

Russ Gibb

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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Interview with Promoter Russ Gibb

by Michael Erlewine

23 April 2003, sound recording.



[Russ Gibb pretty much started the dancehall scene here in the Midwest when he opened the Grande Ballroom in 1966. Gibb is also an educator and teacher, working in the public schools for most of his life. A wonderful being and kind person, it was a privilege to interview this man.]

Michael Erlewine: You had considerable experience with putting on dance events before the Grande Ballroom, correct?

Russ Gibb: Oh yeah. God, that started three or four years easy before the Grande.

Michael Erlewine: I understand that you were a schoolteacher.

Russ Gibb: Yeah, I was a schoolteacher. Well, my first thing was that I had been working at WWGTV and I knew Bob Maxwell. Previous to that I had worked at Keener (WKNR) carrying records. And so I knew a lot of the disk jockey. The one that I knew, probably the best was Snader. He did the first MTV. They had invented a video- jukebox, but they didn't call it video. It was called Moviola. And you put fifty cents in it at the time and you got a film loop on a rear projection screen. I'd seen two or three of them in various restaurants and teen hangouts, where they would take big bands like Glen Miller and Woody Herman. They had clips of them.

So, when television first started, and they didn't have tape, when I was working in it. And so, he had a TV show live, where they had Bob Maxwell, And he would play Snader telecriptions. It would be like sort of what MTV became, that was long before MTV.

Michael Erlewine: Interesting.

Russ Gibb: They had been used for fillers in between major movies in theaters, years ago.

Michael Erlewine: Well that makes sense.

Russ Gibb: Yeah. And they'd put on some big bands, and that would attract the younger audience to the motion pictures.

Michael Erlewine: Sure.

Russ Gibb: Well he did a show, called "Man About Town," or something like that, and he would play these. So I knew Bob Maxwell, when I was teaching,

and I was teaching in junior high in Howell, Michigan. Well, it was actually a junior high and a high school in the same building.

Michael Erlewine: And you taught what?

Russ Gibb: I was teaching science, and social studies. And what had happened is that they didn't allow dancing up in Howell in those days in the schools.

Howell is a pretty conservative little community.

Michael Erlewine: Yep.

Russ Gibb: And in fact, with our contract.... And by the way we got paid

\$2200 a year.

Michael Erlewine: Wow.

Russ Gibb: And we had to drive the school bus if the guy was sick. We had to coach one sport, and if we wanted to drink alcohol, we had to go 21 miles out of town and that was to Williamson, and that was written in our contract.

Michael Erlewine: Your kidding.

Russ Gibb: And we had to attend church twice a week and....

Michael Erlewine: Oh...that's unconstitutional.

Russ Gibb: Well, of course it's unconstitutional, but not back then it wasn't.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Russ Gibb: So, to make a long story short, they didn't allow dancing. So Bob Maxwell had been doing record hops along with Robin Seymour (WKMH) and those guys.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah I remember Robin Seymour.

Russ Gibb: So, I said I'd 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.

Michael Erlewine: And this was roughly what year?

Russ Gibb: Oh God... in 1955 or 1956, 1957, around in there. So that was my first experience of making a few bucks. So we did that a couple times, and then, by that time Gary Stevens was at Keener, and I don't remember when that came. But I was working at Keener part-time. By this time I was teaching elsewhere, okay?

Michael Erlewine: You were working at Keener doing what?

Russ Gibb: I was doing the Sunday jocks, and I was doing record hops. So, at that point, I was looking around and I knew that I could make some money in these record hops. So, I looked around and I got Gary

Stevens to agree to be a permanent disc jockey for these sock- hops.

And we put on shows. We rented a UAW hall out on Van Born somewhere. I don't know where it was, and we got it every Friday or Saturday night. And we called it the Pink Pussycat Club.

Gary Stevens named it, because he'd been to LA at that time, I hadn't by that time. And there was a movie called the "Pink Panther" or something...

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, it was close.

Russ Gibb: So he decided we would name it that, and every week he would get whomever was in town. The record promoters would bring the recording artist and they'd mime to their records. We didn't have a live band then.

Russ Gibb: And that's where it started and that's what gave me the idea that you could make money on it.

Michael Erlewine: As a young person, what kind of music were you brought up with?

Russ Gibb: I was brought up with what we called "pop" back then. Except that, I liked rhythm and blues, and in those days, there were a couple places. The Black and White thing wasn't what it was back in the 70's or 80's. They were called Black & Tan, and they were clubs where Black artists played. For instance, what is now Orchestra Hall was called then Paradise Theater. And I would go down there and I would see... I always liked what they called 'race music'.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Russ Gibb: And I would listen... in those days radio was everything, and I would listen late at night and I would hear stations from down south, and all over the place.

I remember going down to the Paradise and we'd see the black artists, I saw Moms Mabley. I saw Ivory Joe Hunter. I know I saw Count Basie a couple of times. He also played at the Graystone Ballroom one time.

Michael Erlewine: What year was this about?

Russ Gibb: 1948 or 1949. 1950.

Michael Erlewine: Well, I'm really glad we're getting this, because it just really shows that you didn't stumble on music, that you were into early on, and race music at that.

Russ Gibb: Oh yeah. Oh sure. In fact, I remember, that Nellie Lutcher was the first black artist that I think, in my mind, crossed the White radio...and Ivory Joe and Ed MacKenzie were playing. Ed was known as Jack the Bellboy back then.

Nellie Lutcher had a record 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.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Russ Gibb: And then of course Chubby Checkers, and you know the whole thing.

Meeting Bill Graham

Michael Erlewine: I would like to know how you Bill Graham for the first time.

Russ Gibb: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Did you ever meet him more than once?

Russ Gibb: I met him twice, and I talked to him many times on the phone.

Russ Gibb: Well, I went out to visit Jim Dunbar; he had just gotten married. He was what J.P. McCarthy was to Detroit, in fact, Jim Dunbar is in the Radio Hall of Fame.

Michael Erlewine: So you went out...it had to be the late summer of 1966?

Russ Gibb: Somewhere in and around there, yeah.

Michael Erlewine: I would like to pin that time down. You mentioned at one point you saw the Byrd's...

Russ Gibb: We saw the Byrds' unloading.

Michael Erlewine: But it was at that trip?

Russ Gibb: Yep.

Michael Erlewine: Okay, if that's true, then it's very, very clear time-wise, which means you are a fast mover, because the Byrd's only played in June of

1966 at the Cow Palace S.F., but you saw them at the Fillmore Auditorium.

Russ Gibb: I saw them at the Fillmore.

Michael Erlewine: The first time they played at the Fillmore September 16 of 1966.

Russ Gibb: Now here's a problem I have with that. If I were teaching, and I was still teaching in those times...

Michael Erlewine: Okay.

Russ Gibb: I would have been back in school in September. But...I remember them [the Byrds] loading up. I remember their truck. I distinctly remember that because of the strange spelling in the word Byrd's.

Michael Erlewine: Okay, so you think you were out there earlier than September.

Russ Gibb: Yep, I think I was out there during the summer vacation.

Michael Erlewine: Well, they weren't there then. They were at the Cow Palace in San Francisco in June, but they were not at the Fillmore until September 16th. Ummm.....so that's confusing... Well, it's okay to let these things be confused, because we'll sort it out. You know Ben Edmonds, of course.

Russ Gibb: Yeah, yeah sure I know him.

MORE ON BILL GRAHAM

Russ Gibb: I had met his wife previously. She was from New Orleans. So I went out there and Bill Graham had been on his show, and gave him some free passes. Because he was plugging his show. You know Bill was an entrepreneur.

Michael Erlewine: That's right.

Russ Gibb: And by the way he was from New York and talked with a New York accent.

Michael Erlewine: He certainly did.

Russ Gibb: And, I always remember, we'd go into this place and I'm knocked out. And Jim of course knew that I had been doing other music things, sock- hops and things.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Russ Gibb: And making some money on it. So then we went out, and we go there and we get into Bill's private office, and that's when I was introduced the first time to him. And I say, "Well I'm really impressed with this. Well, I've never seen a light show before."

And I always remember Bill Graham's first comment when I asked him, well, where do you buy these things and how do you, you know...and he said, "Where you from?," And I say I'm from Detroit.

He said "How far is that from here?" I said "Oh, probably about 2000 or so miles. He says "Okay, I'll tell you what...and then he gave me the name of the

guy who had built his strobe, was very helpful, and that was the beginning of our friendship.

Michael Erlewine: Did you also get a tour, like behind the stage and all that?

Russ Gibb: Yeah, yeah, oh yeah, yeah.

Michael Erlewine: So he took you around?

Russ Gibb: That's was the first time I saw a light show, where they, you know

... it was overhead projectors in those days.

Michael Erlewine: So how did this impact you?

Russ Gibb: Well, when I came back I immediately started to look for a place.

Michael Erlewine: Let's talk about that for a minute.



The Trumpet Poster

Michael Erlewine: Ben wrote an article on the Grande Ballroom that you might remember. It was published in Wes Wilson's publication "Off the Wall." Now I'm going to talk about that 'trumpet poster' which is called... Now what you told before is that you thought, when you finally took over that venue, you found a bunch of them laying around...

Russ Gibb: That's what I recall...

Michael Erlewine: And that you a little bit later you said that you put one up on the wall just for fun.

Russ Gibb: Yep.

Michael Erlewine: But, what Ben writes is this, and he must have talked to you, so let me read you this, just a short paragraph.

Russ Gibb: Okay.

Michael Erlewine: Okay, so he wrote the following. In it, it says, and this is you speaking:

Russ Gibb: Allright.

Quote from a 2-part article on the Grande Ballroom, by well-known music writer Ben Edmonds, from "Off the Wall."

"Do you know anyone who can do a poster for us? You know, something wild like they do out in San Francisco." Russ Gibb was looking at the grand opening artwork he'd commissioned from a printer friend of a friend. It was dreadful.

Bill Graham had emphasized posters as the best way to reach the new music audience, but this - featuring a cornball illustration of a trumpet - looked more like an invitation to Sing Along With Mitch. So when he called Rob Tyner of the MC5, the local band he'd hired to open the ballroom, "Uncle Russ" (as the singer had dubbed him) was panicked. "

Michael Erlewine: " Now...he's taking some liberties with your emotions and stuff.

Russ Gibb: Yeah right.

Michael Erlewine: He suggests that you went out and had one printed. Is that so?

Russ Gibb: No.

Michael Erlewine: Do you remember that?

Russ Gibb: Those were found.

Michael Erlewine: What?

Russ Gibb: Those were at the Grande Ballroom when I took it over. They were in a package... They had never been used. That [poster] goes back to practically, I would say the...early...late 1940's or early 1950's style of art.

Michael Erlewine: Okay, well since it said a specific date, it said "Friday September 16."

Russ Gibb: Well, then... I guarantee you, to my recollection, that was, we found that thing. There were times I couldn't remember that, you know.

There were so many things, but I think back on it now, and it seems to me that we found several of them, I mean 20 or 30, I don't know... but... and we put them up just about the Grande Ballroom.

Michael Erlewine: Okay.

Russ Gibb: We were at the Grande Ballroom.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Russ Gibb: I don't think we ever distributed those.

Michael Erlewine: Let me tell you what years that could've been, just for the fun. If we look at a perpetual calendar, they could've been in 1966, of course. They could've been in 1960 or 1955, and of course they could've been earlier than that, they could've been back 1938, 1932, or even 1927.

Russ Gibb: Okay, now 1948 and 1949, they were still doing shows like that at the Grande.

Michael Erlewine: Okay, so...

Russ Gibb: That was still a dance ballroom.

Michael Erlewine: On that trumpet poster all it says is "Grande Ballroom Opening. Friday, September 16th , and along the bottom, it says, "Dancing Every Friday and Saturday."

Russ Gibb: That's it. Now that wasn't one of our original posters. I thought it, at one time. It seems to me, somebody I mentioned...I think, yeah I can't...but, as I look at it, and think at it now, "No, because... so I don't know, you know."

Michael Erlewine: If my understanding is right, you had come back from Bill Graham and your first experience at the Fillmore knowing that there was a hip new kind of poster happening.

Russ Gibb: Oh yeah.

Michael Erlewine: And so you wanted one of those.

Russ Gibb: Well, yeah, but again, I didn't know where you got that, and it was John Sinclair who turned me onto what's his name...

Michael Erlewine: Rob Tyner... and then Gary Grimshaw?

Russ Gibb: Yeah right.

Michael Erlewine: John Sinclair was just here for a couple of days, and we went over his whole story in detail. He can't remember the trumpet poster at all, because he says he didn't know you then.

Russ Gibb: That's right.

Michael Erlewine: But what he did say, is that he was writing a column in the Fifth Estate at that point, and suggested that we look there to see if you had announced a premature opening for the Grande Ballroom. He's sure he would have written about it, because he stated that he was always hard-up for any kind music-related event in those times.

Russ Gibb: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: But I have not been able to locate those...

*Michael Erlewine: One thing that you told me last time we talked, that was so interesting that I would like you to repeat it or go over the same area, was that John had such an influence in terms of advising you in how the Grande Ballroom should look and feel.

Russ Gibb: Yes, exactly. Well, look, I give John Sinclair credit. First of all, he brought me the light show. I didn't know them Barry Kramer, who was sort of hip, but he was into the business aspect of it. Sinclair was doing it because of the love of what was going on.

Michael Erlewine: True.

Russ Gibb: And, quite frankly, he...many times he would say....In fact, he got me the Fugs. Sure, I didn't know about the Fugs.

Michael Erlewine: Well, he knew Ed Sanders.

Russ Gibb: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Right? Because they're both poets.

Russ Gibb: Well, exactly, and that's how we brought them.

Michael Erlewine: I mean I think the last time we talked....I hate to do this, because it sounds like I'm priming the pump, but I am trying to go back to that conversation we had. You sort of said that you owned the Grande, but you were running the concessions and stuff and John was really organizing the look and the feel of the thing and helping you find music.

Russ Gibb: Well, I give John a lot of credit on it. I was doing the books.

Michael Erlewine: Right [laughs].

Russ Gibb: And keeping the place together, but many of the band selections and things came from John Sinclair. Yeah, sure.

Michael Erlewine: But didn't at some point Jeep Holland do the booking?

Russ Gibb: Yes, Jeep helped out too. But Jeep was later. It was John at the real... at the beginning.

Michael Erlewine: I see.

Russ Gibb: Remember, as the MC5 started to get notoriety, John Sinclair became more and more involved with them and the UP.

Michael Erlewine: That's right. So now we need to go back. I'd like you to tell me about, because this is really an important event, when you went out and met Bill Graham.

Russ Gibb: Right.

Michael Erlewine: And just the whole thing. Obviously it had a huge impact on you.

Russ Gibb: Well, he had been plugging his thing. And he'd been on Jim's TV show. Dunbar had a TV show. He was on KGO, and by the way until just last year, he left it. He had been midnight man, program director...

Michael Erlewine: And where is this San Francisco.

Russ Gibb: San Francisco.

Michael Erlewine: Okay.

Russ Gibb: KGO Radio is ABC Radio there. And Jim Dunbar hired J.P. McCarthy. He became the J.P. McCarthy of San Francisco, but he hired

J.P. to go to San Francisco and J.P. didn't work out in San Francisco, but Jim did. And he's now in the Radio Hall of Fame. He's done everything. He's done television. He's done interviews. He's done talk, and now he's doing jazz, because my early interest in jazz came from Jim Dunbar.

Michael Erlewine: I see.

Russ Gibb: He and I were buddies all through high school and college.

Michael Erlewine: Wow. So you went out to visit him.

Russ Gibb: We went out to visit when he got married.

Michael Erlewine: Okay.

The Opening of the Grande Ballroom

Russ Gibb: Well, I knew there were a couple ballrooms. There was the one that, finally, Ernie Durham took over. There was on Finkle Avenue, by Livernois. I knew there was a ballroom there. I knew there was one down in what is now Mexican-town on Vernor Highway. Because remember, when I was growing up, dancing was really big, jitterbugging and things like that. And the mambo and things. So there were big bands still, sort of hanging on, and they would play. They'd play at Edgewater, the amusement

park. And I knew there was the Vanity Ballroom, and I knew there was the Grande Ballroom, because I had been to all of them, as a customer. So I started to research them and I found the Grande, and it was closed. And it was being used as a warehouse, a mattress warehouse. They were just using it for storage.

Michael Erlewine: You mean just new mattresses, old ones?

Russ Gibb: Well, I don't know what they were. It was storage. The guy was renting out... Kliemann was his name.

And he, when I told him that I was interested in it, that I couldn't afford it, he said "Well, I'll tell you what," he'd said, "If you interested in the building, we could give you a lease to buy thing, where you rent and then you have a chance to buy it.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Russ Gibb: And that's when I met Gabe Glance. Because that's when Gabe... he was Kliemann's son-in-law, and he was sort of a business guy.

Michael Erlewine: Okay.

Russ Gibb: That's where we... I dealt with him, but it was really Kliemann's building...

Michael Erlewine: So you came right back from San Francisco and did this?

Russ Gibb: And I started to look around.

Michael Erlewine: How long...

Russ Gibb: And then I went down to Wayne State University and I remember I was at the Fifth Estate. It was on Holden, I think, Holden Avenue. And I went in there, because that was the college newspaper, and I knew I'd have to attract the kind of kids that I saw in San Francisco. They were younger college-age kids.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Russ Gibb: And that's when I first got introduced... I think I met Harv' Oshinski, and I think I met the other guy, can't think of his name, who ran it. And they turned me on to John Sinclair.

Michael Erlewine: I see, so you knew John before Rob Tyner or Gary Grimshaw?

Russ Gibb: Oh yes. Oh yes.

Michael Erlewine: Okay. That's an important thing that, so you met John first and John turned you on to Rob?

Russ Gibb: To the MC5. I'd never heard of the MC5 until then but, by the way, after I talked to them...to him, he told me they were going to perform down in Wayne, Michigan, at the Wayne Civic Center, and the

first time I went down there, they were all dressed in suits. They looked like the Beatles.

Michael Erlewine: Wow.

Russ Gibb: That's was...they were just getting involved with John, I think.

Michael Erlewine: Right, John Sinclair took care of that.

Russ Gibb: Yep, yep, oh yeah.

Michael Erlewine: [laughs].

Russ Gibb: ...And they changed it, but they were very nice guys, plus they were from my neighborhood, I mean downriver guys.

Michael Erlewine: Right. And did you like the music?

Russ Gibb: You know...I....to be honest with you, I didn't quite understand it. But, my business sense said this was happening.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Russ Gibb: And then I started to go and get some records that I never had before, and I remember buying English records and having to go, where the hell did I go to find them? English imports? It wasn't easy, I remember that. And I started to listen to some of the things, that's when I first heard the Rolling Stones, the Flowers album.

Now I remember also, about this time, the Beatles had been kicking their heels. The English thing was beginning to be talked about in the media and so forth and so forth.

Michael Erlewine: That's right. Now, how long do you think it took you from the time you came back from meeting Bill to put the scene together.

Russ Gibb: Wasn't long. It was pretty quick, within three or four weeks, as I recall.

Michael Erlewine: And...

Russ Gibb: Maybe at the most five weeks. Seems to me... Didn't we open the Grande in October?

Michael Erlewine: October 7.

Russ Gibb: Yeah, sure. So that was it.

Michael Erlewine: So do you recall any serious delays or was it...

Russ Gibb: No, it was pretty quick. I remember the first money I had to gather up was 700 bucks. And I gathered up 700 bucks.

Michael Erlewine: You mean gathered up, meaning, to put into it?

Russ Gibb: Put into it, yeah, because I had to give down payment for the place, and I had to...

Michael Erlewine: How much repairs and redecorating had to be done...

Russ Gibb: Well, not a lot, at the beginning [laughs]; we just cleaned the goddamned place.

Michael Erlewine: Right, so then this idea of a false or premature opening doesn't make much sense either, because they're trying to say, the people may want to say, well, you tried to open Friday, September 16th, but failed..

Russ Gibb: No, no, no no.

Michael Erlewine: You have no memory of that?

Russ Gibb: No, no, no.

Michael Erlewine: Because it wasn't ready or the paint...

Russ Gibb: No, no, no, we cleaned it up, I remember that. The main thing was going into the 'johns'. There were a couple of 'johns', and cleaning up and worrying about the neighborhood.

Michael Erlewine: So, you didn't, re- paint it or...

Russ Gibb: No. I'll tell you what we did. We got some aluminum, Reynolds-wrap paper and put that on the presidium arch.

Michael Erlewine: Mmmhmm [laughs].

Russ Gibb: And...we did paint, come to think of it. My uncle who was a painter. He just passed away about

three months ago... He was a painter at Hudson's. He came in and painted the two walls on either side of the stage white, so that we'd have something to project on. That was the only painting we did.

Michael Erlewine: But, to the best of your recollection, you don't recall any delay with the opening?

Russ Gibb: No.

Michael Erlewine: And here's another way to ask the same question, is that, when you did open, like this trumpet poster, which doesn't even look like it's from the 1960's era, has no band on it...

Russ Gibb: No.

Michael Erlewine: You certainly did open with the names of actual bands.

Russ Gibb: Yeah, because John Sinclair by this time was involved with me.

Michael Erlewine: Right. So, I'm just trying to help these people research this.

Russ Gibb: Lot of things get twisted in memory, I got to tell you. But I know we didn't have a false opening. I would bet my bottom dollar on that. I know we didn't.

I do remember going out, to Arlen's Discount Store, which was a discount store at the time, and buying some toys. And also, getting something called a "Black Light."

Michael Erlewine: Yeah.

Russ Gibb: Now we didn't have the strobe right the first day.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, I believe it.

Russ Gibb: Because I had to pay 300 bucks for that, which was a lot of money.

Michael Erlewine: You bet.

Russ Gibb: And I had to order from San Francisco, and that came ... probably, two or three weeks after we opened, we got the strobe going.

Grande Artists

Michael Erlewine: Okay, cool, that's really helpful. I'd like to ask you a couple of questions about the different artists.

Russ Gibb: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: So, the first artist was Gary Grimshaw.

Michael Erlewine: Oh definitely, it's definitely.... He's the very first poster.

Russ Gibb: Well, was that the 'Seagull?'

Michael Erlewine: Yeah.

Russ Gibb: Yeah, sure.

Michael Erlewine: And so, do you recall meeting him or anything about him, or what was it like to work with him. Was he easy to work with?

Russ Gibb: Yes. He's very gentle.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Russ Gibb: He's a very mild, quiet, a decent, decent human being. That's all I can tell you about Gary. In fact, I could have...I gave him money for those.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Russ Gibb: I could own all the rights. I never did. Even when he wanted to republish, I said "What the hell. He's a young artist. He's struggling.... Life has been good to me, why should I...."

Michael Erlewine: And he is a very fine person.

Russ Gibb: Yes, exactly. You betcha. And he was always a gentleman to work with. Sometimes, he wasn't as prompt as I'd like because, I think he got high.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, I'm sure he did. [laughs]

Russ Gibb: But....you know, I mean I began to understand that... philosophy a little bit.

Michael Erlewine: Now speaking of high, were you into that a lot? Did you get high?

Russ Gibb: No, because I had to count the cash.

Michael Erlewine: So you weren't into smoking pot.

Russ Gibb: No, no, no, no.

Michael Erlewine: Did you ever take acid?

Russ Gibb: Nope.

Michael Erlewine: So, you just... Were out of that whole thing?

Russ Gibb: That whole scene is... I just sort of looked at, on.... And in fact I got frightened, because so many artists I met, like Janis Joplin, Keith Moon ...and some of these other guys, they were dying around us at that time.

Michael Erlewine: Your right. Yeah, I remember...

Russ Gibb: Yeah, and so I never really had that kind of interest in it.

Michael Erlewine: I remember meeting Janis Joplin at the Grande Ballroom, sitting around where the performers sit, on like a little circular couch.

Russ Gibb: Yep, yep. Yeah, sure.

Michael Erlewine: And she was sitting drinking whiskey.

Russ Gibb: Yeah, whiskey, Southern Comfort and tea. We always had to get it for her. In fact, one time, I had to take her down to Wyoming and Michigan Avenue to the clinic there, to a doctor, and have throat treated.

The other story about Janis. I had to drop her a couple of times, downtown, by Wayne State University in an apartment where she knew this guy, a guitar player, and everybody says she was a lesbian, but she had a friend, a guy friend... who played guitar down there. And I remember twice driving here down.

Grande Handbills

Michael Erlewine: Yeah. Now, another thing that I'd like be clear about, that keeps bubbling up is why you switched from posters to handbills?

Russ Gibb: Costs.

Michael Erlewine: Okay, so costs, but the last time we talked to you, you also said because there was...

Russ Gibb: They were easier to get out....

Michael Erlewine: You said something about the kids could distribute them.

Russ Gibb: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. We had a pass... some guys trying to get from me and offering money for it.

Michael Erlewine: What, your free ticket?

Russ Gibb: Yeah, yeah, yeah...you get a free ticket to the Grande? And Gary Grimshaw drew those.



Good for one free trip

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, I know he did, and it says "Good for one free trip."

Russ Gibb: Yeah, right.

Michael Erlewine: I have an image of it. I don't have a real one.

Russ Gibb: I have a real one.

Michael Erlewine: Ah...

Russ Gibb: Even though I must say the one that I do have, my dog chewed a little bit, put a hole...

Michael Erlewine: [laughs] that's great.

Russ Gibb: I don't know how he got it. Of all the goddamned things for him to chew when he was a puppy.

Michael Erlewine: Well, I've got images of some of these, because I can't afford to have all the real ones.

Russ Gibb: That's when we really started to pass out the handbills, because I'd give the kids a pass to the Grande, to pass them out, and we got a lot more coverage. If you put up a poster, a lot of people didn't want to put it up anywhere....you know. The main stores wouldn't put them, maybe a record store would or a head-shop.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Russ Gibb: But that was about it.

Michael Erlewine: So it was the cost of the posters and the idea that if you went to cards...

Russ Gibb: Yeah...now the card idea, was... it seems to me, and again I think it was John Sinclair, who said we could mail them out if we had cards, because the first ones I don't think had anything on the back of them.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, that might be.

Russ Gibb: Then later on he printed a post-card on the back. I mean, Gary Grimshaw did.

Michael Erlewine: That's right.

Russ Gibb: So, there was a cost thing and a convenience thing and to spread the word, because John was always telling me that we had to...and I remember him distinctly telling me this. He said, "Russ, you got to let people know on the West Coast and the East Coast." You know, because we were feeling like orphans in the middle.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Russ Gibb: ...that people would be sending these out all over and word was that it worked. Because people were collecting them all over the world.

Michael Erlewine: So the cards just seemed like a good thing.

Russ Gibb: Oh yeah, oh yeah.

Hendrix-Toronto Experience

Michael Erlewine: Let's just go over your famous story of the Hendrix/Toronto, where you actually made a trip there?

Russ Gibb: Yeah, yeah. You mean about the "Free?"

Michael Erlewine: Yeah.

Russ Gibb: Well...[laughs]. Well we had been looking for a place in Toronto. You know, we had been taken around. I'd been looking at the... We opened up a place and I can't remember if that was before or after Cleveland, but we were beginning to expand our horizons. We said "All right, let them have New York. Let them have L.A. Goddamned it, we'll start going in the mid-west."

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Russ Gibb: And, so...we put him [Hendrix] up in the Gardens, as I recall. I can't... I think that's where we played.

Michael Erlewine: Okay.

Russ Gibb: And we got up there and all of a sudden there's all kinds of tickets. I mean, more than we sold.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Russ Gibb: And then one of the underground papers popped the story that if you ... they had a fine line, and it says "Free Means Free Everything."

Michael Erlewine: Ah ha.

Russ Gibb: And they had printed that in one scratch on one of the lines, and you

had to magnify it. Christ, I don't know how many times. You could do it on the computer easy today. Back then it must have been ... they had to work at it.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Russ Gibb: And they, they forged hundreds of tickets and gave them out.

Michael Erlewine: Do you have any of those?

Russ Gibb: No.

Michael Erlewine: I'd love to have just a picture of one.

Russ Gibb: It would be a collector's item if I did...

Michael Erlewine: So what did you do? Was there anything you could do about...

Russ Gibb: No, no, no...there was nothing. Actually, yeah... .once we were aware that something was going on, and I forget how we were told, because later on it was in the paper, and you could archive that, somewhere in those papers in Toronto, they did a story on it. And it says "free everything."

And it seems to me, we were able, somehow, I can't remember if it was the paper or the thing....and we did get a magnifying glass and we could magnify it, so we could read it.

Who-Toronto Card

Michael Erlewine: Really. Now what about the "Who Toronto?" What was that? There was a Who Toronto card?

Russ Gibb: No, that happened.

Michael Erlewine: It did. I guess something must have happened to the cards, because there are just a few in whole world.

Russ Gibb: No, no, that happened....

Michael Erlewine: You don't know why the cards disappeared?

Russ Gibb: No I don't. It's like the mystery of the David Bowie card, when he changed his name to "Ziggy Stardust." We had passed out, I don't know, maybe couple hundred of them.

Michael Erlewine: Mmmhmm.

Russ Gibb: And then we get a telegram, and it says he's stopped using his name, he's changed his image. He's now "Stardust," "Ziggy Stardust." And we pulled back those cards. Wish I had them. And those were done by Donnie Dope.

Russ Gibb: You ever see that card?

Michael Erlewine: I may have seen a picture of it.

Russ Gibb: It has him standing looking like a hippy with bell bottoms and, you know, very. He looked like he belonged in a disco, and then there's all kind of little, and if you look very closely at those flowers, there little faces in them, that was Donnie's.

Michael Erlewine: What about the things you did in Cleveland and....

Russ Gibb: Well, the Cleveland thing was really incredible, because they had a black mayor there at the time. And we couldn't believe the handouts that were being passed out. The mayor himself never did that, but... the police, there was a lot of corruption.

Michael Erlewine: Oh really.

Russ Gibb: Well, there was a lot of, you know, cross my hand with silver. Now that one, we didn't stay there very long. No.

Michael Erlewine: What about Cincinnati?

Russ Gibb: Cincinnati, that was just a big pop concert.

Michael Erlewine: And same with St. Louis.

Russ Gibb: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Michael Erlewine: I'm still trying to find one of those posters, or either of them. They're pretty hard to find.

Russ Gibb: You know I gave a lot of them to Ben. I don't know if he ever told you that.

Michael Erlewine: Ben Edmonds?

Russ Gibb: Yeah. I gave literally boxes of posters to him. He'd cut some kind of deal with the guy who was from ArtRock or something.

Michael Erlewine: Mmmhmm.

Russ Gibb: And my deal was that he would set up a scholarship for kids with that money. The guy sent me a check for 1300 bucks.

Michael Erlewine: Is this Ben Edmonds or Phil Cushway?

Russ Gibb: Yeah, Ben was the one who cut the deal.

Michael Erlewine: Oh I see.

Russ Gibb: Ben came here in his car and picked them up and they got to California some way, and then I get a check for 1300 bucks. And I was insulted. I never cashed it. I still have it somewhere.

Michael Erlewine: But are those the ones that ended up with Phil Cushway?

Russ Gibb: I don't know what his name. Yeah, it was some kind of deal.

Michael Erlewine: With ArtRock?

Russ Gibb: Ben set it up.

Michael Erlewine: The ArtRock thing?

Russ Gibb: Yeah, right, right, right. Well, ask Ben about it, because I was furious, I know I never cashed it.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Russ Gibb: I remember I was so insulted, 1300 bucks or something. I think, wait a minute I gave him 1000's of dollars, I'm figuring that, at that time, I thinking well maybe it was \$50,000 or

\$60,000 it would be worth, he'd set-up a fund for kids and...

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Russ Gibb: Never happened, so what can I say.

Michael Erlewine: That's terrible. Any special stories about any of the artists?

Detroit Riots

Russ Gibb: Yeah well, you know, the guy that I used on my theme song, the folk-singer. He played the Grande a lot for me.

Michael Erlewine: Early in the Grande or later?

Russ Gibb: Many times, and when they had the riots in Detroit in 1967, he was with me, and Carter Collins, the drummer, the Black drummer were staying with me.

Michael Erlewine: Are you thinking of Tim Buckley?

Russ Gibb: Tim Buckley.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Russ Gibb: And he had played that night, and we were on the roof of the Grande and it wasn't far from Twelfth Street, where it all started, and we remembered hearing sirens. It must have been around one-thirty. It was a hot muggy night.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Russ Gibb: One-thirty, two o' clock we were up on roof of the Grande, a bunch of us. And we decided we'd have a picnic the next morning, and we went out to Kensington, and we hired, you know, the Grande cops to get a little area, clear an area for us, so we wouldn't be bothered if the guys wanted to smoke.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Russ Gibb: We went out there and on our way back, we saw smoke coming from...and we were coming in Grand River Avenue. And at Greenville, we were turned back, and of course then we turned the radio on and we find out that...you know...a riot is going on, and of course, Carter was worried about his drums and I was worried about some of our equipment there.

So, they had been staying at my house, Carter and Tim Buckley, and we decided we would go into the city. Now we were being told on the radio: you can't go in the city. Stay away, blah, blah, blah. So what we

did is, while we were driving here, in Dearborn, Tim and I were in the front seat and Carter, the black guy, was hiding in the back. When got over to around Joy Road, Carter drove the car and Tim and I jumped in the back.

Michael Erlewine: [laughs].

Russ Gibb: And we got to the Grande, and there were already people rioting, breaking things, and we pulled up around the side of the Grande, got out, and we ran in and we got some of our equipment out. Carter got some of his drums, and then we're loading it up, because they thought we were shopping too. And I will always remembered, Carter, grabbing a couple of the young black youngsters who running by, and said, "Hey, how come you didn't burn here?" They burned all around; they never touched the Grande. And the kids said, "Hey man, you got music. You're cool." I'll always remember that. And they never touched the Grande.

Michael Erlewine: Well, that's a great story.

Russ Gibb: And always remember that, and...that's how we got to the Grande, and of course a day later they brought in tanks and guns to quell the riot. It was Sunday, I guess, I don't know...



Russ Gibb passed away on April 30, 2019/