

Lines in Tomorrow's Sand



by Jacaeber 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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LINES IN TOMORROW'S SAND

By Jacaeber Kastor

Somebody asked me again this week, "what do you consider a complete numbered set?" You see, this question is endemic to {Bill Graham} collecting. Comparatively speaking, {Family Dog} series numbering is relatively strait-forward. This consideration does come up, because people get lured into trying to complete a series - something to do with those little numbers. The inference of a "set" of some sort or a series seem to lure some of us to "Fill in the blanks", to "complete the sequence", to "follow the bouncing ball"; act compulsively, perhaps letting a non-rational side take over. Many of the posters are relatively easy to get; then it gets harder and harder, or should I say, more difficult, anyway, you can get close to the end and as you get closer and closer you discover all sorts of little variations and anomalies, little back eddies, cousins and ultimately the structure of the collection can end up looking more like a family tree than a linear setup. There are many midweek shows and some of them have numbers and some do not. There are lots of size, printing and color variations. The system of ordering them does not make complete sense until you realize they are all BG produced advertising with "{Bill Graham Presents}" written somewhere on the item.

Do you need a number "0" to call a set complete? No. It is no more than the number zero than it is a numbered item. Do you need a No. 74? Yes, (sorry) it was an out of SF show, but it was clearly No. 74 in the series and there are other out of town shows that are numbered. How about a No. 234? No. One does not exist. No. 230 or No. 230A? Probably the BG-230 because at least it would be in chronological order. What about No. 19? Everyone blindly accepts this as a normal BG poster/card - A play? The Beard? Jeez - might as well be collecting BG {Mime Troupe} stuff - WHICH BRINGS ME TO MY POINT - I could go on and on about exactly which ones belong in

a set - there is lots of room for debate. ESSENTIALLY I WOULD SAY YOU JUST NEED ONE OF EACH NUMBER (LIKE EITHER 215 OR 215A BUT YOU DON'T HAVE TO HAVE BOTH!) PREFERABLY FIRST PRINTS IN DECENT CONDITION. THAT IS ALL. RELAX. It is possible to assemble a set after some time or some money or both. You can let yourself off the hook and end the madness. There really is no rule. You can generally sell an almost complete set just as easily as a complete one. Who out there other than a few top collectors really knows the extent of what exists, what choices you have, or has thought about it much?

The real point is - the "set" is what you make of it. Draw your own conclusions. Set your own boundaries. Stake your own tent. Explore what there is out there. Learn to recognize the true order of things. Stay open minded. Keep looking. Be diligent. Look both ways. Chew thoroughly.

HINT:

There are 3 things that are common to most BG posters/cards.

1. Most items can be placed chronologically.
2. Most items say on them somewhere, "{Bill Graham Presents}".
3. Some of the items are numbered.

I think ALL the early BG stuff is worth collecting. I just use BG and the date to connate the item. Without using the numbered system at all, all of the numbered items can easily be put within this system. After the closing of the {Fillmore West} 7/4/1971 I put BGP and the date (except the 288 and 289 which really shouldn't be numbered at all, but I would probably keep them even if they were bumped off the "official" set requirements). BG-34 could also be BG 10/28-30/66, as well as BG 34 or BG 10/28-30/66 (BG 34). BG 4/3/66 turns out to be a midweek

show with a hand bill for {Jefferson Airplane} and the Hedds at the Fillmore that falls between No. 2 and No. 3. This way you get the overall picture and can decide for yourself, but at least you're looking at complete info, so you can theoretically make at least a more informed decision. BGP 10/22-24/71 is a handbill for {Boz Scaggs}, The {Youngbloods} and {Donovan} at {Winterland}.

There are some BGP involvements that do not credit {Bill Graham Presents} on the item. Sometimes it only says it on the poster and omits it on the card or vice-versa. With some involvement's Bill did not want the BGP credit involved even though it was clearly BGP staff and facilities - sometimes for a benefit or charity event. This is a gray zone and bears further scrutiny and deliberations. I personally am trying to manicure my collection to at least some manageable proportion (for myself), so I just collect material with BGP credits.

I just call the early stuff "BG" for my own personal sense of order. Really it is all "{BGP}" material. For me, the BG heading only helps to delineate the parameters of my particular area of interest (the early or numbered set material). The BGP material is being newly produced at this very moment. There are BGP shows all over the place in the 70's and 80's. Anything goes as far as collecting. I personally have chosen to concentrate on the early material from Bill's 1st mime troupe show BG 5/21-22/65 to BG 3/15-16/73 (BG 288) (actually dated later than the BG 289 show which was 6/6-8/72). A lot of the 70's material just seems very minimal artistically. It is that artistic quality that masterpieces after 1971, and hey, nothing is preventing me from keeping a few I like, even if I'm not "collecting" these later BGP items. Probably the real cutoff point would be the BG 6/30-7/4/71 (BG 287); but you choose, OK? You could cut it off in 1/1/1983 when you broke your leg or in 7/23/79 when you stopped tripping. Or stopped having any money.

I have heard there are tribes of native Indians who don't have words for concepts like past, present and future. They just believe in one (quantum-like) time and don't utilize formal bells and whistles and calendars in the same way we Westerners do. They might utilize a bad famine or a death of an elder or a really notable event to do their dating or remembering. It works for them and what I'm saying with regard to the posters is, "what works for you" - go with it. I personally cut off my {Grateful Dead} collecting at {Pig Pen}'s last show. For me it makes sense. You design your own program. If you are going to cut it off at all, then what difference does it make? Reality is the greatest possible denominator. Draw your own lines in the sand. After all, why cut it at all? The {BGP} series hasn't really stopped. However, limits we do have to find, because of lines in the sand like: average life expectancy; how many hours there are in a day; the facts of working, eating, breathing, sleeping, children, spouses, etc. Yes, we do draw lines in the sand lest this column never end.

Your collection is a reflection of yourself. Once people get close to having a full set, you can start to see the individual personality of a collection come out. Most almost-complete collections look pretty much the same. Essentially, a number of people have the same items. However, it seems that there develops a semi-boring period where people often wait for a while for those last few items. This is often where people either branch out a bit, or phase out. The fun and art to it is to start putting together all those "other" posters and handbills, etc.

There are a bunch of midweek shows and other intriguing posters and cards to look for as well as tickets, programs, bumper stickers, uncut sheets, variants, production materials and signed pieces to name a few. You can find lots of stuff while waiting to get the last few hard-to-find ones. Some of the "off the beaten path" stuff is really interesting and after a while and a few finds, the desire to find the arcane and unusual can get to be a passion. It also seems people tend to gawk at your

oddities and pay more attention to them, than material they've seen a lot of times. A few collections out there are really getting "hairy" and development itself injects excitement into the process. The market for the "rest" of the early BG stuff will eventually find its levels of value; for now its still a total frontier. So go out and have some fun on the frontier. It's the spirit that launched it in the first place. One day in the future we'll know just about everything that is available and all the details - enjoy the unknown today.

Speaking of the future, are we creating it as we speak? Possible so, I'm afraid, and I'd like to have a word with some of you about just that. I know Gordon Gecko said, "Greed is Good" in that movie, "Wall Street", but really it isn't good for too many of us. Maybe one or two. You know who you are (probably not reading this!). You don't really care too much about posters and such. But you know some people, or were at some shows, and essentially decided this is time to "get paid"! You are going for the cash quotient now. You need the money and will spread the word around and try to get as much as possible. There is no future. Just this deal. Just the bucks for the bills or the trip to Disneyland or whatever. You'll never probably see the buyer again. OK. Sure, I mean this is allowable here in the USA. It is traditional and you probably deserve the money. I'm not saying there is anything wrong with this. I'm just saying that overall, in the long run, it ain't helping us to grow. This field, this area of collecting, is getting stifled. Smothered. Cut off from life-giving elements, like new collectors. Like a steady flow of money and any kind of stability.

We are like farmers out in the frontier. You have to rotate your crops or you weaken the soil. New collectors need to find cool stuff and get good deals to keep them interested. Sometimes you have to help other collectors. They also search their contacts and local area and bring stuff out to the market. They are like bees. We need these people to pollinate, to circulate stuff. They have to be cultivated. Don't be afraid to sell the

ordinary stuff off reasonably. If you are in doubt about something's value, make some faxes or letters or calls - THERE WILL BE LOTS MORE STUFF COMING DOWN THE PIKE!!

THE MORE YOU PASS ON, THE MORE SEEMS TO COME YOUR WAY. Pieces can float free till a collector that really appreciates them gets them. Don't punish someone for really being into a certain thing, like say Dan Hicks' posters. Give the collector a break for Chris sakes. There aren't that many people into collecting Dan Hicks. How about cultivating it so perhaps this person's collection or enthusiasm will grow and perhaps inspire someone else to get into it, or inspire attention. At least there will be a collector out there who will buy up the {Dan Hicks} stuff. Where else will you get a chance to liquidate that material? Support the eccentric compulsive mad collectors out there! Let the vibes grow.

No one person can preserve this heritage, it will take a whole contingent of us to keep it alive and evolving. I've seen a desperate bunch of grubbing the last few years. Everybody is trying to make every little item into the holy grail. Really high prices for stuff there is only very limited demand for; things that will come up again and again. Hustling like this {Woodstock} 2 mania; with 99 out of 100 people rushing to try to get huge dollars for their memorabilia and only a few actual people suddenly getting nostalgic enough to want Woodstock stuff. It got ugly. Then after the festival, it got funny with people calling me back up, now aware and trying to dump the stuff at much lower prices. Hey! We are still in the infancy stage. "Waah!" All of us need to consider the environment we are in. It's like we have our own little ozone hole. We may be like an old dying town with interest waning as the youth moves away and the bulk of us hit the 60's and older. People don't always collect so heavily when they get old. Some do, but some just try to enjoy the time and stay alive. We need younger players, we need progeny, we need people to sell our stuff to when we are older

and want to cash out. There may be no one there. Just like the American way of taking care of its old. Disposable culture.

The average material we see so much of should be allowed to drop down in value to where it becomes commensurate with the average person's means. People might enjoy that stuff. Now, not in 20 years - they might forget who "The {Great Society}" was. Sometimes the ephemera draws people in to find out all about the shows, the people and the music, etc. Let's keep the doors open. Let's not be scared. There is another dollar around the corner. This won't be the last deal ever.

JUST LET YOUR AVERAGE STUFF GO REASONABLY IF NOT CHEAPLY. THAT IS ALL. DO WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO WITH THOSE BETTER ITEMS. JUST DO YOUR BIT TO ENCOURAGE AT LEAST A BIT OF TRADE. WE AREN'T EXACTLY AT FULL TILT BOOGIE IN THE POSTER WORLD YET. SOME DOOMSAYERS ARE ALREADY SAYING IT'S A DYING AREA OF COLLECTIBLES. I SAY, NOT AT ALL AND PERHAPS A GREAT MANY OF US COULD DERIVE SOME INCOME and PLEASURE FROM THIS PASTIME - IF WE "SHAPE" OUR FUTURE JUST A BIT. AMEN.

[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 Jaceber Kastor]