

ARTS

# Incredibly novel posters

by Trevor Campbell

Johathon Lipson of the Incredible Record Store on Yonge St. wants Toronto to know about the hippie posters created during San Francisco's Haight/Ashbury movement. So he has turned the walls of his packed shop into an art gallery, featuring the original poster art from the peace-loving sixties.

For those of us too young or out of touch with our recent past, this period spawned a sub-culture focused on the power of love, drugs and alternative lifestyles.

It was a time to tune out the political bullshit of the Vietnam War and tune into each other with open arms. The youth of those love inspired days decided to reject authority and institutions and focus instead on a new hip way of life.

A strong musical movement flowered in San Fran at the same time; featuring Hendrix, Cream, The Grateful Dead, and Country Joe, to name a few. Their music echoed the sentiment of the hippie style and gave a popular voice to the growing legion of disaffected youth. A growth which peaked during 1967, and saw the Filmour and the Avalon become the main music venues.

The posters used to advertise these performances possessed a flamboyance which differed from the dull conservatism of the box posters

which preceded them. The box, or boxing, posters relied on black and white text around black and white photos of boxers or performers frozen in unnatural poses.

While the new style of the sixties featured vibrant colours which either bled into each other for rainbow effects or ran side by side in a linear fashion like so many colored snakes intertwined in endless array.

**"The sixties spawned a sub-culture focused on the power of love, drugs and alternative lifestyles."**

The romantic ideals of the hippie generation needed romantic art to express itself; enter Art Nouveau as the precedent for sixties poster art.

Art Nouveau was a late nineteenth century movement against the then new age of mechanization.

The central figure of this new art was the artist/poet William Morris, the outspoken originator of painted wall paper, who felt that true art should be both beautiful and useful.

In other words: Art Nouveau equalled decorative, functional art. It featured text and repetitive colors and patterns which were life like, or abstract, or anything in between.

An example of the art of the new, that's now old, yet connected to six-

ties ideals which are experiencing a rebirth in the nineties, is Henry van de Velde's "Tropon" of 1899. Tropon is printed across the poster's top with a rectilinear maze patterned around it. Three, identical curvilinear forms resembling the rainbow patterns produced when gasoline mixes with water, create an abstraction open to interpretation.

Velde's sinuous lines and bold

colors reappear in the work of some of the more prominent poster artists of the sixties: Rick Griffin, Stanley Muse and Alton Kelly at times created pieces easily connected to Art Nouveau, while other work was influenced more by the dream sequences of Surrealism and the mystique of Eastern Spiritualism.

Griffin's "Human Be-In" with its psychedelic eyeballs and wild lettering illustrates a fusion of all three ideologies. A golden guru-figure with eyes closed emerges from a darkened rainbow background while hovering above the text concerning a future event.

At its best, Lipson's collection shows art freed from sixties conservatism. These posters possess the energy characteristic of work struggling against the norm. Compared to the posters which preceded them, they are a million times better.

However, their function outweighs their form. None of these posters possess the energy, creativity or skill evident in the poster-paintings of earlier artists. Where the romantic art of the last century came to life due to artistic talent, this collection seems to be the work of graphic designers concerned with advertising. Not to say that graphic artists can't create good art; (look at Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, a post-Impressionist painter whose focus on French night-life inspired great work), but when making art for promotion, the artist sometimes buckles under the weight of commercialism and relies too much on technique.

Consequently the posters at Incredible Records shows crafts people confined by the dogma of psychedelic art. Their style is limited and becomes repetitive due to the marginal development of their new posters.

Similar to preferring one colour and over-using it, Lipson's collection shows too much reliance on rainbows and colored snakes. Limiting these posters to the novelties which they began as.



Multi-colored snakes overlaid on Jimi Hendrix are featured in this poster by Lippmann and Rau. This poster which was shown in a 1969 Stuttgart exhibit on psychedelic art illustrates some of the work at Incredible records.

# Images transcend language

by Laura Martins

*Son of Ayash*  
directed by Raoul Trujillo  
Native Canadian Centre

One might think that a foreign language would be an insurmountable barrier when attempting to understand a play. This is true in most cases, but the current production of *Son of Ayash*, performed almost entirely in Cree, manages to transcend the language barrier.

This rather short play (it's a little over one hour) is based on a Cree-Ojibway legend of a father named Ayash, who, believing that his son wronged him, abandons the boy in the wilderness.

After suffering difficult physical trials, the son enters the spirit world where he defeats various monsters, and ultimately overcomes his fears by creating hope for himself in reality.

Director Raoul Trujillo alters Jim Morris' script by framing the legend

with a young man on his death bed listening to his mother recount the ancient legend's message of overcoming one's fears.

As a first time director, Trujillo succeeds in combining dance, music and vivid images to produce a powerful visual and visceral impression. Trujillo, who trained as a dancer, choreographer, and emphasizes expressive body movements to interpret the character's progression from being a fearful person to one who conquers hardships.

Ronceria's dancing and Marsha Coffey's rhythmic score combine to give the dream sequences a moody, atmospheric quality.

The costume design team, "Shadowland," creates a unique assortment of costumes inspired by native traditions, while at the same time using contemporary trends such as neon painted body suits.

The actors all offer vivid performances as the monsters. Gloria Miguel, who also doubles as Ayash,

delivers an imaginative performance as the repellant "Pus Man." Why the name? Well, he actually eats pus by cutting through his flesh. This sounds gruesome, but Trujillo presents it as a comedic scene. As the son declines the Pus Man's benign offer to "dine" with him, the self-eating cannibal generously tells him that "there is enough to go around."

Though the director prefers to compare this legend with Ulysses, my immediate thought was how the legend parallels *The Wizard of Oz*. Certain aspects such as the "yellow road," the repellant yet harmless "Pus Man," and the dream element made me think of Dorothy's journey. I suspect that my unfamiliarity with Cree myths had me relating the plot to other mythical stories from popular Western culture.

But however one compares the legend this production leaves you with magical visual images of a small piece of Cree mythology.

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