

Where to Draw the Line



by Jaceber Kastor

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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. Some of these articles still need work.

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"WHERE TO DRAW THE LINE?"

By Jacaeber Kastor

'Drawing the line' is perhaps the very crux of defining what a particular 'collection' is all about. Existentially speaking - collectors are creating boundaries, borders and distinctions within the unlimited field of the cosmos as a form of 'amusement' much like drawing a picture on a blank piece of paper. You are by virtue of using some subjective decisions creating a 'concept' called a "collection". Your 'collection' may just be what 'came your way' or it may be very carefully delineated, considered and crafted; but anyway you look at it, the decisions you make with regards to perceiving and organizing posters or other 'collectibles' form a kind of 'self expression'. It doesn't necessarily reflect in any 'real' sense the entirety of "what's out there to collect", rather your 'collection' is created by your own particular interests, capabilities and personal motivations; so defining what is needed to complete certain "collections" or "series" may not be your cup of tea. But a lot of us neurotic collectors must go the hard way. This column is dedicated to those who have perhaps lost touch with reality, but nevertheless press on regardless into that obscure and neurotic world of collecting psychedelic "Ephemera".

Are they 'HANDBILLS', 'CARDS', 'FLYERS', POSTCARDS' OR 'POSTERS'???

Where do we draw the line as to what is a handbill, flyer, card, postcard or poster? How do we even determine what it is? Let's first take up the basic question of the "card". A 'postcard', in the more technical, U.S. Postal Service definition, is 7 points thick (a point is 1/1,000 of an inch - 7 points is 7/1000 of an inch), no smaller than 3 ½" x 5" and no larger than 4 ¼" x 6" in order to qualify for 'postcard' postage rates. The Family Dog postcards are larger than that (plus or minus 5" x 7"); yet are obviously still 'postcards' in the common understanding of the term. And what if it's got no 'postcard backing', but is on 'thick' stock (say 7 points or more), should we call it just a 'card'?

Or is it then a "handbill"? Was it designed to be handed out (handbill) and/or mailed (postcard)? Can it still be a 'handbill' and be on thick stock?

I generally have considered 'handbills' to be of thinner paper stock with no postcard backing - but how large can a 'handbill' get before it becomes a "flyer"? Most 'flyers' are of a size between 8 ½" x 11" and 8 ½" x 17" and are designed for handing out, fold-over mailing and phone pole/store window posting. But what if the stock of the 'flyer' is thick? At 8 ½" x 11" it seems like a thick 'flyer', but at 8 ½" x 17" or larger it seems to become a "poster"! Should there be, can there be, "exact" guidelines? Where does one draw the line with regards to thickness, size and intended or actual usage?

These are some tough calls - it seems to me that including 'handbills', 'cards' and 'flyers' in the same category eliminates at least the troublesome decision as to what it is! I've seen some very large 'postcards' and 'handbills' and some super thin 'postcards'! There are some very small posters and hell, an uncut sheet of cards can be more like a 'poster' than a 'card'. I mean you can't keep it with the cards. What a mess!

So what do we call a collection of small stuff? Large stuff is obviously the POSTER collection; maybe someone will come up with a clever term to connote the whole group of 'smaller than poster' material.

There are a lot of people who just collect cards. They're like "compact discs", probably the popular wave of the future because of their easy storage, display and transport. Probably the posters will always have the glamour spot and the big bucks, I suppose because they can be used to decorate (flaunt)?

Anyway, card collectors there are, but there are hardly any good 'pure' card collections to try to assemble in our genre because almost no venue that used small stuff for promotion used solely cards. Vulcan used mainly flyers. Grande used mainly flyers and postcards. Family Dog - handbills, then flyers, then postcards. Bill Graham used mainly handbills and postcards.

What constitutes a "collection"?

Whether you decide you are 'collecting' or 'archiving' posters or 'small stuff' you have to collect different types of material to collect an entire run of a particular venue or promoter. As far as I'm concerned there hasn't been one single grouping, collection or definition of any run of posters or 'small stuff' for any venue, promoter, band or artist that is complete or definitive.

Nope. Definitely not Bill Graham stuff. Not even {Family Dog} stuff. The so-called "numbered set" of Bill Graham material is fraught with discrepancies (determining them is another story - I'm just saying, "give me a break!") such as number "0" (what?!); and why, for instance was BG 100A not included in the ART OF ROCK, but 232A was - #100A has a number, why was a number put on 202 and not 272A (Aretha LA version).

Where do you draw the Line? Is there a goal to shoot for? Can you get them all? Should the goal be set so we can achieve satisfaction easily (to help promote the hobby and to give ourselves a little sense of accomplishment?) or should it be scientific? Like if the Library of Congress wanted to catalog the genre. People are talking about Grande card collections as if they are separate from the Grande handbills and flyers; but hey, they aren't numbered and they're just like Family Dog at the Avalon stuff, the early stuff is thin and large and they went into postcards later. But, then, who would collect all of the Family Dog postcards (nos. 42 - 147) and try to say they had a complete Family Dog postcard collection?

Uh, ok, but so what? If you are proud, great, but the run started with '{Tribute to Dr. Strange}' and why did {Family Dog} start calling '{The Tribal Stomp}' the no. 1? Originally, it had no 'no. 1' and there were posters and small stuff preceding it (they weren't even at the {Avalon Ballroom} yet!). It obtained a number by the second printing but perhaps even that designation was arbitrary. Perhaps it was only when they started using numbers on first printings that they perceived they had a series going. What I'm saying is that there is a lot of great stuff that was not numbered or could be considered part of a run that lies in that gray zone of what the {ART OF ROCK} on page 185 calls "unusual Ephemera"!

The more we divide and smaller we set our scope the more inconsistencies there will be and the more impossible it will be to make good catalogs and lists of collections. To wade through the bullshit, we have to think big!

POINT OF ORDER

Perhaps we need to hold a Psychedelic Poster Symposium or Convention and get together and decide some parameters, or rally the major collectors and dealers into endorsing some particular lists or impartial publication or archival system. I've always had a desire to list "what's out there" just so I could compare what I have versus what's available to collect. What's out there is still coming out, there are still new discoveries - but the point is as cataloging develops, there will be subcategories and ways of determining collections to aspire to. We need a larger sense of order so as to include everything and not have too many items in the "What the fuck is this?" realm.

I feel dating is probably the thread to sew it all together as a whole. Just about everything has a date on it, whether it be a single day or a period of time of an event or a month in a year or just the year. The year is probably the base unit; material with only the year would be listed at the end of the chronological list for that year, and stuff without a specific date, but with a month, being listed at the end of the month. Even most headshop posters have a year, and if something doesn't have a year on it, well hell - it had to have been produced at some point, so it's a matter of research to find out what year it was produced. I'd say that with time just about everything can be tracked down to a year.

And here you have a Root Base List for the computer which could have everything in the whole world from handbill to poster, listed in chronological order with no regard to venue, artist, etcetera. This kind of list could be useful in certain circumstances; although there are obviously a number of possible reference points other than the date. Subcategories have to be established, so out of this Root Base Archive can be pulled other sorted lists by any criterion one might want; such as venue, promoter, band, artist, region, etcetera. Specific lists should be

listed by chronological order too, including any related materials (i.e. everything existent that can be considered a Bill Graham production or done in conjunction with a {Bill Graham} production including posters, cards, etcetera). You can always go and pull out of that list the so-called numbered {Bill Graham} collection, but that requires a definite set of determinations to be established.

So on this master list on November 7, 1967 you have 689 different items from all over the world, now what? Next, sort by country alphabetically, then (in the case of the U.S.A.) by state and then by city (alphabetically sorted).

This, essentially, could handle everything and could be laid out fairly intelligently. Sub categories would follow and by these you can establish "collections" by asking the computer to sort by your criterion. '{Russ Gibb Presents}' or '{Family Dog Presents}' might be what you collect or '{Armadillo World Headquarters}' or '{Boston Tea Party}' or just say San Francisco or Michigan for that matter or 1966 or 60's only or {Jefferson Airplane} or {Rick Griffin} stuff. Maybe even just "cool stuff". At any rate you get your own personal system free 'at birth', so you can do whatever the fuck you want. 'Defining' is just for those of us who have to establish our own '{Dewey Decimal System}' for the posterity of Psychedelic Posters and small stuff collectordom and for all us tormented 'archivists' sitting here late at night holding some pathetic scarp of paper up and wondering: "Where do I draw the line?!"

There are many, many more 'gray' areas in rock and psychedelic poster collecting. In future issues of {OFF the WALL}. I'd like to address a number of these 'fuzzy' areas and perhaps help to clarify them as much as possible, one by one. I'm not going to try to determine the way it 'should be' by myself, but rather to stimulate thought that might lead to some group "commonalties" within the genre of our common interest: these perplexing posters and their peripheral affiliates.

SOME FUTURE CONCERNS FOR "WHERE TO DRAW THE LINE?"

Grading systems for condition. Cross-referencing. Items that seem to be part of two different collections. Human perspective and criterion for sorting, value and pricing. Peripheral 'doo-dads' (buttons, bumper stickers, matches, tickets). Forgeries. Bootlegs and reprints. Storage and presentation. Insurance and protection. Obsession, madness and other related collector infirmities. Jointly created or produced material. Art versus advertising. Trading. Printing technicalities. Tours from reality and various other probes of the Gray Zones by the Gray Matter.

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