

Art Work that Rocks!

By Helen Marketti

"I knew what I wanted to do from day one. As a kid, I did a lot of cartooning and drawing hot rods. One of my favorite things to draw was *Mad Magazine*. I was fortunate enough to know then what I wanted to do with my life," said Bob.

Bob Masse is one of the well-known concert poster and album cover artists from the late 60s generation. His artwork has graced the walls of The Fillmore, Avalon Ballroom and The Whiskey a Go Go.

He has created his signature poster look for Janis Joplin, The Who, The Byrds, Bob Dylan, The Grateful Dead, The Doors and many others.

Still active in concert poster and album cover creations as well as other projects, Bob's work has been requested by Apple Computers, Tori Amos, Fiona Apple and John McLaughlin to name a few. He was also asked to design a poster for the 40th year celebration of Woodstock.

Like great rock and roll, Bob's artwork is still sought after by collectors, admired by music fans and revisited again for the nostalgic look of the psychedelic era.

Originally from Vancouver, British Columbia, Bob went

to art school where his plans were to be an



illustrator

or a commercial artist. "My friends and I hung out at coffee houses. A friend of mine had a cousin who fancied himself to be a Beatnik so we hung out with him, went to clubs and listened to music. By then things had evolved into the folk music era," Bob explains. "One of our college assignments involved marketing your work and getting yourself out there. So I started approaching club owners and the musicians and asked them if I could draw a poster for them for free. This was my way of showing my work, meeting the musicians and getting free tickets."

He continues, "I wanted my work to have its own uniqueness. I always liked experimenting with colors and overlays. I like creating the posters because they are complex enough so that I enjoy the mixing of colors, creating the illustrations and experimenting with the lettering which was always fun to do with its bendy, twisty and flowy look."

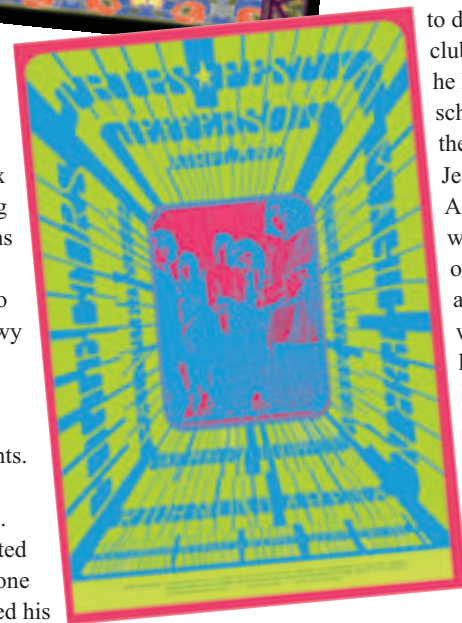
Bob's artwork was becoming more familiar and word was spreading about his creative talents. Bob's first concert poster for a "famous" person was Bob Dylan. "Bob liked the art work and wanted to know if something could be done for him. Believe it or not, I spelled his

name wrong on the poster!" Bob laughs. "It's D-y-l-a-n but I had spelled it D-y-l-o-n."

Bob continued to design posters for local clubs and coffeehouses. One of the club owners he was doing work for moved to another building since business was growing. A bigger concert hall meant larger crowds and bringing in bigger names to perform from the rock world.

Bob explains, "He asked me one day if I would like to ride along with him to San Francisco. He would usually go there at least once a month to do business, talk with bands, their managers and promoters and get them to

come to Vancouver to do a gig at his club. At the time, he had a meeting scheduled with the promoter of Jefferson Airplane. There was about three of us going along and we would pile into his '67 Mustang convertible. It's about a 24 hour drive to San Francisco from Vancouver so I slept most



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of the way.”

“Actually there is a cool story I want to share with you too about that car. There is a very popular poster of The Grateful Dead that has my buddy’s car (’67 Mustang convertible) parked in the background. You could probably get the poster at a Spencer Gifts or someplace like that,” Bob said. “I remember crashing at The Grateful Dead’s place in the Haight-Ashbury district. They were nobody back then. They were just a bunch of crazy, long-haired guys.”

Eventually Bob left Vancouver and moved to San Francisco. “The whole music scene back then seemed focused and based in San Francisco. It was a fabulous place for moving around.” Bob continued moving around until he ended up living in Los Angeles in the Laurel Canyon neighborhood. “Laurel Canyon really was a magical place to live,” remembers Bob. “San Francisco was all concrete but at least in Laurel Canyon there was a bit of country side to it with trees and shrubs. I lived above a garage that was once

the home of Hollywood actor, Errol Flynn,” Bob said. “Down the street was Houdini’s castle. Frank Zappa lived in Tom Mix’s old house, which had a bowling alley inside. I had a friend who lived in Charlie Chaplin’s



house. So many movie stars lived there and had access to people to create their fantasylands for their homes as they did for their movie sets. They had designers create special effects for them.” It sounds fitting to some degree that emerging rock stars of the 60s lived in a neighborhood that was once

occupied by Hollywood’s silver screen legends with their magical bells and whistles.

Bob continues, “You could walk down any street in Laurel Canyon and hear music coming from every house. Joni Mitchell

lived down the street from me and I could hear her playing the piano. I enjoyed living there.”

Living in Los Angeles provided more opportunities for Bob’s art work to be visible. “I started doing some work for Bill Graham who ran The Fillmore and I also did work for Chet Helms who managed the Avalon Ballroom. I also did a lot of ads for The Whiskey a Go Go. I admired all of the musicians and what they were doing. I saw historical moments.”

When asked if a band’s image or their music plays a role in his poster art Bob said, “I take that into consideration more now than I did then. Back then I just did what I wanted to do. My work is now more art nouveau.”

It takes Bob about three weeks to a month to work on a poster. “They’re very involved. I’ve created a monster for myself,” laughs Bob. “The music industry gives more advanced notice, it seems. If someone requests my work, they give me plenty of time to work on it before they need it. Sometimes advertising agencies need a poster in 24 hours so then I’m up all night.”

Some artists sell many posters whereas others do not which Bob found very interesting. “Led Zeppelin and Pink Floyd posters sell,” said Bob. “The Who, Janis Joplin and Elton John posters do not do well with sales. Some artists have fans for their

music only and are not interested enough to collect memorabilia. Other artists do not have a large fan base so it is interesting to see what sells and what doesn’t. Posters I thought would make sales ended up not doing so well. It all depends on the interest of the fans.”

Bob feels that people still ask for his work because they still like the look of the 60s style. “I’ve done artwork for Blues Festivals, Shakespearean Festivals and the San Francisco Opera. They are all different genres and yet they still asked me to do their posters. They still like that look from the 60s.”

Inspiration for Bob has been the art of Alphonse Mucha and turn of the century artists. “It’s a very selfish thing that artists do. It’s not a commercial art. It’s a fine art. I would like to turn the world onto it. I want people to see this style. I’m the vehicle to pass it through.”

For more information about Bob Masse and his concert poster artwork, please visit: www.bmasse.com and www.myspace.com/bobmasse. Bob does sell artwork through his web site and will autograph his posters upon request. Prices will vary.

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