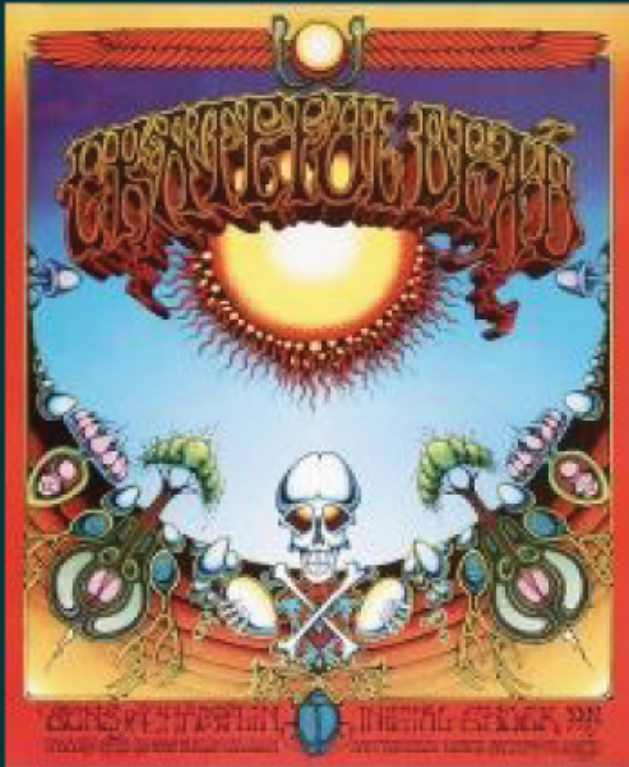


Rick Griffen



by Wes Wilson

Rick Griffin

1944 - 1991

by

Wes Wilson

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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RICK GRIFFIN

1944 - 1991

(Editorial)

By Wes Wilson

Rick Griffin, one of the best of the San Francisco poster artists I came to know over the years, was also one of the nicest. I first met him when he came to my apartment on Carmel Street in San Francisco above the Haight-Ashbury in 1966 just to "meet" me and discuss my posters. He looked every bit like the southern California surfer he was, with the shorter hair and light colored, loose and comfortable clothing - wearing white buck or tennis shoes as I recall. Often I would have visits from "fans" and I remember thinking of Rick as just another appreciative fan. He asked questions about my poster work and I gave him a few posters. He left after a short visit. I don't remember him showing me any of his work at the time.

The next time I saw him he was with the other artists and he had become "San-Francisco-ized" and, having finished a beautifully crafted Amer-Indian-esque "Human-Be-In" poster and had shoulder length hair. The group of us shared some professional opinions about how to maximize artist's rights and discussed poster business and profits, bantered on about various things generally, and as always, smoked some grass.

I'll always remember Rick as a younger, idealistic, reserved and quietly obscure, but very talented poster artist. Occasionally we would talk seriously. Once he would realize that I was a little doubtful about something he said, he would often clam up - become silent on that subject - as if I had been somehow impolite. I was more accustomed to artists who loved the dynamic "dialogue," dramatic confrontation and often noisy argument in support of their favorite ideas. It was for me one

of the requisite parts, almost the "stock and trade" of my artistic fascination. I remember thinking that maybe learning art in a school where the students were given instruction and were expected to comply with their instructor's wishes - not to argue even if they disagreed! In such a scenario I'd blame the teacher for not more artfully encouraging inventive exploration. I prefer the creativity inherent in dialogue as a very important social ingredient of all "art" of any social consequence over either the isolated and obscure artist thinking and acting in total "singular obscurity" or the boring commonality of the thoughtless "follow the leader" type. Rick seemed more likely to say something important to him and let it stand as it was.

(One of my motives for launching this periodical is to encourage dynamic dialogue in the arts. The goal being to make better what is already - or if we are especially fortunate, make something even better yet. I think we've had enough of the spiritual wasteland that is evident in some of the arts today. Enough plastic wrapped seacoasts, soup cans enshrined in our museums, gross perversions lauded, sick rock bought, mental oilslicks spreading and "Da Da" ("duh-duh-ism?") in all the arts! Since such signs of artistic boredom are so commonplace, I think something new is definitely desirable!)

At one time Rick became very much interested in the metaphysics and symbolism of the Theosophical Society as depicted in a rather large, rare and expensive book that he had acquired which contained page upon page of arcane symbols and the lengthy "exegetic rationales" (derivations of assumptions traced from sources in ancient scriptures) related to various ancient eastern religious texts and their interpretations. It was written or compiled by a scholar by the name of "Leadbetter" (spelling probably wrong - one of the co-founders of the society founded by Annie Besant and Madame Blavatsky and from which the Krishnamurti school of theosophical "anti-thought" later evolved). Rick tried unsuccessfully to explain these "truths" to me and explain why

he had chosen to depict, for example, the "A-oxo-M-oxo-A" (Aoxomoxoa) from these arcana on one or more of his posters. "It reads the same from the right or left and, taken together, includes the "Om" (aum) of eastern meditation - which contains all sounds from all words in all languages - the vocalization of which encompasses the voice sounds of all words - and thereby all word delivered knowledge - etc., etc." My questions and arguments about these points were somewhat irritating to Rick and I must admit I did innocently poke fun at him about them. Their significance to him still eludes me.

Some months later, he came over with a mutual acquaintance, a photographer, who held some radical Berkeley "new Left" political views (I said: "Yes I am mostly white but why should that make me personally guilty for black slavery?") blended with jocular dashes about extra-terrestrial influences - and proceeded to tell me that he had lost respect for my "head." For my part, I suggested that Rick was substituting visual graphic diagrams for logical thought and like lots of psychedelic artists and their friends, had possibly taken just a leetle bit too much acid. After this we didn't speak again for quite some time.

During roughly this period Rick used powerful symbols (like apocalyptic metal masks) extensively on his posters. Later, I noticed that his ZAP cover showed the warring eyeballs (artists?) inside the entrance to the cave and the "beetle" carrying the lantern up the stairs and into the light.

Later Rick became rather dramatically a "born again" Christian and dumped many of his metaphysical beliefs from earlier times. Neither our former differences nor philosophical ideas were ever seriously discussed again. We developed a renewed but respectful relationship in association with the Artist's Right Today (A.R.T.) benefits in San Francisco during the middle 80's.

Just prior to our last A.R.T. benefit, I was flattered by Rick's request that I give him my opinion or suggestions about a large

painting he was working on. After looking it over I told him that his large Jimi Hendrix face in the stormy black cloud would look better if the cloud was painted shades of dark purple blue rather than a strict black because "storm clouds are never conscious of race". He laughed and accepted my opinion, smiling with genuine appreciation. I could tell we were friends again after the long hiatus.

Rick's popularity & his prolific contributions to the "fantastic comic/cosmic art" genre of rock poster art have been tremendous. I'm sure he will always hold an important place in the history of rock poster and comic art.

I will miss him the most the next time the poster artists from the "old days" get together. It'll be sad for all of us - realizing that he won't be showing up - even at the last minute.

[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]