

Rick Griffin

A Short Biography



with Michael Erlewine

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Notes

by

Michael Erlewine

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.

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RICK GRIFFIN: A Short Bio

By Michael Erlewine

Rick Griffin was born in Southern California of July 18, 1944. He grew up with a talent for drawing and a passion for surfing. Griffin was very much a part of the fast-growing surfing community which emerged in the late '50s, after the introduction of the lighter foam-based boards. Prior to this, surfboards, typically made of solid redwood, could weigh 250 lbs or more -- somewhat of a lethal weapon to the uninitiated. A favorite surfing spot for the young Griffin was the now famous Bluff Cove, in the Palos Verdes Estates



Rick Griffin

Another important influence for Griffin came through his engineer father, an amateur archeologist, who was interested in the Native American

traditions. Together they made many trips to archeological sites in the Southwest, where Griffin was exposed to the native American lore, artifacts, legends, not to mention the people themselves.

Griffin was already an drawing detailed surf pictures in high school and, immediately after graduating he took a job as a staff artist with Surfer Magazine working under noted surf photographer, John Severson. It was here that he developed the well-known character Murphy (Murph the Surf) for Surfer Magazine. It was also around this time that he did a brief stint at the Chouinard Art Institute in Los Angeles, where reportedly he was told by his instructor that "You cannot make art with a Rapidograph!" He also created album covers for surf music groups like the Bel Airs, the Challengers, and Dick Dale. He attended Cal Arts for a spell, as well.

When Griffin graduated from junior college in 1964, he had surfing plans for Australia, but while hitchhiking up to San Francisco, he was seriously hurt in a car accident, leaving him with permanent facial scars on the left side of his face. The accident also precipitated a re-evaluation of his life direction.

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A love of music all his life, Griffen also dreamed of being a performing musician, and for a time played a one-string zither with a community (tribe) of folk musicians who called themselves the "Jook Savages.

" It was around this time that he met his wife to be, Ida Pfeffele.

When the Jook Savages moved to SF in 1965, Griffin was soon to follow. He traveled with the Jook Savages to Virginia City, Nevada in 1966, where he met the Charlatans at their historical gig at the Red Dog Saloon. It was here that it is said he was introduced to hallucinogenics and the drug culture, in general. In 1966, he permanently moved to San Francisco. At this point, he still considered himself a cartoonist, but this was soon to change.

He created a poster for the Jook Savages for their appearance at the first anniversary of the Psychedelic Shop on Haight Street in January of 1967. It was well received. Griffin then undertook the now-famous Pow-wow Human Be-in poster for the event at Golden Gate Park in January of 1967. This poster was such a success that Griffin turned to poster making as his main occupation.



"Flying Eyeball" by Rick Griffin

Griffin produced posters for both the Avalon and the Fillmore venues. His Flying Eyeball poster (BG-105) is considered by many to be the quintessential poster of the psychedelic era. He also created some of his finest posters for Soundproof Productions, who inherited the Avalon Ballroom, after the Family Dog left.



AOXOMOXOA by Rick Griffin

Griffin also became partner in the first psychedelic poster publishing company, the Berkeley Bonaparte, with partners Bob Seideman and Louis Rappaport who started the company in the Fall of 1966. Griffin oversaw the production process, in great detail and produced many posters, such as "A Puff of Kief," "Can-A-Blis," "Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory," and a lot of pen & ink illustrations like "The Oracle," and "Mescalito."

Somewhere in 1968, when the poster scene was starting to wane, Griffin teamed up with Victor Moscoso and together they joined R. Crumb to work on Zap Comics. The underground comix movement became a big part of Griffin's life, from that time forward.

Griffin eventually moved back to Southern California, and settled in San Clemente, where he made his "Man From Utopia" comix and continued his work with Surfer Magazine. He underwent a religious conversion experience to Christianity in early 1970 and from that point on, Griffin's art took a different direction, which while interesting in itself, no longer contained the psychedelic signature that was the hallmark of his greatest work, posters like the Flying Eyeball and the Aoxomoxoa. In the late '70s, Griffin began a two-year project to illustrate the Gospel of John. More than 500,000 of the finished work have been printed.

During the decade of the '70s, aside from his work in California, Griffin traveled the world, surfing and hosting exhibitions of his work. In August 17, 1991, Griffin was killed while riding a motorcycle.