

Postcarding



by George Sargent

The Joys of Postcarding

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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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THE JOYS OF POSTCARDING

by George Sargent

Why postcards? Pondering the question, searching my mind for a reason, I finally have to just come out and admit the simple clear fact - I'm a visual 'junkie'. I continually have to feed myself images and as a result I quickly fill walls, drawers, boxes and portfolios with photographs, poster, postcards, actually anything interesting on paper. I vividly recall living in Boston, walking the streets and having people hand me announcements of who was coming to town. It took no time at all to fill the walls of my apartment with all these handouts but unfortunately the time came to move and since I used Elmer's glue, a nonreversible adhesive to adhere them, my shrine to rock in Boston remained, soon lost forever.

Some posters remained off the walls, stored for years in portfolios and moved from attics to closets, under beds, to cellars and garages, temporarily forgotten. In the early 70's I started to find interest with photographs found at flea markets, antique shops and yard sales. But the prices rose quickly and I soon found another visual interest, postcards.

The prices were low and I was convinced that you could find an image of anything that was of interest, from bowling monkeys to babies hatching from eggs, surrealistic views of Paris as Venice, complete with canals and gondolas, to exaggerated produce on broken down carts and my very favorite 'The Sewer Banquet', Waterloo, Iowa, picturing a formally set table disappearing down the length of sewer. (If anyone can explain it to me I would love to know.) I thought everything was under control as new cards arrived on approval by mail during the week and weekends were spent searching the flea markets and paper shows. Looking back I find it strange that I didn't see any rock posters or maybe I was just overlooking them.

Anyway, one day, four years down the road all hell broke loose! A package arrived from a postcard dealer who, for a couple of years had been sending me a monthly shipment to look over. When I opened the package my senses were assaulted with the colors, images and names of groups that I had grown up with. The Jefferson Airplane} and Grateful Dead}, Quicksilver Messenger Service}, Moby Grape}, Love}, Muddy Waters}, The Doors}, Cream}, Jimi Hendrix}, Janis Joplin}! I couldn't put them down. I was looking at a collection of Fillmore} and Avalon postcards}. I kept looking through them for hours trying to decide which ones I wanted to keep. Cards moved from one pile to another and I don't remember how many actually remained but I do strongly recall how they kicked me in the rear and sent me searching to see what I had saved. It was also the first of any sort of real effort to put together a collection of 60's rock art. In the beginning it was mostly cards from the Family Dog} and Bill Graham} series but soon little gems from The Boston Tea Party} and other venues across the country started to appear and each time the excitement and 'high' returned. You have to remember that this was before the "Art of Rock}" was published, before lots of it was laid in any sort of order, and it amazes me that after seeing so many images the excitement and magic still exists today when I find an image I have never seen. Equally amazing is the number that still turn up.

One strong consideration about the cards is that even today with the rapidly climbing demand and cost they are still affordable. You either laugh or cry in shock when you hear the latest price a 'Trip or Freak}', 'Tribal Stomp}', Hendrix/Toronto} or Acid Test} poster has just sold for. As they climb in the thousands you can always reassure yourself with the thought that if you are lucky enough to find a card, and remember most proof sheets are made up of one poster along with 6 or so cards so they do turn up more frequently, the price is much more reasonable. As a result unless one has an endless supply of money it is today much more affordable to put together a collection of cards, flyer and handbills.

IMAGE

I must insert here an ongoing question. If there are in most cases more handbills than posters printed, what happens when you rarely see the handbill? Two examples that quickly come are The Grateful Dead}, Fountain Street Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan, and the California Shakespeare Festival}, University of Santa Clara.

IMAGE

In both cases I have a copy of the poster, have seen the proof sheets and numerous posters over the years but those elusive little suckers are still missing from my collection and I often ask myself where the hell did they all go? I theorize. Try to make logical decisions and reassure myself that someday they will turn up. But the days are turning into years so if anyone reading this has an answer I would love to know and hopefully Off the Wall} will help to supply some answers.

Another thing to consider is the storage problem posters create when they start to accumulate. I store my handbills in mylar envelopes which fit into tray cases and on to a bookshelf. With two cards to an envelope using a barrier board in between I can fit around 100 cards in a box about the size of a medium length Stephen King novel. If I have to locate a specific card or just sit and take a look at the collection it is much easier to flip through a tray of cards than a drawer of posters. I store my posters in large flat print drawers and two things amaze me. First, the number of posters that can be crammed into a drawer and how quickly they fill up. Secondly, that it always seems that when the opportunity comes around to upgrade a poster and I want to check the one I have it is usually somewhere at the bottom of the drawer. Chalk another one up for the cards!

Enough rambling for now. Hopefully in upcoming issues I can try to explain how having the ability to restore paper art has led to some weird events, my special appreciation for the use of collage in poster design, printing a numbered list of the Russ Gibb}/Grande Ballroom}, Detroit cards and the strange tale of one of my favorite posters, Carlos Castaneda} with Don Juan} in Providence, Rhode Island.

[Note: This article originally appeared in Wes Wilson}'s publication "Off The Wall}," and is used with permission of Wilson and the author. Copyright © Wes Wilson and George Sargent]