

The Fillmores



by John Kuzich

The Fillmore Series

by

John Kuzich

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.

Michael@Erlewine.net

Here are some other links to more books, articles, and videos on these topics:

Main Browsing Site:

<http://SpiritGrooves.net/>

Organized Article Archive:

<http://MichaelErlewine.com/>

YouTube Videos

<https://www.youtube.com/user/merlewine>

Spirit Grooves / Dharma Grooves

Cover photo © David Singer

You are free to share these blogs
provided no money is charged

THE FILLMORE SERIES: Fueling an Old Passion with New Insight

by John Kuzich

As a rock poster collector of many years, I look back with general satisfaction at the experience of discovery and the enjoyment of a vast array of graphic images. Many of those treasures have been quite rare and unique. I recall such one-of-a-kinds as the Sin Dance} and Tribal Stomp} printing plates, the David Singer} BG-285 with the beautiful purple overprint (an experimental press proof) and the BG-287 closing poster in the blue, silver and purple overprint version.

IMAGES

Though the old collection is gone, I have continued to re-collect one particular group of posters - a body of work - that stands out as my all time favorite. That group of posters consists of first printings of the first 62 Fillmore}s. Given the intensity of my passion for these images and my drive to assemble mint sets, numerous collectors have asked why, "WHY the first 62?"

As a poster collector - new to the scene in 1972 - I realized early on that any serious Fillmore} or Family Dog} collection would contain all available first printings. Based on that common logic, I proceeded to track down and grab up all choice first printings wherever I could find them. With the Fillmore series I was especially attracted to the graphics and soon developed a fondness for the size of the first 24 Fillmores produced by Wes Wilson}, and the thicker, soft, and slightly textured paper. To me these posters contained a simple somewhat primitive-and yet sophisticated-quality, which in its own way captured the enthusiasm and hopefulness of the new movement and those first explorations into psychedelics.

One of my fondest memories, and one of the classic tales of discovery in posterdom, trail back to a fateful day in 1972 when I - quite by chance - stumbled upon Double H Press, a tiny print shop on upper Haight Street. Standing there for a moment looking at the sign above the door, something in the dim recesses of my mind clicked, and I remembered that Double H had printed posters. So I promptly strolled in, walked up to the counter and asked if they had any posters. The pressman promptly hoisted a large box onto the counter, informing me that the price was \$5 each. Well, as in every poster collector's fondest dream, there amidst a massive stack of rarities were copies of my favorite Fillmores, a number of Lenny Bruce's, Lenny Bruce overprints, 5s, 6s, 7s, and on and on. In fact, when I had finished sorting out the pile, to my astonishment I had found mint first printings of all of Wes Wilson's first 25 posters!! Tack on the Sin Dance and other assorted printing plates, numerous Sin Dance posters in three different versions, an extra copy of a "Tribute to Dr. Strange" (to name a few), and I had to feel that it had been a good day. That find took me deeper into my appreciation of those early Fillmores.

But back to the question, why the first 62? Well, during those early years two things were ample reason. First was collection value, and, second, was my attraction to the bold and colorful images - an appreciation, by the way, which slowly moved from the first 25 images to the rest of the series in which I was able to observe the progression of Wes Wilson's craft as it evolved into much more complex compositions and color relationships.

One and a half years ago, however, a renewed drive to collect yet another set of first printings gave way to a new realization that made my collecting as exciting - if not more so - than in the old days. And this was new insight into the real nature of Wes Wilson's artistic achievement. Today I consider this the most relevant factor in the collecting of Wes's work.

Devoid of any real knowledge of Wes's art training, it would be very easy for many to take those vibrant works for granted. And many people do. Just so much more great art from yet another well-schooled artist. NOT REALLY! Had Wes Wilson been the product of extensive and committed art training, studying for years at the best schools, a person observing Wes's work could, perhaps, yawn once or twice without being bawled out. But, as I learned and much to my surprise, Wes Wilson} had scant little art instruction at all.

For anyone who can recognize the beauty and sophistication of this early body of work, the realization that Wes had little art training is really dumbfounding. For myself, a commercial artist of 25 years, this was the key to a whole new appreciation and zest for collecting. With each new poster I acquired I was reminded of the level of accomplishment and would, naturally, relate it to my own experience. As an artist I had drawn and painted extensively during high school, attended night and summer classes, won the National Scholastic Art Awards} Competition at the Chrysler Salon in New York, attended three years of the most grueling training at the Art Center School} in Los Angeles and was always in earnest pursuit of excellence. And during that time I had the opportunity to observe many talented artists develop. Yet none of them, including myself, ever achieved the consistent degree of uniqueness or excellence that Wes did WITHOUT ANY REAL DEGREE OF TRAINING!

As I write this and relay these insights to you, I take a moment to review the plates containing these images in THE ART OF ROCK}. I look at the color relationships - amazing! Any artist will tell you that it is not easy to create a great op poster in just one, two or even three colors. And I look at the design of the overall compositions, the textures, the spontaneous use of space, the flowing, organic compositions, the symmetry, the graceful curves. Wow.

Adding to these insights is the fact that these posters were produced within very tight time frames and with a rather small financial incentive. And yet Wes - throughout the entire Fillmore series - never really "laid an egg." Every piece is consistently excellent. And as I write this and review these reproductions I become aware of the variety of compositional themes. Each piece being a new adventure in creative expression rather than a repeat of old formats. I AM DULY HUMBLED.

I think it is time for every serious collector to reflect on this article and to take, what will hopefully be, a fresh new look at Wes Wilson's poster work. It was, without a doubt, one of the most important contributions to the psychedelic movement; it stands as one of the most brilliant chapters in the development of poster art.

I can only conclude this article by sharing this tantalizing thought with you. If Wes had been able to produce another 20 or 30 posters for Bill Graham, what would we have seen in the way of continued innovation? SIGH.

[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 John Kuzich]