

Classic Posters - Early Poster Printing Methods

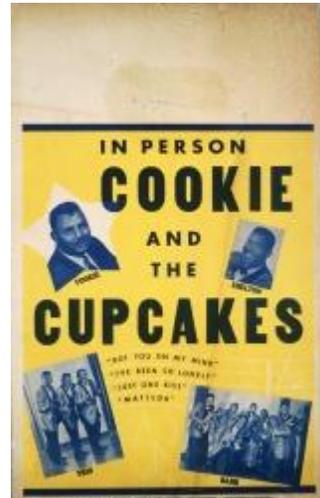
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by Michael Erlewine

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 little more than slick generic posters,

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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

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