967-04-14/16 P-1

The above would satisfy both the archivists and newcomers. The newcomers could call it "Kal-01" and it could also be referred to as "KAL 1967-04-14/16."

As time passes, most runs or sets of posters settle down, as far as new members in the collection. It is hard, almost impossible, not to assign

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

numbers to posters. Since there is inevitably a first poster in a series, it is hard not to refer to that fact. "Do you have the first Kaleidoscope?" That is a fair question. What follows automatically are references to the 2nd, 3rd, and so on in the series. And when posters are found, in a series, that predate the first posters, they are assigned the number zero, and so forth. This is true for the BG series, the Neon Rose series, and the Grande Ballroom. There would be no attempt to number a series that is still being organized. But those that have been around for 30 years or so, and for which new members have not been discovered, might as well be numbered.

We should resist adopting the method outlined in the preceding two paragraphs, that is: attempting to assign a first, second, third, etc. It is bound to be self-defeating, as earlier and mid-sequence items are found. You will inevitably be stuck with 107-A, 107-B, etc. This is a mess.

It makes much more sense, in the long run, to simply use the acronym for the venue (KAL - Kaleidoscope) and the date and edition identifier sequence, thus:

KAL 1967-04-14/16 P-1

This would identify the first posters in the Kaleidoscope series, with the venue, the date range, and the fact that it was a first-edition poster. We should RESIST permanently labeling this event as Kaleidoscope #1. Yes, we can still say "Do you have the first Kaleidoscope poster?" or even the "Do you have the 4th Kaleidoscope poster?," but this would always be relative to whatever was currently considered as the 1st or

the 4th poster, subject to change and not locked into the vernacular.

We can still have nicknames, for those more popular items and, as we know, there are a number of different nicknames for some posters. But we can agree that we will disagree as to what those nicknames are.

### **Promoter Numbered**

In cases like the BGs, BGP, NFs, and Avalons, where the promoter themselves has numbered the series, then this numbering system should be used, although it necessitates using adding newly-found or mislabeled items, with the "108-A" approach, which is less than satisfying. And the promoter makes mistakes or misses a number too.

### **COMPUTER IDENTIFICATION: Another Issue**

As if this were not enough, I suggest we also add a unique image identification number, for computer use and for making positive identification without long lists of date codes.

### **THE UNIQUE IMAGE ID**

Unique numbering systems are very simple: just number all unique image items, starting with the number one and counting upward incrementally. Examples of unique items would be posters, handbills, cards, ads, and artwork. Each variant of each poster, card, etc. would also have a unique catalog number. There is no attempt to remember what poster each item refers to, only the need to have this available in a lookup table of some kind. Also, there is no attempt to have these unique numbers in any particular order relative to the posters they refer to. For example, if FD-1 has the unique number

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

"1040," FD-2 might have a unique number that is nowhere sequentially close, such as "12299."

These numbers can then be organized via computer database in dozens of ways, including all of the commonly used poster identification mentioned above. There can be no numbering confusion, because each item has a unique number. One requisite with this method is that users must have a linking table to know what the number means. For example, I give you poster #4848, which means nothing to you. If I provide you with a linking table, you can look up #4848 to see that this refers to BG-105, the Flying Eyeball.

These unique image numbers are very useful when working with databases, if only because they take up less space. Also, archivists and experts will find them useful as a crosscheck against any other methods of identification. When we have a master database up on the web, we can have a unique-number lookup that will save us from having to remember potentially thousands of venue names.

### **MORE TO COME**

Just think about it: There have been music-concert posters of one kind or another for over a hundred years. If we just limit our interest to the psychedelic posters of the '60s to the present, we still have a huge quantity of material. And keep in mind that, for the most part, all of the posters we know of are restricted to what appeared in the largest cities, in the Bay Area in particular. What about the thousands of smaller towns and cities? Did they not have some form of poster advertising? The answer is that they did have

advertising, but we have not documented these yet. Perhaps these are of no consequence, but I will wager many are of interest. So we are talking about possibly hundreds of thousands of posters, handbills, etc., in all their variations.

### **MAKING IT SIMPLE**

Now that we have had somewhat of an analytical discussion of number posters, what shall we in fact do? Here are some examples:

When all is said and done, to identify a poster, we need the date, the bands, the venue, the format, and perhaps the artist, such as:

The Euphoria Youngbloods poster for 1970-07-17 by Bob Fried. That is what we need, and while we can nickname the most familiar, as soon as we get into strange territory, we need all that information to make sure we are talking about (or buying/selling) the same poster.

When I specify "Euphoria," I am saying what venue I am speaking of, but often that will not be specific enough. There are many venues that are used by many promoters, where the event takes precedence over the venue, such as the Bread and Roses Festival (B&R) held at Berkeley's Greek Theater (GT), so I could say:

B&R 1979-10-05 P-1

I am speaking of the 3rd Annual Bread and Roses Festival held at Berkeley's Greek Theater. I suppose I could say:

GT 1979-10-05 P-1

Yet, many promoters use the Greek Theater, but by saying "Bread and Roses Festival," I am narrowing it down

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

to one of six events, since that is the number of years that festival was held.

We could quibble about any of this. The important thing is to come up with a consistent method of describing posters that will identify the poster and not be too cumbersome.

For the most part, I have resigned myself to writing these things down. I like Eric Kings approach, but don't want to spend the rest of my life hyphenating dates in my mind, so I would much rather see "1970-07-17" than "19700717," not that I can't decipher King's version. I want to make it as easy on myself as possible, in particular, as I may be doing this for a long time and handling any number of posters. So, for the Euphoria poster:

EUP 1970-07-17 P-1

In summary, I plan to use the following:

EUP = Acronym for the venue

1970-07-17 = Date of the Event

P = poster

1 = 1st printing or edition

I suggest that we abandon the idea of trying to indicate a range of dates, in favor of using this ID# to get into the ballpark, identify the poster we are talking about, after which we can discover all the fine points and details about it.

### Legend

P = Poster

H = Handbill

C = Postcard

T = Ticket

BS = Bumper Sticker

BU = Button

LC = Lobby Card

PRO = Promotional

TOU = Tour Posters

AD = Advertisement

AC = Awards Ceremony

BP = Backstage Pass

CAL = Calendar

FC = Fan Club

MAI = Mailing Piece

MM = Memorabilian

ST = Sticker

MN = Menu

PRM = Promotional

SP = Speciality

3D + 3-Dimensional Item

1= Original

2 through 'N' = Reprint

OA = Original Artwork

X= Pirate

F = Forgery

PP = Printer Proof

PROG = Progressive Proof

ONK = One-of-a-Kind

Michae@Erlewine.net



# Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

## Printing and Collecting Terms

by Michael Erlewine

This is by no way exhaustive, but here is a collection of some major terms used in poster collecting and printing. We need someone who is a printer out there to write a definitive article on this. Hopefully this can be of some help.

## Business of Collecting

Ebay, Shipping Posters

## Poster Display

Adhesives for Framing Posters, Archival Glass, ClearHold Corners, Dry Mount, Mat Board -- Archival, Plexiglas

## Poster Measurement

Gloves for handling posters, Starrett Steel Rules

## Poster Storage

Archival, Drop-Front Storage Boxes, Flat-File Cabinets, Glassine, Interleaving, Laminating Posters, Museum Barrier Paper, Neutral Glassine, Oxford Display Albums, Polyethylene Storage Bags, Portfolio Boxes, Steel Safes, Taped Plastic Bags

## Misc.

Bindweed, Combo, Lobby Cards, Music Memorabilia, Price guide, Signed by Plate, Signed By The Artist

## Cards

Card Set, Grande Card, Mailer, Postcard, Postcard -- Ad Back, Postcard -- Blank Back, Postcard -- Bulk Rate, Postcard -- Cut Double, Postcard -- Double, Postcard -- Place Stamp Here, Postcard -- Single, Uncut Double

## Editions

1st Printing Set, Bootleg, Counterfeit, Forgery, Original Art, Pirate Printing, Reprint, Unauthorized Poster, Variant, Artist's Proof, Color Variant, Concert Poster, Edition, Format, Image Set, Limited Edition, Numbered Edition, Numbered Poster, Numbered Series, Original, Original Printing, Progressive Proof, Set, Ticket Set, Flier, Handbill,

## Tools

Loupe, Ticket Outlet Strip, Grading

## Printing Anomalies

Blistering, Chalking, Drop Out, Ghosting, Moire Pattern, Off Register, Overprinting, Pin or Tack Hole, Pinholing, Posterization, Press Hickey, Set Off, Show Through, Walk-off, Crease, Dog Ear

## Color

Additive Colors, Color Bar, Color Wheel

## Folding

Folding: Concertina, Folding: Continuous, Folding: Double Gate, Folding: Parallel, Folding: Right-angle Fold, Folding: Single Fold

## Papers

Cover Paper, Grain of the paper, Self-cover, Paper Stock, Bond, Brown Paper, Card Stock, Cardboard, Coated Stock, Glossy Stock, Index -- Coated, Index -- Uncoated, Matte Finish, Newsprint, Thin Paper, Varnish, Vellum

## Press Terms

Back to Back, Back Up, Blanket, Bleed, Broadside or Broadsheet, Butt Fit, Cylinder Press, Dye-Based Ink, Embossing, Gang, Ganging, Grippers, Monochromatic, Overrun, Paper Plate, Platen Press, PMS, Press Number, Process Inks, Process Printing, Rotary

# Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

Press, Run On, Split Fountain, Trapping, Trimming, Under-run, Work and Tumble, Work and Turn, Work and Twist

## **Press Mark**

Corner Marks, Crop Mark, Fold Marks, Register Marks, Trim Marks

## **Pre-Press**

Artwork (Mechanical), Break for Color (Color Break), Burn, Color Separating, Color Transparency, Duotone, Emulsion, Flat, Halftone, Image Area, Keyline, Knock Out, Lay Out, Line Art, Negative, Overlay, Plate, Positive, Registration, Screened Print, Stripping, Vacuum Frame

## **Proofs**

Blue-line, Brownline Proof, Digital Proof, Match Print, Press Sheet, Printers Proof, Proofs, Proofsheets, Silverprint

## **Print Types**

Giclee, Iris Print, Litho, Lithograph, Offset, Screen Print, Serigraph

## **Terms**

Dots Per Inch, Point Size

## **Intaglio**

Printing Type: Intaglio, Etching, Gravure (photogravure), Metal Engraving

## **No Impression**

Printing Type: None Impression, Inkjet, Laser Printer, Xerography (photostatic)

## **Planographic Printing**

Offset Printing, Collotype, Hectography (gelatin), Lithography

## **Relief Printing**

Printing Type: Relief Printing, Letterpress, Linocut, Woodcut

## **Stencil Printing**

Printing Type: Stencil, Mimeography, Silkscreen (Seriography)

# Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

## **Printing and Collecting Terms**

by Michael Erlewine

This is by no way exhaustive, but here is a collection of some major terms used in poster collecting and printing. We need someone who is a printer out there to write a definitive article on this. Hopefully this can be of some help.

## **Business of Collecting**

Ebay, Shipping Posters

## **Poster Display**

Adhesives for Framing Posters, Archival Glass, ClearHold Corners, Dry Mount, Mat Board -- Archival, Plexiglas

## **Poster Measurement**

Gloves for handling posters, Starrett Steel Rules

## **Poster Storage**

Archival, Drop-Front Storage Boxes, Flat-File Cabinets, Glassine, Interleaving, Laminating Posters, Museum Barrier Paper, Neutral Glassine, Oxford Display Albums, Polyethylene Storage Bags, Portfolio Boxes, Steel Safes, Taped Plastic Bags

## **Misc.**

Bindweed, Combo, Lobby Cards, Music Memorabilia, Price guide, Signed by Plate, Signed By The Artist

## **Cards**

Card Set, Grande Card, Mailer, Postcard, Postcard -- Ad Back, Postcard -- Blank Back, Postcard -- Bulk Rate, Postcard -- Cut Double, Postcard -- Double, Postcard -- Place Stamp Here, Postcard -- Single, Uncut Double

## **Editions**

1st Printing Set, Bootleg, Counterfeit, Forgery, Original Art, Pirate Printing, Reprint, Unauthorized Poster, Variant, Artist's Proof, Color Variant, Concert Poster, Edition, Format, Image Set, Limited Edition, Numbered Edition, Numbered Poster, Numbered Series, Original, Original Printing, Progressive Proof, Set, Ticket Set, Flier, Handbill,

## **Tools**

Loupe, Ticket Outlet Strip, Grading

## **Printing Anomalies**

Blistering, Chalking, Drop Out, Ghosting, Moire Pattern, Off Register, Overprinting, Pin or Tack Hole, Pinholing, Posterization, Press Hickey, Set Off, Show Through, Walk-off, Crease, Dog Ear

## **Color**

Additive Colors, Color Bar, Color Wheel

## **Folding**

Folding: Concertina, Folding: Continuous, Folding: Double Gate, Folding: Parallel, Folding: Right-angle Fold, Folding: Single Fold

## **Papers**

Cover Paper, Grain of the paper, Self-cover, Paper Stock, Bond, Brown Paper, Card Stock, Cardboard, Coated Stock, Glossy Stock, Index -- Coated, Index -- Uncoated, Matte Finish, Newsprint, Thin Paper, Varnish, Vellum

## **Press Terms**

Back to Back, Back Up, Blanket, Bleed, Broadside or Broadsheet, Butt Fit, Cylinder Press, Dye-Based Ink, Embossing, Gang, Ganging, Grippers, Monochromatic, Overrun, Paper Plate, Platen Press, PMS, Press Number, Process Inks, Process Printing, Rotary

# Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

Press, Run On, Split Fountain, Trapping, Trimming, Under-run, Work and Tumble, Work and Turn, Work and Twist

## **Press Mark**

Corner Marks, Crop Mark, Fold Marks, Register Marks, Trim Marks

## **Pre-Press**

Artwork (Mechanical), Break for Color (Color Break), Burn, Color Separating, Color Transparency, Duotone, Emulsion, Flat, Halftone, Image Area, Keyline, Knock Out, Lay Out, Line Art, Negative, Overlay, Plate, Positive, Registration, Screened Print, Stripping, Vacuum Frame

## **Proofs**

Blue-line, Brownline Proof, Digital Proof, Match Print, Press Sheet, Printers Proof, Proofs, Proofsheets, Silverprint

## **Print Types**

Giclee, Iris Print, Litho, Lithograph, Offset, Screen Print, Serigraph

## **Terms**

Dots Per Inch, Point Size

## **Intaglio**

Printing Type: Intaglio, Etching, Gravure (photogravure), Metal Engraving

## **No Impression**

Printing Type: None Impression, Inkjet, Laser Printer, Xerography (photostatic)

## **Planographic Printing**

Offset Printing, Collotype, Hectography (gelatin), Lithography

## **Relief Printing**

Printing Type: Relief Printing, Letterpress, Linocut, Woodcut

## **Stencil Printing**

Printing Type: Stencil, Mimeography, Silkscreen (Seriography)

# Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

## The Cataloging of Posters

by Michael Erlewine

There were a few people out there that were really into posters in an organized way from the early on, folks like Eric King, Paul Getchell, Jacaeber Kastor, and Dennis King. These guys not only liked posters, but they collected them assiduously, and more important, they organized and cataloged their collections. In other words, they wanted to know how many there were in a series and in what order, and what variations of each one were printed. This never crossed my mind. In those days, I could have cared less.

Eric King produced the first serious catalog of some of the major poster venues like the Family Dog and the Bill Graham series, complete with detailed analysis of the variants and reprints. Dennis King, another acknowledge expert, not only organized the material for his own use, but has run a sophisticated poster shop for decades, the D. King Gallery in Berkeley, California. "Sophisticated" here means treating these posters as art and historical documents, not just as memorabilia.

Thanks to these people, the art of collecting has taken shape and has been organized to the degree it is. And later in time, came people like Paul Grushkin, who published the first and only comprehensive book on rock posters, a book which almost single-handedly catapulted rock posters into the status of collectables.

Another important historic figure is Phil Cushway, who under the name ArtRock, consolidated the poster market, maintained a large retail store, and by

kind of cornering the market on a number of key items, helped to establish a floor price for most posters. Cushway published full-color catalogs promoting poster purchasing and collecting, and generally helped the buying and selling of posters to become a recognized business. This was on the West Coast.

On the east coast, Jacaeber Kaster, who was an early collector and is an accomplished poster expert, did something similar, creating an upscale gallery and market for these items as collectable art in New York City.

Those of us who collect posters today owe the above group our thanks for pioneering the way. To this list should be added many other experts, people like Walter Madeiros, and Greg Davidson. More recently, Ben Komins.

## Tips for Cataloging Posters

I archive my information using the FoxPro database on the PC, since it is the fastest database available for the PC. For those of you who have no database experience (and may not be ready for any), it is still worthwhile to pay some attention to how you store your data, so that later, when you do want to database it, it will be easier.

It can be helpful to store your data in spreadsheet format using Excel or something similar. I would consider a spreadsheet as an intermediate step that will be useful later, when you need to move it to a true relational database.

As a systems programmer, I will be happy to come up with a separate article (and we can have discussions) about how to set up a poster database, but for now let's just keep it simple. You need some way to identify the poster image

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

with its name. I have had many years of experience with this, working with millions of records, so I do know what I am talking about.

Ultimately, it is not helpful to try to encode a description of the poster into the image file name. Sure, it is tempting to name a photo image file "FD84.JPG," but this becomes more problematical for non-series posters like "Grove for Peace.jpg," and so forth. Get a few thousand of these named files in a directory and you have a mess. After all, that is what spreadsheets and databases were created for: linking one thing with another, an image with a poster description.

It is best to simply number your files, numerically, perhaps using some sort of alphanumeric code as a header. Be sure to make allowance for the total number of posters you wish to document. For example, I might use the two-letter combination "CP" as a header, followed by a numerical sequence. Thus: "CP00001," "CP00002," and on to "CP99999." Notice that I do not name the file "CP1," "CP2," and so on, since these names will not sort or appear properly in a directory. You need the extra zeros, to make them sort properly. That is how files can be named.

At this point, we have shot some images, named them, and archived them to disk. You might think our job is over. Far from it. The time consuming part is just beginning.

### **Post-Processing Data: Compression**

I do my entire post-session image processing with Photoshop, since it is (for me) the most powerful tool I have been able to find. I know there are other similar tools, which also do a fine job.

At this point, I have a directory of very large image files. Next, I process the files, converting each very large file to something more manageable for day-to-day examination. I reduce each file from its native (NEF 8 MB) format to about a one megabyte JPG file.

Here is not the place for an extensive discussion of compression formats, but let's do say a few words to whet your appetite (or send you running). The problem is that these huge images (40 megabyte TIFF files, etc.) are VERY difficult for the computer to handle, with any speed. They are slow to load, slow to modify, and slow to save. I am working on a dual-processor workstation with a megabyte of RAM and it is still slow!

Therefore, I save the native original file and create a smaller, working file, as mentioned. With most forms of compression and all forms of extreme compression, there is some loss of information (read: quality) involved. And there are many forms of compression, .JPG, .GIF and so forth, each with their positive and negative qualities. There is always a tradeoff. The greater the compression ratio, the smaller the file (which is great), but also the poorer the quality of the compressed image (not so great), when it is later decompressed.

So like most things in life, there is a compromise that must be negotiated. JPG compression is a lossy compression that can have a compression ratio from 2 to 100. In other words, the JPG method can compress up to 100 times, which is a lot. For my purposes, I am using JPG files compressed to a ratio of about 6, which is not a lot of compression.

# Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

There are programs that allow you to control the amount of compression you want to use in your JPGs. There are even programs that let you compress one part of the image more than another, so that you could preserve the features in a person's face (for example), while not worrying about the ocean in the background. We won't go into that now, but it is interesting.

Now I have a file that is about one megabyte in size, which my computer can play with and not be slowed down to the point that nothing gets done.

## I. Cropping the Images by Michael Erlewine

### Cropping

Next, I load each image into Photoshop and crop it. I separate it from the board on which it was photographed. Since I am only using these images for identification purposes, the cropping can be "pretty good." If I were helping one of you create a poster book for publication, we would have to take greater pains AND work with the giant images.



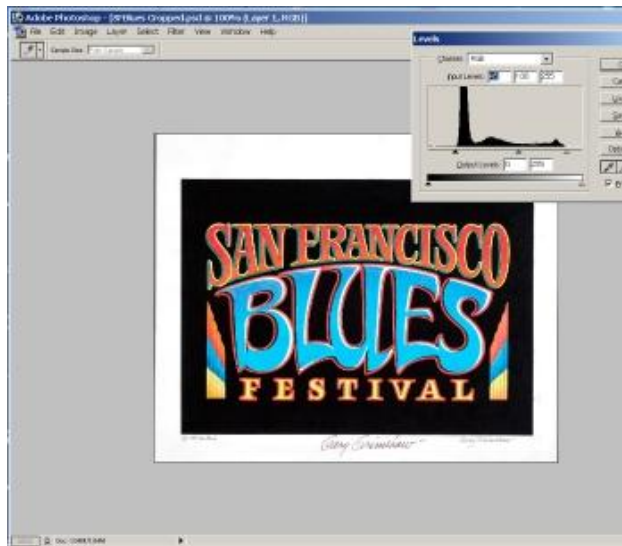
### *Cropping in Photoshop*

Note: When we are talking about photo-documenting posters, I want to emphasize what should be obvious that if you wish to use these poster images in a publication, you must negotiate that permission from the artist who created the image and perhaps with the venue that contracted the work. For example, the Family Dog images are under the copyright of Chet Helms. He would be the one to contact, if you wanted to publish a book with some of the FD series in it.

## II. Adjusting Brightness Levels in Photoshop

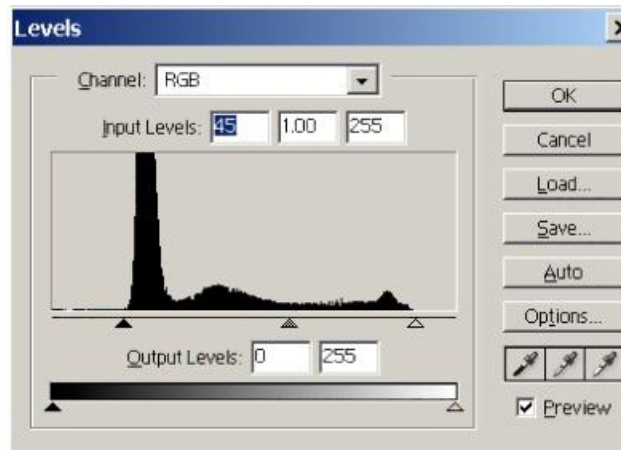
After cropping, the next step is to check the image for any obvious problems, something that could be corrected by adjusting the color or brightness levels of the image. In almost all cases, some correction is required and Photoshop makes this pretty easy. Using the ADJUST LEVELS command, one can manipulate the small histogram so that the point that represents the blackest black is marked and the point the represents the whitest white is also marked. I won't go into all the details, but the general idea is to balance the image, so that it is not too dark (can't see it) or too light (washed out). If you are going to use these images on the web in very small size, then you may want to sharpen the image, as well.

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More



*Adjusting the levels in Photoshop*

Using the Levels feature in Photoshop, take a look at the small histogram and note if there is blank space on the left and right of the graph. In this case, there is space on both sides. Then you move the small triangles on either end and under the black horizontal line, from the right and left... in until they are under the start and end of the graph. In this illustration, I have moved each inward, so that the left-hand triangle is at the beginning of the dark part of the image, and the right-hand image is at the beginning of the light part of the image. Removing this dead space will give you good light levels for the image.



*Levels graph or histogram*

The resulting, balanced image is now cropped, light-leveled, and ready for use.



*Finished image*

### III. Cataloging Images

Now we have an image that is ready for cataloging. Let's talk about that for a moment, although we really should have a series of articles on this, at some future point in time.

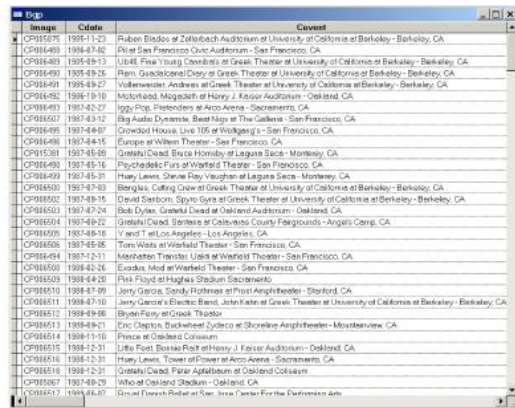
We need to be able to find a particular image, on demand. Since we have numbered them in an orderly way, all that remains to be done is to link the image number to whatever data on the poster we are interested in. This usually means the date of the concert, the bands who played on that date, the venue where the gig was played, and, last but not least, the artist who produced the poster.

This can be entered into database, a spreadsheet (like Excel), or a word processor, in order of potential usefulness. It is a habit easily acquired, but a bad one, to skimp on documenting the images. If you put the data into a word processor, then at least enter the



# Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

data in some form of table or separate the different fields (date, venue, etc.) by tabs or some mark that can be accessed later. If you put the data into a spreadsheet, then you already have it in columns, which are easily converted to a database. The key thought here is to have identical pieces of information for each entry. If you have no info for a certain field, like the name of the artist, you would enter "" or something, just to keep the sets of data even. Otherwise, they can't easily be databased.



Date	Artist	Venue
1995-11-23	Ruben Blades	Zellerbach Auditorium of University of California at Berkeley - Berkeley, CA
1994-07-02	DKL	San Francisco Civic Auditorium - San Francisco, CA
1995-09-13	U2	Pauley Pavilion, University of California at Berkeley - Berkeley, CA
1995-09-15	Blondie	Pauley Pavilion, University of California at Berkeley - Berkeley, CA
1995-09-27	Voltaire	Andrews Hall, University of California at Berkeley - Berkeley, CA
1996-10-10	Moby-Dick	Mogeloff of Henry J. Kaiser Auditorium - Oakland, CA
1997-02-27	Jay's Place	Indestructible at Acorn Arena - Sacramento, CA
1997-03-12	Big Audio Dynamite	Beet Nigs at The Galleria - San Francisco, CA
1997-04-07	Crowded House	Live 105 at Wolfgang - San Francisco, CA
1997-04-15	Europe	Whelan Theater - San Francisco, CA
1997-05-09	Grateful Dead	Electric Blue Horseshoe at Laguna Seca - Monterey, CA
1997-05-16	Psychadelic Furs	Worldwide Theater - San Francisco, CA
1997-05-31	Hazy Lewis	Shoreline Amphitheater at Laguna Seca - Monterey, CA
1997-07-03	Bongos	Calvin Cowie at Greek Theater at University of California at Berkeley - Berkeley, CA
1997-08-15	David Sanborn	Spirits Gyps at Greek Theater at University of California at Berkeley - Berkeley, CA
1997-07-24	Bob Dylan	Grateful Dead at Oakland Auditorium - Oakland, CA
1997-09-27	Grateful Dead	Spenters at Colusa County Fairgrounds - Angels Camp, CA
1997-09-19	Yves T. et Les Angéles	Los Angeles, CA
1997-05-06	Tom Waits	Worldwide Theater - San Francisco, CA
1997-12-11	Mercury Theatre	United Worldfield Theater - San Francisco, CA
1998-02-16	Grateful Dead	Atkinson Theater - San Francisco, CA
1998-04-20	Flax	Floyd of Hughes Stadium Sacramento
1998-07-09	Jerry Garcia	Sandy Richman at Frost Amphitheater - Stanford, CA
1998-07-10	Jerry Garcia	Electric Blue, John Kahn at Greek Theater at University of California at Berkeley - Berkeley, CA
1998-09-06	Byron Fenty	of Greek Theater
1998-09-21	Eric Clapton	Buckhead Jyco at Shoreline Amphitheater - Mountain View, CA
1998-11-10	Prince	at Oakland Coliseum
1998-12-31	Life Force	Bonnie Richman at Henry J. Kaiser Auditorium - Oakland, CA
1998-12-31	Hazy Lewis	Tower of Power at Acorn Arena - Sacramento, CA
1998-12-31	Grateful Dead	Pauley Pavilion at Oakland Coliseum
1997-08-29	Who	at Oakland Stadium - Oakland, CA
1998-08-07	David Sanborn	at San Jose Center For the Performing Arts

## Keep a list or database

The point is simple. If you are successful and accumulate a run or series of images, sooner or later, you will wish they were in a true database. You can visually look through a hundred or so posters, but when that scales up, it becomes increasingly impossible to find anything. For example, I am working with a database of about 25,000+ images at this point. If this were in a word processor, forget it. Even in a spreadsheet (most of which have size limits anyway), it becomes very difficult to find things once several thousand items exist. For those interested, here is a list of fields for you to keep track of:

Date: 1966-06-03 (YYYY-MM-DD -- use this format, because you can sort on it)

Venue: Avalon Ballroom

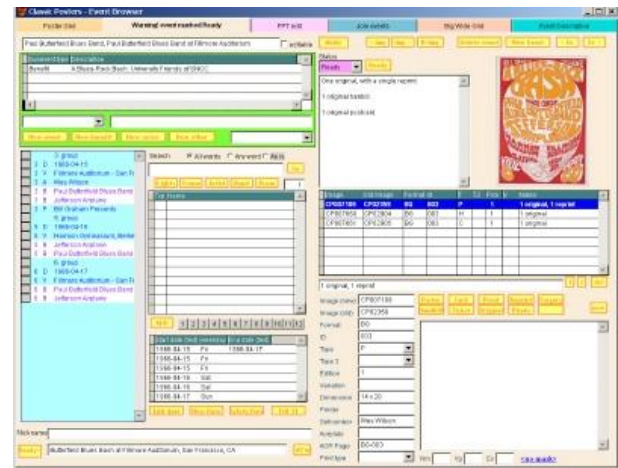
Bands: Grass roots / Big Brother and the Holding Company / Stone Façade /

Artist: Victor Moscoso

Size: 13 x 20"

Notes: 2nd printing

The database I use for the 25,000 thumbnail images is over 1.5 gigabytes in size, but I can very easily pull up any combination of date, bands, venue, artists -- whatever. I can have in seconds what would take days of work to assemble from a word processor, if ever. I can sort on date, venue, city, artist, promoter, etc. I can easily examine sizes, conditions, editions, notes, and alternate images -- whatever.



## Classic Posters data application

My point is that you can make your data entry database friendly and future oriented or otherwise. Make it friendly, by keeping things in columns, numbering items as mentioned above, and the like. If there is interest, I would be glad to go into excruciating detail about how to set up poster data. Just let me know that this interests you.

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

### **The Advantages of Poster Documentation**

In any discipline, there is a need for cataloging and documentation. Posters have been up to now, largely seen as memorabilia. There are no comprehensive attempts to document all known posters. Pioneers like Eric King, Jacaerber Kastor, and Fred Williams have attempted to order and document and PUBLISH various parts of this field. Each of these has produced lists of posters with some variation detail, in particular Kastor and Eric King. There are many of you out there with great knowledge of posters, but not the compulsion to put it into print and share it.

It is my opinion that we are in a transition phase at this point, where posters (at least those from the '60s) are beginning to be seen as something more than simply memorabilia. What we have here is art and fine enough art to warrant inclusion in any discussion of graphics in the 20th Century. Posters are collectable, affordable art that appreciates, plain and simple. And a bargain at that!

What remains to be done at this point is to market this concept and to bring awareness of posters as art to a greater circle of people. Documenting images and data, organizing that data, and publishing appropriate catalogs or guides are just the obvious first steps required to bring a more academic aspect to the field.

In many ways, this can be approached using a divide-and-conquer plan. Most of us have some area of knowledge, some part of the world of posters th make that catalog available for all to

use. I have a track record of doing this with music and film. Those sites have proved to be useful for a very large number of people -- millions, in fact.

Photo documenting and cataloging posters is only the initial framework. We also need essays and articles on every aspect of poster collecting, repair, storage, pricing, selling and trading, and so on. This is in addition to biographies of all known posters artists.

So, we have a lot of work to do. It should be a lot of fun.

# Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

## Some of the Tools the Experts Use

By Michael Erlewine

Your most valuable tools are your eyes and your sense of good taste -- what appeals to you. Other items that may be useful are:

Cotton Gloves -- Not needed for a lot day-to-day handling of posters, you may want them if you are handling very expensive or very old paper, since the transfer of body oils is more detrimental and the harm done more immediately visible. I use gloves for the very rare stuff.



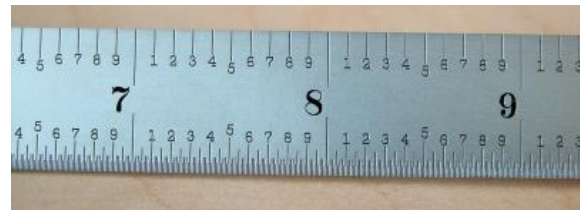
*Cotton gloves are useful*

Micrometer -- You don't need this device, unless you are discriminating variants for rare posters such as some in the Family Dog and Bill Graham (BG) sets. In these special cases, it can be important to know the thickness of the paper the poster is printed on, and this is what micrometers measure.



*Micrometer -- measures thickness*

Steel Rule -- You will need some sort of yardstick or measuring tape, to determine the actual size of the poster you are working on. The steel rule shown below is 36" long and measures in increments of 1/64 of an inch. You don't need this kind of accuracy unless you are working with sets with special variants, like some of the Family Dog and Bill Graham (BG) sets, but they are kind of fun to have around.



*Steel Rule, in 1/64s of an inch increments*

## Shipping Posters -- Flat

Packing and shipping posters is crucial to almost all of us, since that is how we receive most, if not all, of the posters we collect. The horror stories of bad poster-packing could fill a small book. There are two main methods of shipping posters, shipping them flat or in tubes. Flat is very much the preferred method and the one invariably used for really

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

expensive pieces, unless they are too large.

### Flat

The really big dealers have specially made shipping containers, like the one shown below.

Here is a heavy-duty cardboard box that has custom-fitted pieces of foam, with protruding fingers. There is a foam piece above and below the posters. Where the fingers of the foam pieces meet is where you place the posters. The foam fingers press together to hold the posters, kind of suspended between the fingers. This kind of box works well if the number of posters is not too many. Too many posters, and the foam fingers cannot maintain a pressure, causing the posters to slide and bent corners result.



*Custom Shipping Container*

The most common form of shipping posters flat involves two sheets of heavy cardboard, with the poster placed and held in the center, using various methods. With the poster between the cardboard sheets, the two cardboards are securely taped, making sure all the outer edges are sealed. This is probably the most commonly used and most effective method for shipping valuable posters.

The only caveats here are the methods used to secure the poster between the cardboard panels. Quite often, the poster is placed in a cheap polyethylene bag, pushed to the bottom of the bag, and the extra plastic bag, squared off, and folded over the poster and taped. The bag is then taped tightly to the cardboard.

The only danger here, and it is VERY common, is that of opening the plastic bag. To get the taped bag off the cardboard, some kind of box-cutting knife is used to cut the pieces of tape holding the bag (and poster) to the sheets of cardboard. This is all very straight forward, except that when the tape is cut, it is VERY easy to lose sight of where all the cut ends are. Since most tape is transparent, it is easy to forget these cut ends, with the result that, as the poster is withdrawn from the plastic bag, one or more of these loose ends 'grab' at the poster, potentially causing damage. Using opaque tape like masking tape helps the receiver see where tape ends are.



*Dangers of tape and plastic*

So, be careful when you remove a poster from a taped bag!

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More



*Beware the loose transparent tape!*



*The maverick bag*



*The 'Good Tape' -- You can see it.*

Another word of warning to those new to collecting. When you first start out, you don't have that many ways to store your posters. It is very tempting to want to somehow salvage these taped plastic bags and to reuse them for storage. This can be a big mistake. Those old tape ends can sneak up on you and grab at your posters. Just throw any bag that has had tape on it in the trash.

### **A Safe Way to Ship**

The most common and a very safe way to pack posters is also very inexpensive and simple. You just take a common mailing envelope, and cut off the four corners. These corners are then used to position and hold the poster on the inside of the cardboard sheets. Place four cut corners of the mailing envelope over the four corners of your posters. Place the poster on the inside of one of the cardboard sheets and tape those corners (not the poster) to the board.



*Good way to mount poster to board*

Using this method, the poster is securely held to the board by the four corners, but no tape touches the poster.

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

Some put the poster in a clear plastic bag and then put the bag to the board, using the four corners method.



*Mounting the corner*

Finally, with the poster on the board, held by the four corners, place the two cardboard sheets together and completely seal all outer edges with packing tape. This is the least expensive and safest method I have seen to date. However, this does not work for very large posters, where the cardboard can be bent in transit.

Most of the main dealers use 2-3 pieces of heavy cardboard (or foam core) on each side of the poster. The poster is then plastic bagged and fastened to the inside of the sheets with tape or with corners, as described above.

### **Mailing Tubes: Pros and Cons**

Putting posters in tubes should be avoided. Unfortunately it is the most common way to ship posters, since it is cheaper and involves less labor than any other method. Just roll the poster

tightly and slip it in the tube. That's it. You are done.

The problem on the receiver's end involves getting the poster out of the tube, and then going through the process of flattening out the poster.

Getting the poster out can be a bit of an art, since the poster usually expands to the limit of the inner diameter of tube. Sometimes, it is very tight. Most times, it will not just slide out, but has to be pulled out.

This is done by pressing your fingers to the inside of the tube, and rolling the poster tighter, so that it can gradually be pulled out. Most times this works out, but the process can also involve damage to the poster, if proper care is not taken.

Many shippers place the poster in the center of the tube and bunch tissue paper into either end, preventing the poster from slipping and moving to either end of the tube. This can be helpful, but the same tissue paper can also damage the edges or the poster, either as it is placed in, or during transit, as the poster slides and presses against it.

Very large posters invariably have to be sent in a tube, since flats of this size are not accepted by UPS or the U.S. Mail. There is also the very-real danger of larger flats being bent in transit. This definitely happens fairly often, so in this regard, the tube could be best.

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More



*Tube Diameters*

As for the size of the tube, tubes less than 3-4" in diameter should NOT be used. The standard is 1/4" walled tub at least 6" in diameter. The smaller tube in the enclosed picture is just too small, yet a quite-large (and expensive) poster was shipped in it.

Many dealers buy tubes in 4' lengths and cut them once, based on the size of the posters they ship most frequently.

In the best of worlds, tubes of 4-6" are best. They roll the poster much less tightly than the smaller variety.

### **Flattening**

Do not store your posters in rolled form. This is to be avoided. As posters age, their ability to be flattened out from a rolled state becomes less and less, until the poster actually breaks into pieces. I have seen very valuable posters stored in a rolled format. Don't do it. Flatten them as soon as possible and keep them that way.

If the poster is somewhat brittle, then the flattening process may take more

time, be done more slowly. In general, most collectors place the rolled poster, upside down, in a flat position and put other posters or flat objects on top of it, and leave it there. Sometime later, you will have a well-behaved flat poster.

### **Matting and Framing**

Matting posters is not harmful, provided a few essential guidelines are followed. Here they are:

Matting -- The mat board is not simply cosmetic. It serves an essential function, that of keeping the glass or Plexiglas raised and away from the poster surface. It is important that the mat board be thick enough to serve this purpose. Always use archival mat board, which means the board will not chemically react to the paper/inks of the poster. Also, always make sure the mat is at least 3/4 inches larger than the poster itself, to allow for the natural expansion and contraction of paper with routine temperature changes.

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More



*A Piece of Original Art, Matted and A Piece of Original Art, Matted and Framed*

Mounting the Poster -- According to the experts I respect, and contrary to what many framing sites declare, it is my understanding that there is NO adhesive whatsoever that is archival safe. In other words, ALL ADHESIVES are harmful and do damage to the poster. Therefore to not mount your poster to a back board by adhesives of any kind. Instead, use the clear plastic corners as described above. These serve to hold the poster and cause it no long-term damage.

Glass or Plexiglass -- Glass is much cheaper, but runs the risk of, if broken, possibly damaging the poster. Plexiglas is not likely to do that, although Plexiglas has been known to splinter.

In either case, the real choice is whether to get glass or Plexiglas that is UV protected. The effect of ultraviolet radiation is detrimental to poster color and will cause your poster to fade over time. Just ask for "archival" glass. It will cost more.

If your poster will not be hung where any direct sunlight will ever reach it AND it is not your most prized poster, then you might get away with standard glass.

The same goes for Plexiglas. It is available in both standard and UV protected forms. The UV protected form is more expensive.

It is perhaps sad, but seems to be true, that most (certainly many) collectors don't mat and frame all that many posters. They tend to squirrel their posters away from sun and eyeballs, confined to safe storage of one type or another.



*Double Mats raise the glass from the Poster Surface*



## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

### **Tools of the Trade, the Well-dressed Poster Collector**

by Michael Erlewine

You would think that the first thing one needs to begin a poster collector is some posters, right? Well, not always the case. Many collectors have no idea of what to collect, so very often the first purchase by a would-be collector is a good book on posters, of which there is just about one, "The Art of Rock," by author Paul Grushkin. Although somewhat out of date by now, it still is the one essential book that all collectors of the San Francisco 1960's poster scene must have.

As for copies of "The Art of Rock," best look to Ebay for used copies. There is a tiny much-abridged and unreadable paperback available on Amazon.com. This is useless, so don't waste your money it. Pony up the big bucks and get one of the original printings on Ebay. It turns up every week or so. This is a must have book. Once you have this book, you can look and read through it and perhaps get an idea of just what type and period of posters you like, and might want to collect.

There are other books on posters out there, and I am sure I must have them all. I can't think of one that you really have to have.

Now you are ready to get some posters. We can leave that to another section to discuss. Let's jump right to: what do you do with them?

Well, the classic response to that is to tack them up on the wall, of course. We all did that, years ago, back in the 'day'. Very few poster collectors pin them to the wall, anymore. Any kind of damage,

event tack holes, reduce the value of a poster. "Mint" condition is the preferred condition for collecting.

### **STORAGE**

So where do you put them? In the early days, most collectors threw them in a box and shoved the box under the bed or in a closet. Today, there are several commonly-used methods of storage, perhaps the most popular being placing the posters in an album, between archaically-safe sheets of acetate or mylar. This way, the poster can be viewed, but no one can touch them. Handling posters by hand runs the risk of leaving body oil from the fingers on the paper.

However, beware that most inexpensive albums, like photograph-type albums, use a plastic that can actually react with certain poster inks and damage your posters. Therefore you want to make sure that whatever plastic sleeves you are using are archivally safe.

Putting them in an album prevents that. The only downside about albums is that posters tend to slide around in these albums, damaging corners. The heaviness of a full album makes moving it around difficult, and prone to slippage. If you use adhesive corners, they will hold the poster steady, but they have other disadvantages like: getting them in place and the poster in them can lead, through our the inherent clumsiness of the process to bent poster corners and what not. Also, these corners can slip and turn over, exposing their sticky side to posters, and so on. Nothing is free.

A better solution is the use of Mylar sleeves. Mylar is an inert, archivally safe, form of plastic sleeve, into which posters can be placed. If you use

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

properly sized Mylar sleeves, there is very little danger of slippage and this is a good solution.

The only possible disadvantage (and this paranoia speaking) of all of these plastic sleeves and albums is that: should they get near a fire or even in very hot sun, and melt, they would fuse to the poster material and the poster would be rendered useless -- just a consideration.

What the conservative collector uses for poster storage are archivally safe (inert) cardboard boxes, often those storage boxes with metal corners. The posters are placed in these boxes, one on top of another, with an interleaf page (some inert paper) between each posters. In particular, silkscreens need to be interleaved.

As to what kind of paper to use as the interleaf, glassine will work, but is not recommended for color photographs. Most collectors use storage papers that are buffered to pH 8.0-8.5. with perhaps 2% calcium carbonate. You want an acid-free paper with as little sulfur content as possible. A good place to read about these is Light Impressions, which can be found on the web.

So there you have a brief run-through on where to store posters.

### Measurement Tools

Some of the poster experts like Eric King and Jacaeber Kastor have special rulers that are graduated to 1/64", which is very fine. I have one, because they have one, but I find it mostly overkill. Even if their measurements are to 1/64", their readers won't have one and so what good will that do them. For almost

all posters, a ruler or tape measure that goes down to 1/16" is fine.

### Micrometers

For measuring the thickness of various papers, you will need a micrometer, but, again, this only comes into play ones in a very great while, for very special posters.

### White Gloves

On other hand, so to speak, white cotton gloves (available from any archival web site) are not overkill. There will definitely be times when they are needed to keep body oils off a rare or delicate poster. I use these quite often.

### Photo Documentation

And if you are buying and selling posters, you are going to need to be able to get snapshots of them for one reason or another. There is a whole article on that subject elsewhere on this site:

"Photo-Archiving of Concert-Music Posters"

### Shipping Materials

You will need some materials to exchange and ship posters. Many of these you may acquire if you buy posters. You can just reuse what you receive. Posters are shipped in two ways, either rolled in a tube or flat - no rolling them. Shipping them flat is preferred, if you package the posters correctly, but the packages are unwieldy and you don't want the whole package to even be bent, and so on.

Tubes are convenient and if of large enough diameter (4" or greater) will not affect the poster. Beware of tightly rolling an expensive poster and jamming it in a 2" tube. Not a good idea.

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

It is kind of an unwritten rule of poster exchange that if the poster is very valuable, it is always shipped flat and the seller is responsible to package it properly. The following articles are on this site.

"Shipping Posters - Flat"

"A Safe Way to Ship"

"Mailing Tubes: Pros and Cons"

### **Building a Library**

As for books, I have good and bad news. The good news is that you won't have to spend a lot of money on poster books; the bad news is that there are so few of them. We need more.

### **ESSENTIAL**

Art of Rock by Paul Grushkin (BOOK)

Collector's Guide to Psychedelic Rock Concert Posters (BOOK)

### **COLLECTABLE IN THEMSELVES**

Eureka: The Great Poster Trip (BOOK)

Get On Down: A Decade of Rock and Roll Posters (BOOK)

Masters of Rock: Psychedelic '60s (BOOK)

Freehand: The Art of Stanley Mouse (BOOK)

Rick Griffin

### **GOOD**

Swag: Rock Posters of the '90s (BOOK)

Art of the Fillmore by Lemke and Kastor (BOOK)

High Art: The History of the Psychedelic Poster (BOOK)

High Societies: Psychedelic Rock Posters of Haight-Ashbury (BOOK)

### **FUN, BUT OF LIMITED INTEREST**

Street Art: Punk Poster in San Francisco 1977-1982 (BOOK)

Summer of Love: Haight-Ashbury at Its Highest (BOOK)

White Rabbit and other Delights: East Totem West (BOOK)

Fillmore East: Recollections of Rock Theater (BOOK)

I Want to take You Higher: The Psychedelic Era 1965-1969 (BOOK)

### **DATED**

Goldmine Price Guide to Rock 'n' Roll Memorabilia (BOOK)

Official Price guide: Rock and Roll Magazines, Posters, and Memorabilia (BOOK)

# Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

## Visual Guide to Poster Grading

by Michael Erlewine

The best way to learn how to grade the condition of posters is by looking at a lot of examples of what can happen to a poster. Luckily for you, and not so for me, my collection happens to have a lot of fine examples of poster degradation, so I have put together a little archive of what you don't want to have too much of in your collection.

To start with, be sure to read the Rosetta Stone for estimating condition, as written by Jacaeber Kastor of Psychedelic Solution, considered by many, including myself, to be the expert's expert when it comes to the fine art of posterizing. You can read it here !A CP000037 "Poster Grading Chart".

**WARNING!!!!** Some of these images are large, so that you can see the poster defects, so be forewarned if you have a slow connection. Also, there are a lot of them, so have fun.

**PERFECT: A/A.** Here is the corner of a poster fresh for the printers box. It does not get any more perfect than this, but even here you can see some ink imperfections, so a rule to consider is: If life is imperfect, posters are too. They are, not by design, but by nature, imperfect. The perfection may affect the price, but seldom need to affect the enjoyment of the poster. In fact, many a funky poster has made for great enjoyment. Sometimes I like the odd raggedy poster, because I am not afraid to touch and enjoy it.



*A/A Perfect, Fresh From the Box*

**WRECKED:** If you want to see a poster that is beyond salvaging, except for an illustration like this, check you this copy of FD-26, perhaps the most immediately recognizable poster in the FD-series. Our thanks to Jacaeber Kastor for contributing this (our worst nightmare) poster.



*Beyond Help*

The next sections will take you through a brief tour of condition.

### Corner Defects by Michael Erlewine

**CORNERS:** The corners are the first to go, because they stick out in the world and are the most vulnerable. Almost any poster that has been handled much has

# Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

some corner wear, and this is to be expected, and not considered a harsh defect, as long as it is slight. When it gets seriously blunted, that is a different matter, and when torn off, well.....



*Corner Damage Inconsequential*



*Soft Corner*



*Softer Corner*



*Corner Bend, Missing Ink*

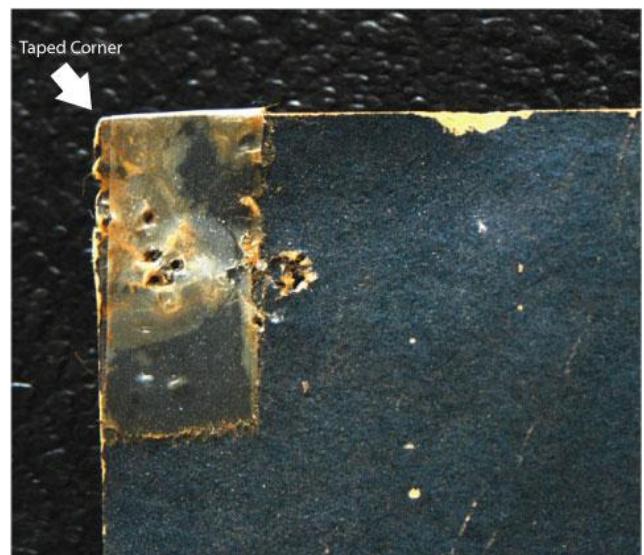
# Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More



*Corner Missing*



*Corner Bent, Slight Buckle*

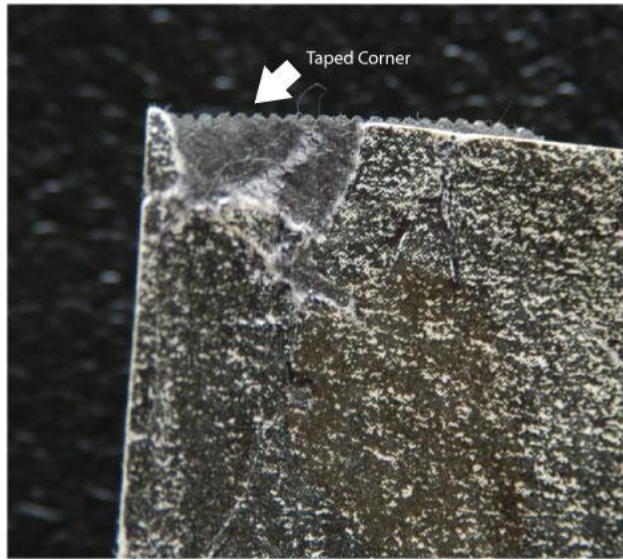


*Corner Taped*



*Corner Bend, Tack Hole*

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More



*Corner Taped Fill*



*Corner Tape over Tack Hole*



*Corner, Torn Tip*



*Corner Soft, with Fold*

### **Tack and Pin Holes**

**TACK AND PIN HOLES:** Posters were designed to be tacked (or glued!) to the wall, so it makes no sense to go crazy about their being tack holes in a poster. In fact a nice set of pinholes adds a touch of world elegance to a poster, much like the odd gold earring sends an "out of the box" message. A set of holes means this poster actually was used for the event or to grace someone's quarters. Not a bad thing.

Pinholes are generally very acceptable and a nice set of tack holes, even with the circular impression of the thumbtack head is not to be overly frowned on. Tack hole tears are another matter. They are to be discouraged and generally affect the price of the poster.

# Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

And harsh tears, where the poster was ripped down with the tacks in place, leaving long tears are not welcome. The same goes for a set of staple marks, which are like multiple pinholes, at their best. Staple holes are cool, unless they are some big whopper that tears up the poster. Multiple holes are uncool.



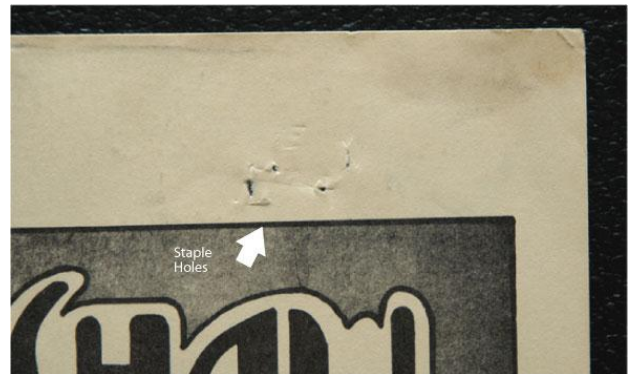
*Pin Hole*



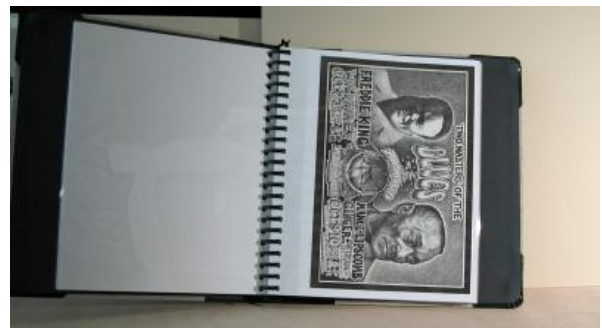
*Tack Hole*



*Tack Hole Tear*



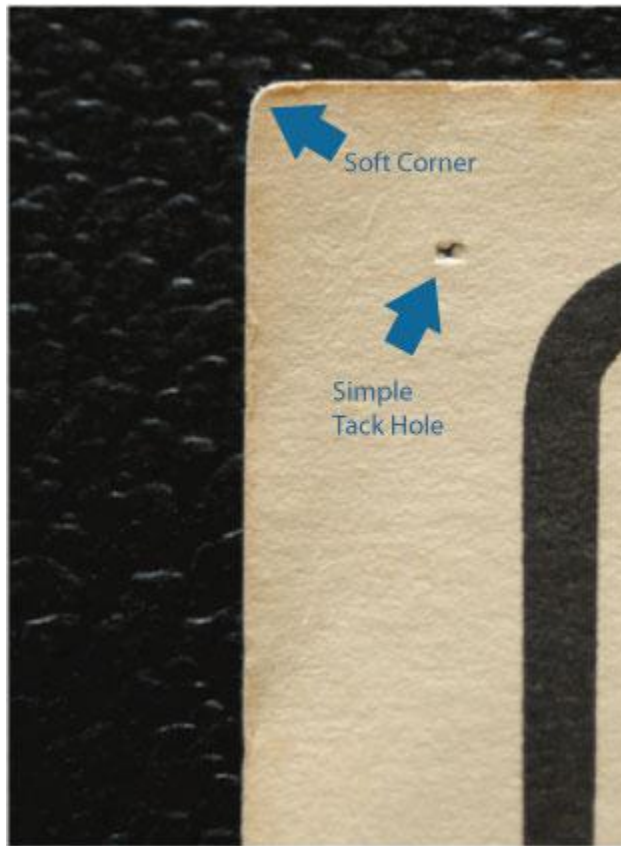
*Staple Holes*



*Multiple Tack Holes*



## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More



*Single Tack Hole*



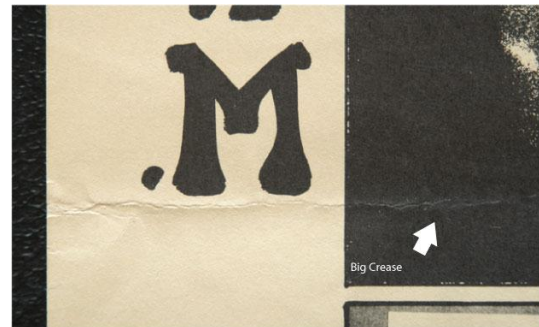
*Tack Tear*

### Edge Wear: The Crease and the Crumple

EDGE WEAR: THE CREASE AND THE CRUMPLE: Posters get edge wear, in particular with glossy slick posters, edge wear is almost to be expected. Large glossy posters seem to defy handling

and almost always show edge wear. While edge wear is never welcome, it usually does not affect the central image and vanishes the moment the poster is framed. And there is all kinds of edge wear, as looking at the shots below will illustrate. These range from tiny abrasions that just flare the lip of the edge to gaping sections gone, showing air.

And there is the crease and the crumple. Creases can be at the corners, but they can also affect large sections of the poster. Same with the crumple. These are never cool and while they may be insignificant, they often extend into the poster image. Some posters of handbills have been folded in half, and that's that.

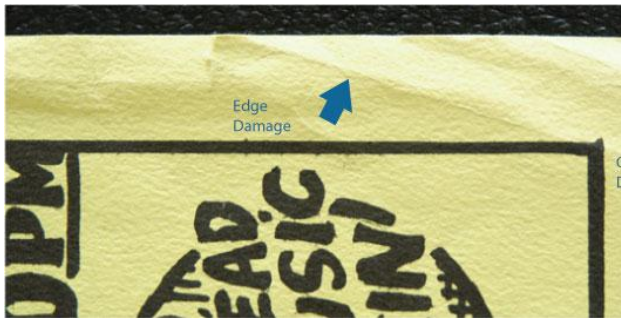


*Big Crease*



# Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

*Edge Crumple*



*Edge and Corner Crumple*



*Edge Damage*



*Edge Damage, Serious*



*Edge Damage and Crumple*



*Taped Edges*

## Fingerprints and Back Hinges

**FINGERPRINTS AND GLOSSY STOCK:** Watch out for these, because you can easily create them, in particular on glossy thin stock. A technique for handling these, taught to me by Brad Kelly, is to use a poster-it note to pick them up and raise them so that you can get your hands under them. Fingerprints can be removed, but I will have to get one of the experts to write a short description of how to do it.

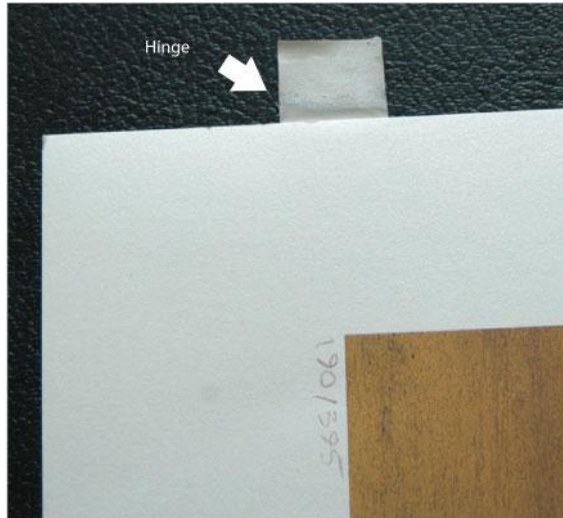


*Fingerprints*

**BACK HINGES:** There are dozens of ways to attempt to mount posters for matting and framing, and most of them involve sticking some form or archivally-safe glue-hinge to your poster. I don't do it. Period. What most collectors I know do is to mount the poster to the backboard using transparent plastic corners that are self-adhesive. Place these corners on the poster, carefully place the poster on the backboard, align

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

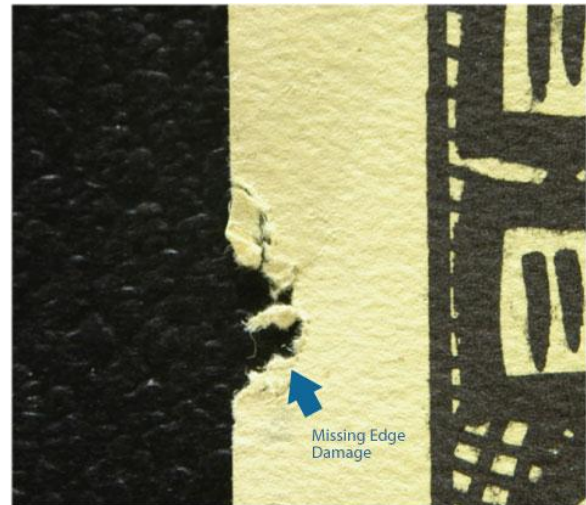
(and that is the hard part) and press down. This is a safe way to mount your posters. However, watch out for the self-adhesive corner that folds in half or in any way turns its sticky side up and grabs your poster. It happens.



*Back Hinges*

### Missing Pieces and Smudges

**MISSING PIECES:** Hey, there are no good missing pieces, so I can't help explain that away. If it is gone, it is gone. There is a article on this site on restoration and some poster collectors restore their posters to raise their value. While I understand why they do this, I have never done it and don't even like to see the signs of restoration, but that's just me.



*Missing Piece*

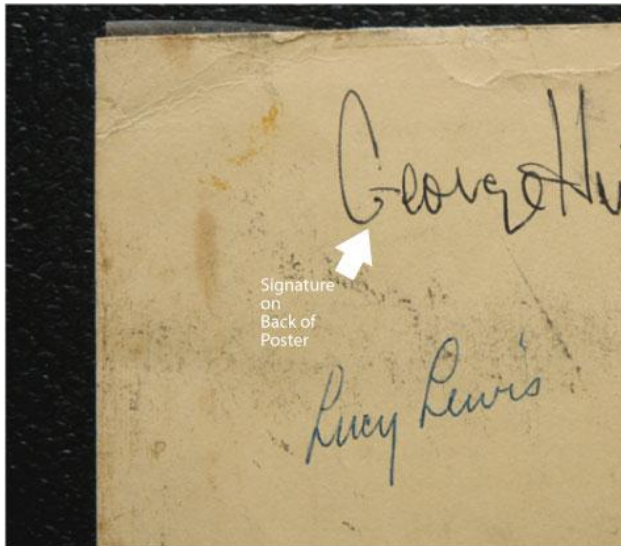


*Missing Piece and Tape*

# Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More



Damage Serious

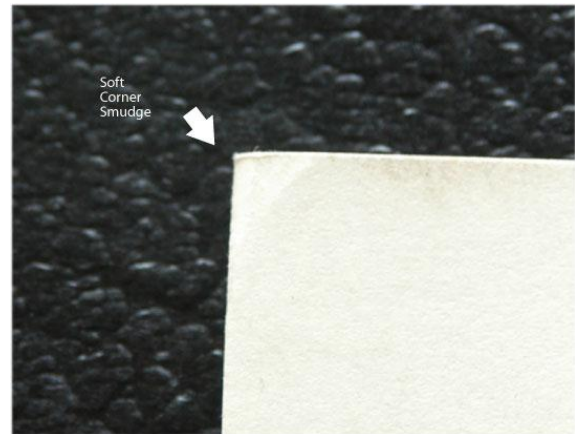


Signature on Back

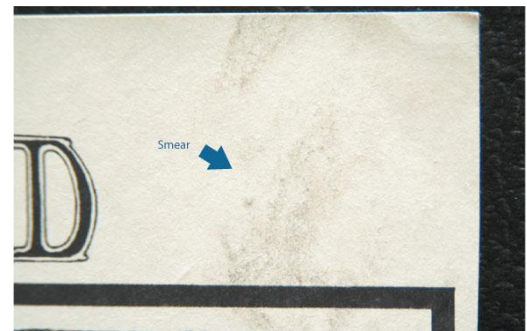


## Poster Mounted on Board

**SMUDGES:** Smudges are easy to come by and hard to see coming and to get off. There are ways to do this, but I don't know them well enough to be your instructor on this. They are not cool.



Corner Soft, Smudge



Smudge

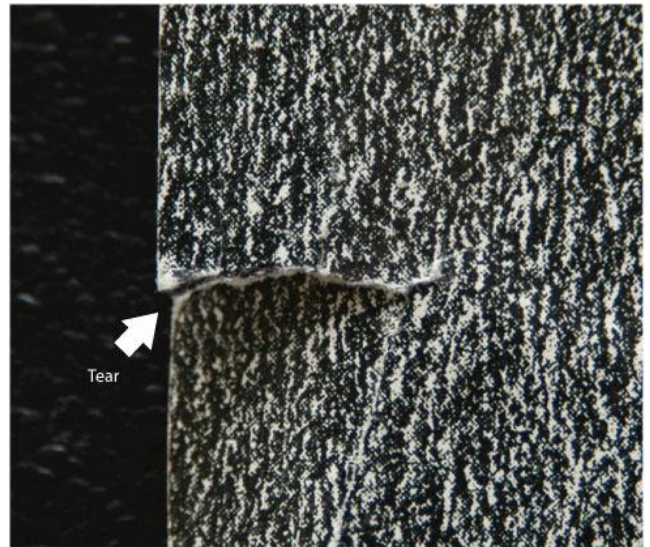
## Tears

**TEARS:** Tears of all kinds can happen, in particular as the poster gets old and brittle. Some of them are just along the edges and at the corners, but they can occur right in the middle of the image and do. Taping them is not good. You will find a lot of old posters taped to beat hell. Check out some of the examples below.

# Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More



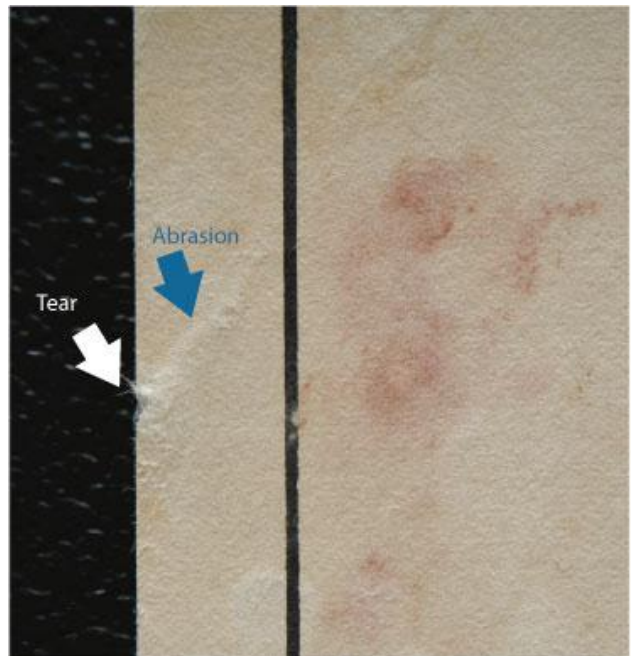
*Tear with Piece Missing*



*Tear*



*Tear, Stains*



*Tear, Abrasion*



*Tear, Taped*

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More



*Tear*



*Stain in Center of Poster*

*Stain in Poster Center*



*Tear and Hole*

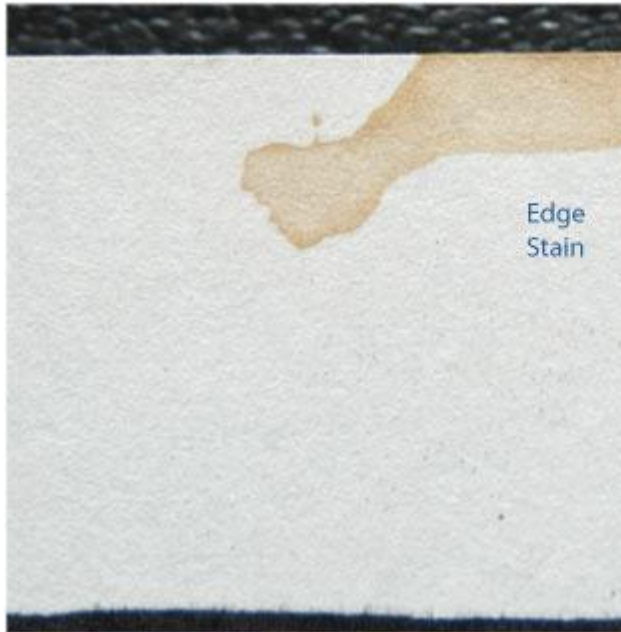


*Stains, Bad, Acceptable Pin Hole*

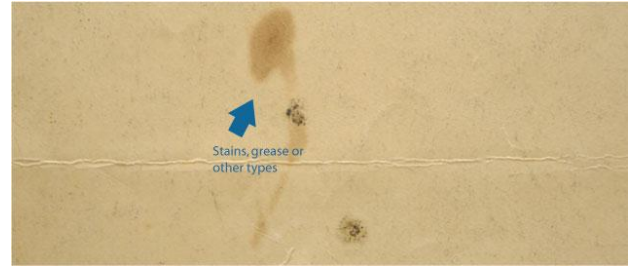
### Stains

STAINS: Stains, especially big greasy or oil stains are bad. They really affect the value of the poster. Most any other damage does not matter too much if you want to frame the posters, but stains are visible and alter the way the poster works, in particular if they are large and in the image area.

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More



*Stain, Edge*



*Grease Spots*

So there you have it, at least some introduction to what can go wrong to our posters and what to look for in buy or selling a poster. Combine looking at these images with Jacaeber Kastor's article on grading, mentioned above, and you are on your way to learning the fine art of poster grading.



*Stain Severe*

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

### **„Off the Wall' - Wes Wilson's Magazine on the Poster Scene**

by Michael Erlewine

If you love posters and poster collecting and don't know about "Off The Wall," the short-lived (but wonderful) tabloid-sized publication, created by Wes Wilson, who is arguably the father of the psychedelic poster, you should. Although it only ran for nine issues, "Off the Wall" was devoted to rock art posters and postering.

I kept hearing 'Off the Wall' referred to with reverence by rock-art fans and wanted to see what this magazine was all about. I managed to track down Wes Wilson, who had a few complete sets of the magazine left. I ordered a set.

What a treat it was to look through them. The list of authors reads like a who's who of posterdom, with authors like Eric King, Jacaeber Kastor, Walter Medeiros, Ben Edmonds, Dick Wentworth, Paul Getchell, Paul Grushkin, etc., and of course Wes Wilson - all writing about the poster scene.

Here you will find different kinds of articles and essays on collecting posters, handling them, caring for them. Articles on Ben Friedman, Rick Griffin, Bill Graham, Chet Helms, Levon Mosgofian and about venues like the Grande Ballroom, the Seattle scene, Los Angeles and more. Also included are fascinating interviews with artists like Alton Kelley and early poster printers like Frank Westlake.

Wes Wilson not only pioneered the psychedelic poster, but also was the first to create a journal devoted to poster artists and poster collecting. In addition, Willson has organized and put on some

of the most important poster shows. He is kind of a man for all seasons, when it comes to posters.

If you are finding, like I am, that you love posters, their art, how to care for them, and how they look on the wall, you may find it worthwhile to seek out some of the old issues of 'Off the Wall' or check with Wes Wilson. He may still have a set or two.



## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

### A Short Biography of Artist Bob Masse

by Michael Erlewine

Bob Masse is, without question, Canada's most celebrated rock poster artist and his extensive use of the Art Nouveau style and old images makes him one of the most easily recognizable rock-art artists in the world.

Born Robert Joseph Masse on April 5, 1945 in Burnaby, British Columbia, Masse was drawing from an early age and recalls competitions with a cousin as to who could draw the most pictures of Bugs Bunny. And Mad Magazine was a major influence. He would copy images from every issue, from the first page to the last. During his teens, Masse often worked through the holidays, providing window decorations and graphics, even creating large cardboard Santa's'.

Masse, much like Stanley Mouse and other artists, grew up building model cars, drawing hot-rod cars and hot-rod monster T-shirts. He mastered the art of pin striping cars, adding flames and other graphics.

After high school, Masse attending the old Vancouver Art School, but says he was fading out by the fourth year. By that time he was taking on various commercial art projects and starting to get poster jobs at the local coffeehouses. Masse states his whole take on art changed with the sixties.

In the early Sixties, Vancouver, which Masse claims tended to run a couple years behind what was happening in the San Francisco area, was still entertaining beatniks and the beat scene. Coffeehouses were yet in vogue.

This was before the transformation of the beatnik life style into that of the hippie and the subsequent replacement of the coffeehouse with the dance hall, as the place to be. Some of Masse's earliest work appeared in the Bunkhouse, for acts like Gordon Lightfoot, Ian and Sylvia, and other folk-style acts. He wasn't even charging for much of his work at that time, content with a chance to meet and spend time with the visiting music acts, attend all the parties and, generally, just hang out. His focus began to change from the coffee-house/folk scene to the emerging rock dance-hall scene. He went on to do a number of significant pieces for the Afterthought and other venues, including the new dance and rock-oriented places like the Retinal Circus.



*Poster by Masse for the Afterthought*

Masse credits his trips to San Francisco during the early days for inspiring him, in particular the work of Rick Griffin, Victor Moscoso, Wes Wilson, Stanley Mouse, and, above all, the Art Nouveau style. "I went nuts with that style," says Masse. Where others dipped into the Art Nouveau style to enhance their poster

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

style Masse embraced it openly and set about to fully incorporate it within his own vision. He clearly has grasped the style of Art Nouveau artists like Alphonse Mucha, bringing the delicate designs, engravings, and colors to another generation. Masse's metamorphosis of the Art Nouveau style poster is immediately recognizable and much loved.



*Art Nouveau Style of Masse*

Masse made frequent trips to the states, particularly to the Bay Area and to Los Angeles. It was on a trip to San Francisco and the Haight-Ashbury District in 1966 that his eyes were opened to what was happening in venues like the Avalon Ballroom and the Fillmore. The Bay Area was a year or two ahead of the more conservative Vancouver, and Masse's posters helped to spread the word in Canada, with his version of the San Francisco-style psychedelic poster.

When a local Vancouver band, the Collectors, went to Los Angeles to cut their first album, Masse went with them to do the album cover, hung out at the recording studio, and ended up living in the Laurel Canyon area for much of

1967 and 1968, producing ad work for venues like the Whisky-A-Go-Go, the Cheetah in Venice, and the Magic Mushroom, in Studio City. He was also doing work for a lot of pop festivals in the area at the time.



*Masse Poster for Gassy Jacks*

Late in 1969, Masse returned to Vancouver to produce what are considered some of his most collectable pieces, posters for venues like Gassy Jack's, Moose Valley Farms, and the Retinal Circus. As the '60s era waned, Masse once again found work doing cartoons and commercial illustrations for companies like McDonalds and many other firms. In the 1980s he created a number of movie posters, including ones for "Back to the Future" and "Total Recall." His television work includes graphics for the "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles" series.

In the early 90's, although Masse continued to produce commercial art, including the little furry fox mascot-logo for radio station C-FOX, there began to be a surge in music memorabilia collecting. A number of his earlier posters were in great demand by collectors.

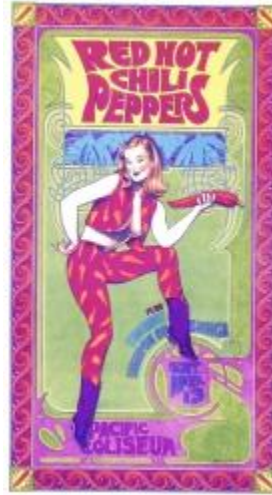
## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

Masse found himself once again fully engaged in turning out posters in his classic '60s style as well as continuing with his more contemporary graphics. Masse credits the Internet for making his work available to a wider audience. "Otherwise, I'd be stuck with the Vancouver economy." In recent years, Masse has reprinted several of his most popular '60s posters.

Masse is quoted in an excellent interview by Paul Gouldhawke for *Psychedelicatessen* in March, 2000:

" I don't really do my posters in a modern way; I still do it in the old fashioned way. Except for hand overlays. I'm doing full color pieces, paintings that are color separated. There's a lot of computer cheating that I could use, borders could be computer generated, lettering can be generated by computers but I don't do that. I still hand do everything. So consequently I can't do that many a year, I can maybe crank out 6 to 8. It almost takes me 2 months to do a piece. They take a long time. They're very time consuming. That's the way I like to do it, I don't feel right if I'm cutting corners - I feel like I'm cheating people in a way. They're all very complex pieces. That's what people like. "



*Masse Poster for Red Hot Chili Peppers*

Today, Masse is one of the few original poster artists still working full time, with more work than he can handle. Bob Masse has become more popular and collectable, as time moves on. He has no credible imitators.

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

### **A Short Biography of Artist Lee Conklin**

by Michael Erlewine

Lee Conklin was born in Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey on July 24, 1941. He grew up in the small town of Monsey, New York, and graduated from Spring Valley High School in 1959. According to Conklin, he was always preoccupied with art during his school years, painting with an easel in his later teens.

After high school, Conklin attended Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where he studied literature and philosophy and was again published as a cartoonist. It was there that he met his wife Joy; they were married in 1965, just before Conklin was drafted into the army. He did a tour of duty in Korea, where he continued to exercise his artistic skills by working on murals in the army mess halls. He was released from active duty in May of 1967, at which point he located himself in Los Angeles, where some of his pen and ink illustrations were published by the Los Angeles Free Press. He looked for work as a cartoonist.

After reading in Time Magazine an article about the poster artists and music scene in San Francisco, he decided to relocate there. Upon arriving he went to the Fillmore Auditorium offices, where he showed his portfolio to Bill Graham. To Conklin's amazement, he was hired on the spot, and asked to create his first Fillmore poster that very weekend. Conklin rose to the occasion and went on to contribute 33 posters to the Fillmore series alone. Only Wes Wilson and Bonnie MacLean and, of course,

David Singer have contributed more to this venue.

In the summer of 1968, after the first rush of the Fillmore era had passed, Conklin and his wife Joy left San Francisco and traveled throughout Northern California, living in an old bread truck. They eventually crossed the country, settling in Middletown, NY, very close to the town where Conklin was born. It was here that they started a family. During these years, Conklin worked in a psychiatric hospital as a therapy aide. He continued his art work in his spare time and sometimes would show his art at some of the regional art fairs in the area.

In the latter '70s, the Conklins moved back to Northern California, living for many years in the Petaluma area, which has been a home to a number of the poster people. Conklin worked with for many years with trees and reforestation projects. He now lives in lovely Columbia, California, at the foot of the Sierra Mountains, not too far from Yosemite National Park.

Lee Conklin continues to produce art and has in recent years produced a number of art prints as well as posters for venues such as the New Fillmore series and the Maritime Hall.

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

### **Ben Friedman, the Poster Man**

By Michael Erlewine

#### **Ben Friedman and Postermat**

Ben Friedman was born in New York City and raised in upstate New York. He relocated to San Francisco after World War II, where he worked as an egg broker, from Petaluma, the self-proclaimed egg capitol of the world. He eventually invested in a store on Grant Street, with a friend, as an outlet for bankruptcy goods, mostly clothes. In time Friedman bought up a large collection of water-damaged records, some 100,000 albums. This led to more and more records being added and, in time, his partner moved on, leaving Friedman with half of the store empty and plenty of bare walls. He was calling the store "Gorilla Records" at the time. As it turned out, a poster wholesaler pitched him on adding posters to go along with this records, and the combination soon increased sales to such an extent, that the clothes and odd stuff was phased out. He hanged the name to the "Postermat."

In early 1966, posters for both the Family Dog and the Bill Graham started to be dropped off at the shop, advertising the dances. After customers showed an interest in them, Friedman devoted considerable wall space to the posters. The interest further increased. They were popular.

Soon Friedman decided to contact Bill Graham directly and asked him about getting some of the posters. Graham told him that he could not be bothered, and said he just gave them away or had them posted. He didn't have time to mess with making special arrangements. Friedman then asked

him to sell him fifty copies of each of the first 40 posters for a \$1000. Bill soon brought the posters to Friedman's shop himself and collected the money. Friedman planned to double his money, turning a 50 cent investment (per poster) into one dollar. And that was the real start of these posters as a business. Up until around 1970, Friedman sold most posters for \$1 apiece.

Friedman's shop soon had walls of poster with colored light playing on them to music, and a special black-light poster room. Ben Friedman went on to buy up back stock not only from Bill Graham, but from Chet Helms, and the Bindweed Press. He cornered the market.

Friedman lived above his poster store and treated the store like his living room, hosting collectors and customers late into the nights. Stories about Friedman abound, and in these accounts, he appears as a likable character, who nursed many a well-known collector along the road to poster acquisition. He is famous for seemingly never exhausting his stock of posters. According to accounts, he never sold you all that you wanted, but always kept you coming back for more. And he always seemed to have just one more copy of that poster that nobody else could find.

When Friedman decided to liquidate his archives, he sold them to Phil Cushway of Artrock, who now has taken over the mantle of the 'deep stock' and from whose vaults posters now eternally spring. Ben Friedman pioneered the poster store and the selling of posters. For many years, he was the common thread that linked hundreds of collectors

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

together, his store their meeting ground and point of connection.

Ben Friedman died on Jan 4, 2003 at the age of 91. His ashes were cast on the San Francisco Bay from his friend Eugene "Dr. Hip" Schoenfield's 60-foot yacht.

Classic Posters – Bio of Poster Guy  
Michael Erlewine

Michael Erlewine is the founder of ClassicPosters.com. Erlewine's interest in posters goes back to the '60s, where he performed as a musician at some of the famous poster venues, places like the Fillmore West, the Matrix, New Orleans House, the Straight Theater, and the Haight A on the West Coast, and all over the Midwest, at venues like The Living End, Chessmate, Mother Blues, and of course, the Grande Ballroom, just to name a few.

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

### 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.

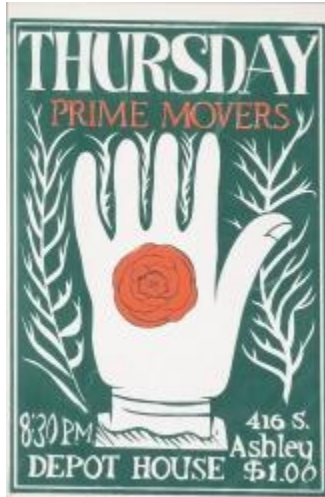


*Michael Erlewine and Iggy Pop*

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

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

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 CP000018 001 "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) is the largest music database on the planet. Erlewine went on to found the All-Movie guide (allmovie.com), All-Game Guide (allgame.com), and other major Internet sites. As president of that company, he



## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

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.

IP CA000173 "CPC Video Studio with Library Set"

ClassicPosters maintains a small fully-equipped video studio, where visiting artists, vendors, and collectors are interviewed and photographed.

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More



*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.



### *Poster-documentation Project*

### **Collection**



*ClassicPosters.com Deep Storage*

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.

### **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 area, and offices.

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

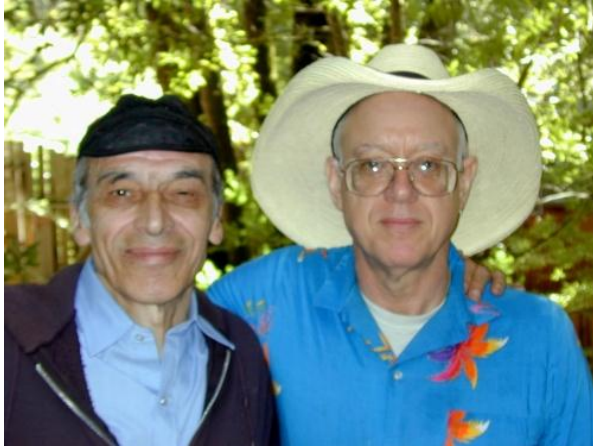


*ClassicPosters.com Headquarters*

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

### Eric King – Poster Archivist Pioneer

by Michael Erlewine



*Victor Moscoso and Eric King*

Eric King's connection with psychedelic posters and the San Francisco scene goes back to the mid 1960s, when he relocated from the east coast in August of 1965 to become a graduate student in English literature at the University of California at Berkeley. Early in 1966, while walking down Telegraph Avenue, in Berkeley, a kid gave him a handbill for a Family Dog dance. He thinks it was probably, "The Love." "What the hell is this?," he thought. "It's neat!," and he stuffed it into a book. He soon found himself going to one of the early dances.



*'The Love' Family Dog Handbill*

What he experienced at the dance halls of San Francisco was a far cry from the New York concerts, shows by Alan Freed, and other rock events, that he had known. The light shows, the extended music, the whole experience was something new.

"I think I went first to the Fillmore. Well, this wall is jumping all over the place and there's all these people hopping up and down. And it was just incredible. I'd heard people tell me about them. It was hard to describe these things, even to somebody who'd been to rock and roll shows; and it's very hard to communicate now, to anybody, what these things were like, because they really were something like nothing else. It really was the greatest party since the fall of the Roman Empire."

"People would shake hands, dance a couple of times and leave and (chuckle) go screw; there was a lot of sex going on. This was an intensely sexualized environment. All these people had lived through the incredibly uptight fifties. It was like -- in the words of a cousin -- like letting a lion out of a cage, meaning the sexuality of a large segment of the population was literally released. Remember there was this doorway between the coming of the pill and the coming of aids. People did a lot of screwing. There wasn't a lot of conversation. You danced. You danced with people. It was like watching whooping cranes dance up and down and mate."

All of this made a real impact of King, who saw the posters as more than announcements. He knew he was looking at art, and began to collect them from early on. When he returned from a summer in Florida, in August of 1966,

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

he was aware that he had missed a lot of posters and set about finding them by putting up signs on telephone poles along Telegraph avenue, asking who had some for sale. He ended up buying a whole stack of them.

Being highly organized and of a collector's (archival) mind, he found himself organizing what he had into piles, storing them by venue, and comparing notes with other collectors. He states that he was trading with other collectors no later than the spring of 1967. At this point, he kept all of his information in his head. He did not make notes. King also was on the mailing list for the major venues, to receive their postcards. Eric King, according to his own account, was soon interviewing many poster-related figures, artists, printers, and related people, with constant questions.

King credits two other collectors with systematically accumulating information, the artist Randy Tuten, and a fellow collector by the name of Greg Davidson.

"Davidson also accumulated a massive amount of information, and what happened was that I took my entire collection over to this fellow's house. He had sold at the Marin Flea Market for years. People would come up to him and say "I've got twenty posters." and he'd buy them. He'd take anything that was different and put them in his own little pile. He tended to have the same mentality as Jacaeber, and I. He had a good eye and he would remember what he had seen. If he saw something new, he did not have to have the old one next to him."

According to King, he and Davidson would get together, sit down and go

through their collections, comparing posters, one by one, variation by variation, all from their knowledge and memory. They went through everything.

Then, in the late 1970s, when poster reprints were abundant and some unscrupulous dealers began to make extra money selling reprints as originals.

"At this point the artists came after me. They said, listen, if this goes unchecked no one will collect this stuff, and we will lose out. It is not as though our art will die, but there will be much less interest in it, we will make less money and our reputations will be besmirched. You are the only person who has all this information and we gave it to you. We gave you hours and hours and hours; we put up with you and tolerated you, because we liked you, but you bothered the hell out of us. You owe us. Write a book. I said "Ah man, I don't want to." And they said, "Don't give us any shit. Our reputation for the future is going to rest on whether there is, or is not." They all had the foresight at this point to recognize that there had to be a guide. This was in 1977."

"I knew people knew that I was working on this thing. What happened was I said to everybody -- and I mean there's like two hundred people -- "I'm not going to lose money on this. You send me a check for twenty dollars. I will not cash the check until the book is done. And it'll take me six months." Over the period of about a month, I got a lot of support. People said: 'Yeah, we really want this.' "

"I sat down at that point and typed it. It took me six months. I went to a photocopy place and printed it up, then cashed all the checks and mailed all the

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

books. There are probably some people, who still have it but I don't. What I have is the original manuscript."

In 1978, Eric King finished the first edition of his book, a slim 100-paged document, with no illustrations. He had a whole group of people who had put money down for a copy.

'The Collector's Guide to Psychedelic Rock Concert Posters, Postcards, and Handbills 1965-1973, Volume 1' is now in its 5th edition. Copies can be had by emailing Eric King. See: Collector's Guide to Psychedelic Rock Concert Posters (BOOK)

The guide is the only comprehensive and detailed analysis of major venues like the Family Dog, the Bill Graham venues, the Neon Rose, and the Grande Ballroom. It sets the standard for all works of this type to come after. Every serious collector of this material should have a copy, sitting right next to the "Art of Rock," another indispensable book.

Today, King continues to pursue information on any of the venues he covers in his guide. When asked where volume II is, he laughs, and says that is mostly a joke. "Volume II will be done by someone else." He has enough on his plate for now.

For those of you new to collecting, it is important to understand the value to the poster community of the guide that Eric King has produced. Previous to King's work, there was no attempt to define how original posters could be identified from reprints, forgeries, pirates, and so on. None with any real details.

The artists were right to ask King to do this, because without such a document, the value of these posters, and their

value as investments to all of us could be in doubt. In order to build an investment in collectable concert-music posters, one must know without a doubt what is the real thing and what is a reprint. Eric King has provided that information, and his book can be found on the shelves of every serious collector of this material that I have ever met. In these matters, it is the bible for the industry.

This is not to say that other expert collectors do not have this same information or their version of it. They do, in fact. Experts like Jacaeber Kastor, Dennis King, and Phil Cushway, among others, have extensive knowledge and collections of this material. The main different is they have not taken the time to put it down and make it available to the rest of us.

So we here at Classic Posters have made a special place for Eric King in our "Poster Expert Hall of Fame." His guide put a stop to much of the confusion about originals and reprints, and shored up the entire posters-as-collectibles arena at a time when it was very much needed. Eric King continues to keep a vigilant watch on our growing community's resources.

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

### Promoter Bill Graham

By Michael Erlewine

Bill Graham has a reputation as a pretty rough character, and a well-deserved one as I can well remember from the one shouting match I had with him, when my band opened for Cream at the Fillmore Auditorium in the Summer of Love, 1967. I didn't like his manner then and it has taken me some years to come to understand that, aside from his brusque style, he has made an enormous contribution to rock and roll in general and to the San Francisco (and poster) scene, in particular.

It helped me to understand where he was coming from, where he came from, so let's start with that.

Born Jan 8, 1931 in Berlin as Wolfgang Grajonca, of Russian-Jewish parents, his father died shortly after his birth and his mother was forced to place both his sister and himself in an orphanage. The two siblings were in France as part of a student-exchange program when the Germans invaded, and Graham and his sister were part of a group of 65 Jewish children and one Red Cross worker who fled across the Pyrenees to Spain. Bill Graham was one of the eleven children who survived the march, many others dropping off along the way or dying in the process. His sister never made it.

After arriving in America, Bill Graham was raised in a foster home in the Bronx. He assumed the name "Graham" and became an American citizen in 1949. He was attending City College in New York, when he was drafted in 1956 into the army during the Korean War, earning both a Bronze star and a Purple Heart. It was after this that he relocated

to San Francisco and became a businessman.

As mentioned, Graham was drafted, forcing him to leave school. From the start of his arm experience, he had several run-ins with authorities, a major one during boot camp and another while serving in combat. In the troop ship over, Graham worked in the kitchen, making extra money at night selling pilfered sandwiches to hungry soldiers. His fascination with gambling was also tweaked on that trip.

He mad himself unpopular with his superiors by pointing out that he was serving in the army and was not himself yet a citizen. What he was after was to help his sisters immigrate to America. He came very close to having a court marshal and finally got early leave and then release from duty with the death of his stop-mother, and then his step-father.

### The Catskills and On to the West Coast

Next came a period of time working in the Catskills at some of the largest Jewish resorts, in the kitchen, first as a busboy and prep person, and later as a waiter. According to reports, he was in his element and a hot commodity. He ran a gambling house on the side at one of the main resorts.

After relocating to Los Angeles and then on to San Francisco, he mainly worked in various business capacities, working for Allis Chalmers (the tractor firm), where he met his wife Bonnie McLean. He wanted to act and work in the theater, but was mostly frustrated in these attempts.

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

He was making over \$21,000 with Allis Chalmers, but gave it up to take over management of the struggling San Francisco Mime Troupe, a street-theater group, for a fraction of that salary. Due to an archaic law that limited any group performing in a public park to two performances a year, Bill Graham engineered a public confrontation with authorities, making sure reporters and other important city leaders were present. This resulted in a number of arrests and a great amount of publicity.

It was Graham who engineered the series of three appeal parties for the mime troupe, that not only raised much-needed cash, but opened his eyes to the commercial possibilities of putting on similar events. That first event was this large party, packed to the brim, that raised some \$4200. All the hip crowd in San Francisco showed up and it was a huge success. He received hundreds of phone calls and letters after that event asking him to hold another party, and the heck with having to have a cause. They just wanted the party.

The second appeals party was held in the Fillmore Auditorium, and thanks to a plug from Bob Dylan, who was playing in Berkeley, it too was very well attended. It raised some \$6000 and even had a nascent kitchen that served matzo-ball soup and salad. This was December 10, 1965.

Another appeal scheduled for January 14, 1966, the first one to charge admission rather than request a donation. It was after the third benefit, that Graham knew that he wanted to do more events like these, and like many of his partygoers, the heck with having to raise money for a cause.

According to some mime-troupe members, Graham made a pitch to the troupe to market the emerging “hippie” culture through scheduled events, and most of the other members saw it as an attempt by Graham to exploit the emerging culture as a business. There ended up being a vote and they all voted against him, some 48 to 2, the two being himself and one other. Graham walked out and went on his own way from that point forward, but he now had a much clearer idea of what he wanted to accomplish.

### **The Trips Festival**

The next major turning point came when Graham was invited, due to his organizational talent, to help organize the forthcoming 3-day Trips Festival that, while already scheduled, seemed to be languishing and not coming together quickly or well enough. The Trips Festival was advertised to that public as a non-drug event that would create the atmosphere and ambience of and LSD-inspired event, the public’s chance to get a taste of the emerging culture.

There has been a lot written about the Trips Festival and it makes for fascinating reading, if you know something about the players and have the time. Keep in mind that there were something like over 3000 people a night in attendance. To summarize all this, Bill Graham had been brought in to better organize what had been to that point more of a loosely organized event, mainly the work of Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters. Well, of course, the two approaches did not mesh and thus all the funny stories.



## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

Most of them take the form of Graham trying to control what was, and had always been, not about control, like Ken Kesey dressed in a space suit and helmet letting dozens of bikers in the back door for free, much to Graham's horror. As Kesey explains, these were acid-test members, who had always been there and helped to create what the event was. They had no need or reason to pay. They were, for all practical purposes, part of the show.

Graham, of course, who was running around with his cardigan sweater and clipboard saw these freeloaders as lost revenue. The funniest story I read was that Kesey and other leaders did not even speak to Graham, who stood yelling at them not to let these people in. In fact, Kesey with his space suit, and large round bubble helmet with visor up, simply turned to Graham, looked in right in the eyes and with a nod of his head, flipped the visor down. He then turned away from Graham and continued to let people in.

Graham, in turn, was not exactly sure who these people were. As the story goes, a few months later, one of these leaders, Ken Babbs, was at a Fillmore show, now firmly in Graham's control. Bill Graham spots and recognizes him and yells out "Trips Festival. Trips Festival," while banging his palm against his forehead. Ken Babbs responds in return, by banging his palm to his forehead, while crying "Asshole. Asshole." Of course, Babbs was ejected from the Fillmore, at once.

It was during and after the Trips Festival that Graham realized this is what he wanted to do, put on these great theatrical events. He began planning a series of three dance concerts, Feb. 4th,

5th, and 6th, 1967. Graham restructured and expanded the light show concept, filling all the surrounding walls with moving light. He set up areas before the stage to sit in, and plenty of dancing room. He had black lights, face painting, balloons on the floor blown about by hidden air blowers.

### **Big Bad Bill Graham**

There are hundreds, if not thousands, of stories about how rude, harsh, conniving, etc. Graham could be, and most of them are no doubt true, having experienced his bedside manner myself.

Again, it helps to remember that Graham was a refugee and probably greatly influenced by the difficulties of his survival and entrance into this country. Graham's account of waiting for placement in a foster home as a young child, new to America, is heartbreaking. Week after week, couple after couple, he would be left standing there alone, after having been hopeful, having dressed up, and so on. He was crushed, time after time. Mix a little of this with his refugee background, and a few tales from his Catskills period, where he was no doubt an "Operator," in every sense of the word, and a New York-style operator at that. Now mix all of this into the West Coast scene and then put him up beside his main competitor, Chet Helms, and you have contrast.

Chet Helms, perhaps the most seminal force in the whole emerging dancehall scene, while not a flower child himself (he was older than that), but a leader of the movement, with all of the counter-culture values, liberal ethics, and hippie sense of outrage and honor on one side. Against this you place Bill Graham, who

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

not only screamed and yelled at people on a daily basis, spewing expletives, but also was not above doing whatever it took, short of breaking an agreement, to make his projects succeed. That is the comparison, and from a hippie point of view, there is no comparison. Helms is the saint, Graham the sinner.

Let's finish up with a couple of the „bad“ things Graham did, at least from my point of view, and all of the different versions seem to converge as these being true. First, when the Family Dog crew went for a discussion with Graham about staging their two events on different weekends, so each would have a solid attendance, they naively revealed to Graham that they planned to use the Fillmore Auditorium, and at the ridiculously low rate of \$45 a night. Graham went right out, found the landlord, and signed a lease to control that venue for some number of years. Perhaps not illegal, but we might all agree that this was not hippie-ethics in action. His response, when being challenged about it, was something like: he gets up early in the morning, and Chet Helms does not, suggesting that he was a businessman, and Helms mostly a fuzzy-minded hippie.

To add insult to injury, when Chet Helms debuted the Paul Butterfield Blues Band, at great financial risk to himself, but with great success, Graham immediately sought out Butterfield's manager, Albert Grossman, and locked up all foreseeable dates for that band in San Francisco. Again, not illegal, but also showing no consideration or comradeship with Helms, who was supposed to be his partner in part of this. And so it goes. I won't even go into some of the stories about Graham and

the poster artists, but they are similar. So what's good about the guy?

### **Bill Graham's Contribution**

Well, aside from being a tireless worker and undefeatable businessman, the most important quality of Bill Graham was his absolute dedication to his customers, the endless stream of music lovers who flocked to his productions and still do to this day. Graham spared no effort or expense to provide a first-class experience for his audience. If you read what is written about him, a picture emerges of a man who dearly cared for and provided for his customers, much like a husband for a wife. The old adage of being married to the job seems to be perfect here.

Of course, it is superior business to look after the customer, but Graham seemingly carried this to ideal lengths, often doing much of the simple manual work himself, sweeping the floors, relocating props, whatever needed to be done. He was meticulous about every aspect of the experience, in particular the sound system. It would not be out of line to say, that the modern sound performance systems owe Graham a huge debt for moving this technology forward on the fast track.

And it was the total experience of the listener, the customer, that Graham was concerned about. It is repeated and very clear from the writing that he has done. Whatever Bill Graham did to offend others in matters of rudeness or whatever, he was perfect in his care for and concern to provide the very best musical experience and just plain „experience“ of any promoter that I am aware of. For this, we are all grateful.

### **Fillmore Auditorium to Fillmore West**

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

A major event in the line of Fillmore shows was the move from the original Fillmore Auditorium to what came to be called the Fillmore West. This occurred after Martin Luther King's death. The original Fillmore Auditorium was located in a largely Black neighborhood. After King was assassinated, there were an increasing number of events in that neighborhood, purse snatching, vocal threats, and muggings. This did not bode well for the Fillmore and attendance dropped. Graham had to do something, and fast.

The rumor was that the Carousel Ballroom was going to close. There was any number of entrepreneurs who would have liked to get their hands on it. After all, it was clear that Bill Graham was making real money at the Fillmore, and with the public nervous about going there, there was this opportunity in the air.

Graham, true to form, was proactive. Finding that the owner of the Carousel Ballroom was a very rich man, who live in Ireland, when attempts to reach the man, who was always busy, failed, Graham hopped on a plane and flew to Ireland to meet him. They met in the airport, had breakfast, followed by a lot of drinks, as they got to know one another. At the end of it all, businessman stood up and left, leaving Graham with an agreement for a three-year lease. The Carousel Ballroom soon became the Fillmore West.

### **LSD Experience**

Another fascinating story is the endless attempts to dose Bill Graham with LSD. Graham, who drank and had smoked a little weed, was not at all interested in taking LSD. Talk about loss of control?

He had seen enough examples and he took great lengths to stay away from the stuff. On the other side, any number of his fellow workers, in particular the Grateful Dead, thought that there was nothing Graham needed more than a LSD trip to soften him up, give him a glance at their reality, and to help him take a giant step in letting go a bit. And so there was a cat and mouse game that went on for years, where the workers would sneak LSD into every conceivable bit of food and drink, in the hopes that Graham would happen on to it.

And they got him at last, by placing tiny drops of an LSD-laced liquid on the top of unopened pop cans, that were already sweating with condensation. The cans looked sealed to Graham and he popped the top of one and, unknowingly, took the love potion.

The reports of Graham's acid trip are pretty funny. In essence, he soon found himself on stage with the Grateful Dead playing a gong,,, and then a cowbell. And he played for four hours straight! According to the dead, Graham saw during that trip more of what the music was really about, that it was more than just a bunch of stoned hippies. The Dead felt he saw their band and the music as inherently good and as Mickey Hart says "He likes good. Bill likes good, because he's seen enough horror."

The Fillmore West was the stopping off place for almost every major act of the period. Graham opened a second club, the Fillmore East in New York City in the spring of 1968. While it was patterned after the Fillmore West, it had one major difference, that being fixed seating instead of the open dance floor of the San Francisco venues. It went on to be

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

a very strong commercial success. The scene went on as described until the early 1970s.

### **The Closings**

Bill Graham decided to close the Fillmore East in the spring of 1971, to the shock of almost everyone. It was making money, but there were other problems. The whole scene had changed. The acts that had once played the Fillmores were now playing Carnegie Hall and huge stadiums, and could not/would not restrict themselves to the fees and attendance levels of the smaller venues.

Although I have not seen it directly stated, from my reading of that time period, what really may have led Graham to close these places was the change in character of the bands and those who managed the bands. Before only Bill Graham was the business shark, others were the talent, which was being presented. By 1970-1971, everyone and anyone connected with talent, had a whole back of tricks and demands. They were out voodooing the voodoo man himself. I believe Graham found it distasteful and it is everlastingly to his credit that he brought to a close an era, that had been known for its purity, before it self-destructed. The bloom was off the rose and the age of innocence ended.

The Fillmore West closed soon after the Fillmore East and so ended one of the most wonderful music eras in this country's history. Graham went on to book an almost endless series of tours and concerts, just not in a fixed location. He continued to do many benefit concerts, much as he had done from the very beginning. He produced tours for

Bob Dylan, The Band, George Harrison, and Crosby, Stills, Nash, & Young, not to mention the Rolling Stones' 1981 world tour. He did the now famous "Last Waltz" concert in 1976, which became a Martin Scorsese film. As a manager, he handled Santana, the Neville Brothers, Eddie Money, Blues Traveler, and Joe Satriani. And so on.

He also pursued his love of theater and acting, appearing in cameo roles in movies like "The Cotton Club" and "Apocalypse Now."

Bill Graham was killed in a helicopter crash October 25, 1991, on his return from visiting a concert by Huey Lewis and the News. The world of promoters has not seen his equal since.

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

### The Art of Victor Moscoso

by Michael Erlewine

The work of no artist of the psychedelic period is as immediately approachable for the general public as that of artist Victor Moscoso. In fact, I am told that he was the first artist of that period to be shown in the Museum of Modern Art in New York. There are a number of reasons why this may be so.

First and foremost, Moscoso successfully incorporates the essential elements of the psychedelic imagery of that time into his work, but without using either images or color combinations that the uninitiated public would find weird or challenging. People love Moscoso's work, and at first glance.

Even in my own case, this is true. While I sometimes find myself explaining to my wife why I am collecting these psychedelic posters, on seeing some of the Neon Rose series, she immediately grasped my reasoning and approved of Moscoso's work. It was obvious to her that these pieces of art were just beautiful. End of story.

Another reason may be the fact that, of the original group of San Francisco, artists, only Moscoso had formal art school training to the level of completing a masters program. His extensive training at Yale and later at the San Francisco Art Institute may have provided Moscoso with a more traditional approach to his work than, let's say, an artist like Rick Griffin.

Whatever the reasons may be, the work of Victor Moscoso is much loved and eagerly collected. His Neon Rose series of posters is one of the crown jewels of the psychedelic poster era.

Born in Spain in 1936, Moscoso was brought up in Brooklyn, New York, where he studied art at Cooper Union Art School before attending the Yale School of Art. In 1959, he relocated to San Francisco, where he studied and took a degree at the prestigious Art Institute. He taught lithography at the Art Institute for five years after he graduated and was also involved in other commercial art projects.



*Family Dog Poster #3 by Wes Wilson*

Influenced by seeing Wes Wilson's poster work [Family Dog #3] around town, Moscoso first became active doing concert posters in the fall of 1966, with work for the Family Dog at the Avalon Ballroom. His Neon Rose series for The Matrix, a local rock music club, remains one of the high-water marks of the '60s poster era.

Around 1968, Moscoso and Rick Griffin also became active in the underground comix scene, working with artists like R. Crumb and his Zap Comix. Over the years, he has continued to produce comix art, posters, and a string of fine album covers for performers like Jerry Garcia and others.

## Classic Posters: Collecting and Archiving and More

---

Moscoso lives in Woodacre, California, where he is still very active in graphic design.

An ebook from  
Heart Center Publications  
315 Marion Avenue  
Big Rapids, Michigan 49307  
First published 2011  
Michael@Erlewine.net

© 2002-2011 Michael Erlewine

ISBN 0-925182-74-5

All rights reserved. No part of the publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher.