

Classic Posters - Grande Ballroom Set

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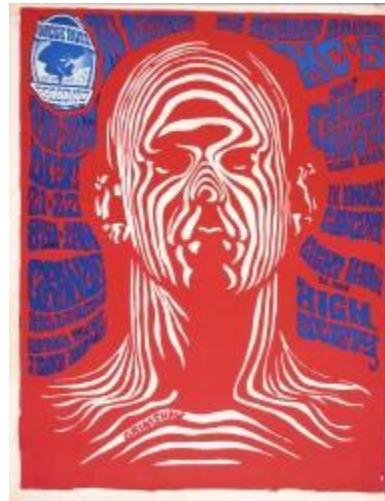
by Michael Erlewine

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The posters, handbills, and cards of the Grande Ballroom series by promoter Russ Gibb is one of the best-kept secrets of modern poster collection. While most of the attention for psychedelic posters has focused on San Francisco and the numbered series of the Family Dog and Bill Graham, no less of an expert in San Francisco posters than Eric King (who wrote the bible on the Bay-area posters) had this to say about the Grande material:

"I realized that these [Grande series] genuinely rivaled the best work of the major San Francisco artists."

In the summer of 1966, Michigan school teacher and local record-hop promoter Russ Gibb journeyed to the Bay Area to visit a friend and met up with entrepreneur Bill Graham, who gave him a tour, not only of the Fillmore Auditorium, but of the whole idea of the psychedelic scene. Gibb returned to Michigan determined to create his own Midwest version of the dancehalls and psychedelic trappings that he had witnessed in San Francisco, and with a matter of weeks had done so. The Grande Ballroom was born and it ran from October of 1966 until the early 1970s, in one incarnation or another.



Ultra Rare Grande 'Zebraman' Poster

But it is the series of shows put on by promoter Russ Gibb that are the focus of assiduous collecting by a small group of dedicated collectors, who have had their eyes opened as to the beauty and historical value of this series. The set consists of about 40 posters, some 81 postcards, and a still-undetermined (and still emerging) number of handbills. At the heart of the Grande Ballroom series is the work of artist Gary Grimshaw, who has been called the "hardest working man in the poster business," having (along with Randy Tuten) probably produced more commercial art than any other poster artist on the scene. Eric King states that had Grimshaw been working in the Bay Area, he would have been placed in the same company as artists Rick Griffin and Stanley Mouse.

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Gorgeous Rationals Poster

The Grande series, in the beginning, had quite a few posters (and many handbills), but over time, the accent on posters was replaced by a greater use of the postcards, as Detroit did not have that many places at the time to display posters. So the posters gave way to the cards and many of these cards are still available to collectors today. The posters on the other hand are already somewhat rare and some of the handbills are so rare that there may be but one known copy.



and Rare Cream Poster

Today, many of the major Grande Ballroom posters are rare high-ticket items like any of the Family Dog or Bill Graham Presents originals, costing several thousand dollars apiece. And they can be very difficult to find. A complete set of Grande Posters has never appeared on the market, to my knowledge, but there have been a few near-complete sets that have surfaced.

This set I collected included ALL the Michigan posters in the set and is missing only the two pop shows that were done in Cincinnati and St. Louis. Everything else is there. On the card side, included are all 81 cards in the standard collected series, plus many rare cards that often collected with this set.