

Classic Posters - How to Evaluate Posters - Nostalgia

by Michael Erlewine

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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 than a group that 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

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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.

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