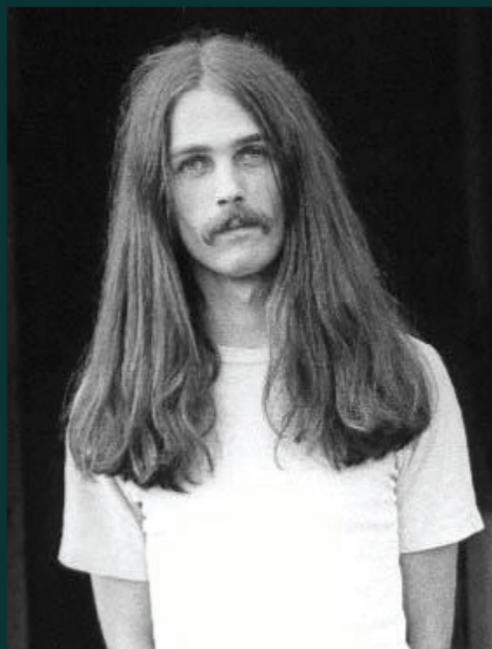


# Gary Grimshaw

## An Interview



with Michael Erlewine

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## INTRODUCTION

This is not intended to be a finely produced book, but rather a readable document for those who are interested in in this series on concert poster artists and graphic design.

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## **An Interview with Gary Grimshaw**

With Michael Erlewine

Gary: One thing I guess I should say is that I have a more than usual academic advance towards the posters and I don't know why maybe it's just because of my academic background

Michael: Yeah, without a doubt.

Gary: When I was in college I got a job selling encyclopedias for a month.

Michael: So did I.

Gary: Did you really?

Michael: Colliers Encyclopedia

Gary: Yeah, and they gave it to me because I had a beard. I looked like a college professor and it was a great Aid

Michael: That's funny.

Gary: But, you know I got into this thing real early about you, know how there are different additions and different variations of things. I was always into, you know, you found one

that was missing a color or whatever. And I paid an awful lot of attention.

Oh yeah, in fact what I... there are certain historic collections that I bought over the years and that I know the problems of and I would go... I would take those collections and go back to my old collection and compare notes and then I would put notations in with my posters that would say "This particular poster came from this person, so I knew for example the guy who used to actually post all of the early Family Dog and Bill Graham posters. So, you go back and you say, " Ok, the question is that which one of these was the first, well, this is the one he had.

Michael: Right. That's cool.

Gary: And he put them up on the poles, so I mean this is pretty good, pretty good documentation. Also, about what's his name Jerry. I bought a lot of his posters and like, for example. the "Batman" poster. I probably shouldn't say this but I knew about the Batman poster way back. I've told other people but I knew which one was the first addition of the Batman poster way before you know Eric went public with them and I didn't really go to him and say "Hey you know, but I

did tell a lot of my customers what was going on with it.

Michael: The super experts work it out between them.

Gary: And you know, I knew you know Jerry had the guy who put them up on the pole had this, yes, this is the one. It's not the one he's talking about; it was this one. So, you know I've done a lot of that over a period of time and when I have people come to me and say "I can't figure out this book, what should I do here" and I say, well, first of all you know you shouldn't always pay attention to books because they won't always lead you to exactly where you'd want to go. I'll tell you what, ask me what you want to know and I'll tell you what I can tell about the history that one. Also, a lot of collectors don't really know what they want to collect. I find it is interesting because people will come in and they buy a couple things and then somebody says "Oh yeah, this is really hot," so they say "Oh, I better buy that because it's hot." What I used to do is I talked to collectors and say, well, what is it that you really want to do?

Michael: OK.

Gary: What's your focus? Because I've dealt with so many different kinds of collectors and you'll find that at some point, if you don't have a focus, you either lose interest or you end up doing something you didn't want to do; and there's so many different things you can focus on. You can focus on an artist. You can focus on a venue. You can focus on a band. You can focus on an era or you can get posters from your birthday. You know ones that you went to and these are things a lot of people don't really think about when they start collecting.

Michael: I understand.

Gary: Also, one thing that's interesting is that I used to find in... I don't do as much retail these days, so I'm on the phone or I'm on the computer all the time, pretty much, but I used to find a lot of people who want to collect all the poster arts. And this, because you can put them in a book. You can have them all and then the 6 posters you really, really have to have, you buy the posters. You hang on them on the wall.

That's been a real trend for a long time and I don't know if that's happening quite as much these days, I still see it amongst some of the old collectors but I don't I don't really have that

face-to-face that I used to have. But no, I guess the only thing I can really say that I can think of is that I'm very eclectic when it comes to posters.

Gary: I'm not focused on, for example... if you're talking about Fillmore posters, I'm not focused on the Bill Graham posters, I'm focused on all the Fillmore posters that I'm more interested in the mid-week shows that were not done by Bill Graham because they fit into the sequence and you can see really historically what was going on. I paid a lot of attention to a lot of the smaller venues over a long period of time.

Michael: Like?

Gary: Pepperland or Soundproof, when they did the shows at the Avalon. You know the Great Highway FDs, Carousel Ballroom, The Matrix, etc. There's a whole lot of venues that are really way outside of the the Fillmore and Avalon, and were very significant. And a lot of people were very into these at the time. In fact, if you think about the Carousel, which is been overlooked to a large extent. Really, what the Carousel was it was you know, the Airplane and the Dead and the Angels saying, you know, forget Bill Graham. We're gonna' go out and start our own ball room, and they

went out and started it and then Graham called the police on them because they weren't smart enough to take care of that or careful enough or whatever. But you know, to really get the picture of what was going on, here these other venues are very, very important historically. And going on into the modern posters, you know there's a tendency to look at the 60's as having been a very insular phenomenon and I don't see that at all. I see there's a lot of artists in the 90's who've been very strongly influenced by the 60's.

Michael: Can you name some?

Gary: Like Chris Shaw for example and Chris in one sense probably wouldn't like me to say that because he's really... he's got his own style and he's very 90's in a lot of ways, but you can really see the influence of the 60's in his work. And you get really exciting... I mean there's a lot of really exciting artists that have come through all these different periods, the 60's, 70's, 80's, and 90's, but you get a guy like Derek Hess who, you know how I feel about Derek's stuff and I, when I saw Derek's stuff for the first time, I want to say I think and was just blown away. I was like "Oh my god (laughs) who is this guy?" Where do I get it? More, More, More!!!! I mean I just couldn't

stop. I mean here's a guy who just had his finger right on it.

Michael: Nice stuff.

Gary: On the button, very much like the guys from the 60's did.

Michael: Yes.

Gary: Epitomizing their era and their culture, and I think that's to me, is a very important part of the posters. It's not just the art and it's not the bands; the bands don't really matter to me. They don't matter. Bands are very important to some people, but what is this thing saying.. has this captured it's era? I mean, I think that's the real crux of the situation for the very important posters. You look at that, pshhh, it says it all. It's 60's it's a psychedelic experience. it's, you know... Spirituality it's everything,

Michael: Carlos Castaneda.

Gary: Carlos Castanada... the whole thing, it's all there!

Michael: It's true, I wrote an essay on it.

Gary: There are people right now, who are doing that with, with their own era, and I think that a lot of collectors would be very wise to take a look at what's around, outside of that mainstream, because, when we look at, back at this the historical perspective, I don't think we're going to see as much Fillmore auditorium, Bill Graham, Chet Helm's Family Dog, we're going to see something much deeper and broader than that.

Michael: Cool, so we at a breaking point?

Gary: Well, just go back to say, you know, how much I loved living in Ann Arbor from 1970-1973 and that I was living in a communal situation and that David Sinclair, who is John's brother.

Michael: I know David

Gary: David, was you know, ran the situation and he controlled the money, which was always in short supply (laughs).

Michael: Right.

Gary: And I was one of the people in the house and there was 30 of us, but was actually generating income and because of the work I did for UAC/Daystar and Eastern

Michigan university. So, I would do all these posters and David would bill them for the art and he would get paid, and that would go under the general fund, and I'd get room and board, that's how it worked, so I know if you look at my social security records during the period I had no income whatsoever.

Someone: And you were working full time?

Gary: I was working like a dog!

Michael: Right.

Gary: I was not only doing the posters, but I was doing the Ann Arbor Sun newspaper

Michael: I know it.

Gary: Anytime any community organization that was politically correct as far as we were concerned walked in the door and they needed some art, we would produce it, on the spot, you know.

Michael: I think this really makes you almost unique as an artist. You've done more community stuff than anyone I know of in the poster world.

Gary: Well, we were inspired by the Diggers, which started in the Haight Ashbury.

Michael: That's right.

Gary: And they set up a duplicating machine, and anybody who walked in with anything, they would print it for free, and the whole idea that information should be free.

Michael: Right.

Gary: So that's what we get. We were trying to be the Diggers of Ann Arbor.

Gary: Ahh you have to keep in mind that it's not just me

Michael: Alright.

Gary: That there were several people, like a rotating group of people, who all had the same ideas and it, and we all worked together.

Michael: Are you talking about just the art or the whole thing?

Gary: The art, the printing, whatever needed to be done. There's a whole crew of people and I was sort of like a central figure, but I was very good at delegating authority. (laughs)

Something came in and I didn't want to do it, I'd say you do this.

Michael: You were the art director

Gary: I was the art director right. Exactly. The Minister of Art.

Michael: Yet, I can't help but wonder when you did the poster like the Curtis Mayfield. It's so beautiful. Did you just do it like it was another thing to do or what?

Gary: Well that, that was one of the later pieces that I did for for the UAC/Daystar. But this was like a side project. it wasn't a UAC/Daystar job though, because cause it was for a different university

Michael: Right.

Gary: But that particular job, I don't know I just, I had a couple of days to work on it, which is very unusual

Michael: Right.

Gary: Because, usually I'd have a day. And, and a there was not a lot of stress on me at

that point, I think John had already gotten out of prison

Michael: Right.

Gary: And so, I just was very mellow when I did it, you know. I just was very relaxed. I remember that about that particular poster, that it was unusual in that respect.

Michael: That's right.

Gary: And as much as I love Curtis Mayfield, you know, I just zeroed in on it, enjoyed doing it.

Michael: Well cool, You knew that it was cool. I mean obviously you did all those incredible posters.

Gary: Curtis, yeah, jeesh! (laughs) And this is before his big accident and everything, you know, he was like on top of his form. And yeah, it was winter, Yeah.

Someone: You went to a lot of the shows you did the posters for didn't you?

Gary: Yes I did, but I also missed a lot of them too

Someone: Oh really.

Gary: I mean I went to more of them than I missed

Someone: Oh, ok.

Gary: But, this kind of postering you know, people say “Oh it must have been great to go to all of those shows and get back stage and all this...” But really there was so much going on all at once that, I was sort of happy when it was show time, so everybody else went to the show, and I could get some sleep you know? (laughs)

Michael: Right

Gary: It's like the John Sinclair “Freedom Rally” at, Chrysler Arena with John Lennon and all that. Everybody in the house wanted to be there, and there was like 30 of us right? But somebody had to stay home

Gary: And I had been up for like 3 days doing the program, the poster, and you know, just arranging everything to get there at the right time you know, that when it came time to actually, the show time, I was the only one who was incapable of actually going to the show, so I was appointed to, be in charge of

the house. So, while the show was going on. I was the only one home and...

Someone: You put the show together did the art, everything else and then oh wow.

Gary: But the good thing was, that it was broadcast on television it was on WDET on channel 56 in Detroit and it was on the radio.

Someone: Ahhh!

Gary: So, because I was the only person there, I had to sit in the front office. We were very, you know, very security conscious.

Someone: Yeah yeah.

Gary: And we always had to have somebody on duty 24 hours a day in the front, right at the front desk. So, that's where I was during the whole thing, I had a little TV and I had a radio. So that's how I saw the show.

Michael: Do you remember Audrey Simon?

Gary: Oh, Audrey yeah she's great!

Michael: She's still in Ann Arbor,

Gary: She's an Aries.

Michael: Yeah, she and I know each other.

Gary: Oh, she's great, she's a wonderful woman.

Michael: She's doing massage and stuff like that.

Gray: Oooooooooo great!

Gray: I remember she had hepatitis for a while there back in 1971 or something. She had very bad hepatitis and we were all worried about her but she, she got over it. (laughs)

Woman: It's news to me. I can't remember last year.

Michael: Right, you remember Arlene Sinclair David's wife?

Gary: Right!

Michael: She's born again and living in the south.

Gary: I'm in touch with Dave.

Michael: Hang on one second (phone rings)  
Hello? I'm interviewing Gary Grimshaw at a

restaurant. How are you doing? Did you go to the mother/daughter thing? How was that?

Gary: Should I pause?

Michael: That was my wife, checking on me.

Gary: (laughs) they tend to do that.

Michael: We're used to always being together, right, so it's unusual. Anyway, Audrey is doing fine. we're having a going away potluck party, saying goodbye to people. Yeah but Arlene I don't know anymore but we stay in touch. Se has a whole bunch pigs lives down in Missouri or somewhere.

Gary: Dave's living' in Florida, David Sinclair, yeah

Michael: Oh really!

Gary: I can't remember

Michael: Where's Pun Plamondon?

Gary: No Pun owns a big farm he's a farmer up in northern Michigan.

Michael: Really!!!

Gary: You're thinking of Kevin.

Someone: Kevin's doing insurance.

Gary: Kevin is the one with the insurance.

Someone: I dropped in on him a couple times lately.

Gary: His father was a big insurance guy, and his father gave him the company

Woman: What happened was I think, that in-law, David's in-law of his current wife, I don't think it's the same wife from before

Gary: No not Arlene.

Woman: Not Arlene.

Gary: What's her name I don't...

Michael: What about Genie Plamondon?

Gary: Oh Genie doing great!

Woman: She had a magazine.

Gary: Genie is the publisher of a magazine in Detroit that is like... it's the trade magazine for the film industry in Detroit, which is huge.

People don't realize that Detroit's like the Hollywood of the mid-west, and she just remarried and she's really into martial arts. She had a martial arts studio

Michael: Wow!

Gary: And I think she still does.

Michael: Do you know John Sinclair's new wife?

Gary: Penny? Oh yeah

Woman: Penny yeah.

Gary: Oh yeah Penny, well it's not news. I mean they've been married for what about a decade now. They're sweet hearts. They've been sweethearts for a long time. They had a rough time for awhile but are doing better.

Woman: I think they've been on again off again.

Gary: Uh huh. Yeah Penny's really nice. I like her. You know I'm really glad every time I see John Perform because I love it. You know, the guy's great, but I got a shock this afternoon,

with this group that performed. Spoken word about this woman.

Woman: Yeah, this woman who organized this seminar this summer, and she had like a theme that she's doing at all the different ones and this, this theme was ...

Gary: This was strait out of Opera

Woman: It was three poets.

Gary: It was three poets and they would like trade off verses.

Michael: Well, it sounds a lot like John

Gary: This is exactly what John was doing, with the saxophone player in the background you know, but it was like, it was like a poet group, a communal thing, you know?

Michael: It was good.

Gary: I've never seen anything like it before in my life.

Michael: Yeah.

Gary: It was tough. It was really tough, It was good, and the audience loved it.

Woman: Yeah, they had a great San Francisco crowd.

Michael: I know quite a bit about Blues, I've studied it and played it for years. And when John invited me to hear him, I didn't know what it was going to be like. You know gritty poetry gets a little difficult, And you know I've heard him many times now, it's great, he does a great job, My wife likes it, good sign. And I have played harmonica behind his poetry a number of time.

Gary: Oh yeah he puts on a great show, I mean he's excellent.

Woman: He's a great performer.

Gary: Excellent words

Michael: John also invited us to the last hash bash which..."

It's all good, right you know that one? "It's All Good."! Right?

Gary: Well, John had been a, a huge influence on my life, because when I first met John, I was a loose cannon on deck. I was a juvenile delinquent. I was headed for disaster. I had all this energy and intelligence and I didn't know

what to do with it. I didn't have a clue, and John calmed me down.

Michael: How did you meet?

Gary: The day he got out of the pokey they had a party at the Artists Workshop and my buddies the MC5 were there.

Gary: They just ripped the roof off the place and John was just freakin out, the last thing they wanted to see was the cops to show up.

Michael: Right.

Gary: Cause he had just gotten out of jail that morning you know?

Michael: Oh!!

Woman: It was the House of Corrections

Gary: He'd just done six months there. So John instructed to pull the plug on the band, (laughs). She went out and pulled the plug you know, but the band, and all of us, we understood you know, we knew we were nasty down-river rats you know. We figured all along, but at least we got away with something you know, but you know, John was

scared, but he loved the band, and that was the beginning of the relationship between MC5 and John Sinclair cause he did, he recognized you know this is great (laughs) and, and I was living like a block away and I got to hang out with John and them. What I really loved about John was his literary aspects, you know, the fact he was a publisher and a writer

Michael: Right!

Gary: And you know I was no slouch myself at writing but I didn't, I didn't know where to put it, I didn't have any concept of how I could use this writing to do anything, and John showed me how you, you work it, you have published press releases. You focus. You create your own publications, and I always thought well I had, had to write something and just drop it around to sell it somebody. No. No. No. John said No. You do it yourself. This is how you do it, if you write it you publish it you do it.

Michael: Right.

Gary: And this, completely flipped my mind around big time. Gave me a whole new way to approach. How to live my life. And it, I stopped feeling like this, like this sucker or this victim that just had to please somebody, I realized

that I could create my own reality and do it my own way, and I had never thought of that. I mean it was a breakthrough for me.

Michael: John is pretty, pretty aggressive.

Gary: Well, but, in a very gentle and nice way though, you know?

Michael: Well pretty much,

Gary: He's not like he's pounding your head or anything. He's a nice guy!

Michael: Oh, he is a nice guy, a very nice guy.

Gary: And the depth of his knowledge of culture is just, astounding. There's no way, you know I try, I work my, I work very hard to learn as much as he knows but I never will.

Michael: How did he help you do art. How did that come about? How did you find that?

Gary: He created the circumstances that I could do art, and get paid for it, you know cause he understood. I mean it goes back to Burroughs, Burroughs says that in order to have a full affect you have to have both the, the words and the pictures. He made a very big point of that you know, and this is

something that John took to heart because he was a word creator and he thought I was very important to him because I could create the pictures, and would back up the words. So, we were like a team, and we struggled to be a team from 1966 until 1987 off and on.

Woman: I think '88.

Gary: '88, right. And, and there were times we were off and there were times we were on. But we, through out that whole period we were struggling to work together.

Michael: I was kind of trained in macrobiotics, so I think I understand that you have a little association with that.

Gary: Oh yeah in 1968, when the warrant went out for my arrest in Michigan, at that time I was a student in macrobiotics from a distance but I knew I had to leave the state (laughs)

Michael: Right

Gary: As quickly as possible, so my first choice was Boston because I knew that was where...

Michael: Mushio Kushi was?

Gary: Michio Kushi and the whole food thing was happening, and I thought that would be great, so that's where I went and I... at that point I was recovering from abusing speed and at that time I was actually totally sober and when I went to Boston and my wife, well I call her my wife, she was the first woman that I lived with for three years. It's common law right? And she followed me, like two weeks later and I lived in Boston through most of '68 and I went to all of Michio's talks,. It was at this church right off Boston Commens. It was once a week and it was like 2 hours long. I studied there and I hung out with the people that were associated with that.

Michael: Is that when you did the Zen poster? The macrobiotic. Yeah, I finally found a copy of that. Did Michio ever examine you during the whole

Gary: No, no.

Michael: He did that to us.

Gary: I was just a member of the audience.

Michael: He told me to not eat squash. He said "Don't eat squash."

Gary: (laughs) At the same time I was into astrology and a lot of spiritual things and I was just putting this all together in my head you know, and it made sense to me It just made incredible sense.

Michael: I did the logo for Eden Foods and, as an astrologer, they asked me to pick the date to open. I designed... I've done a few logos.

Gary: Oh yeah right right.

Michael: That's kinda art that I like.

Gary: Eden's is great, however.

Gary: I noticed ahh, when I got into socializing with macrobiotic people in in Boston ummm that, they were all great cooks, that was the whole thing was all about cooking

Michael: Balancing food.

Gary: Balancing food and this, everything was cool, but they, they loved to drink beer, beer was the macrobiotic drink you know?

Michael: Beer, coffee and cigarettes yeah.

Gary: Well, not coffee so much, I, it was there's nothing wrong with smoking, they were

into grain coffees and stuff like that, a little bit of coffee.

Michael: They were into yeah, there's all kinds of those have you ever heard of Muromoto? West Coast

Gary: No, uh uh.

Michael: That's another, element of that.

Gary: I lived in Boston in '68.

Gary: In later 9168 I moved to California because I had a federal warrant out for my arrest you know? And I was like totally underground.

Michael: Right.

Gary: And, I didn't hook up with the macrobiotic people out here, and I started eating hamburgers and stuff, drinking' beer, and sorta lost it you know about 1970 and then I moved back to Ann Arbor, I was still pretty macrobiotic though, you know. I was like 95% vegetarian.

Someone: Really?

Michael: I spent you know 8-9 years being mostly vegetarian. I mean I was vegetarian for awhile, and then I, I took my family to Tibet to meet this really high lama we came back and all started eating meat. I get home and I went to restaurants and I think three nights in a row I ordered a porter house steak.

Gary: I can understand it though. When we eat meat, your consciousness contracts, and you become very focused you become like a hunter, because if you eat meat you have to hunt it.

Michael: I haven't hunted, much lately.

Gary: Well it's not literally hunting, hunted, but that's the way your mind goes you know. If you're vegetarian, like look at all the vegetarian animals, like elephants and cows, they're big, they're huge.

Michael: That's right.

Gary: And they're very docile, all they do is go out and graze, they don't really have a lot on their mind.

Michael: I can't say that, but you're probably right.

Gary: But an animal that eats meat, they have a lot on their mind.

Michael: They have to get more meat.

Someone: Right, yeah, they gotta' get more meat.

Woman: (laughs)

Gary: They have to think. They have to plot and they have to plan.