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If your parents know who Big Brother & The Holding Company, Jeff Beck Group, Sly & The Family Stone, Steppenwolf, and Jefferson Airplane are, don't let them kid you: They probably did drugs, and they most likely inhaled, unless it was a pill. Over the years, I've remembered the tough parts of the late '60s and early '70s, the Vietnam War and how the protest movement tore a generation apart, but until last Friday night, I had forgotten the fun parts.

Until 1970, we really did think peace and love could change the world, and the posters in *Feeli n' Groovy: Rock & Roll Graphics 1966-1970* at Quad City Arts are the images serving as the banners of that hope. This show contains some of the most powerful images from that time, guaranteed to evoke a reaction from the viewer.

The show's timeframe begins with 1966, which is about when the *New York Times* began to have a moral awakening about the Vietnam War. Not that morality was ever a driving force in American politics, but how many Buddhist monks burning themselves to death on the steps of the American Embassy in Saigon could the *Times* ignore? The show ends in 1970, because May 4 of that year was when the ideals of the time came face-to-face with a volley of bullets on a Midwestern college campus. A hot-lead reality put a stop to peace and love conquering all, and many of us realized that democracy, without minority-rights protection, is nothing more than a way to legitimize a lynch mob.

Feelin' Groovy documents the San Francisco music scene when free love was revolutionary, and energy and excitement spread throughout the country. The selection of posters and handbills resurrects memories of a generation that bloomed in innocence and then lost that idealism.

Music, politics, religion, and art were one to the '60s generation, and you can't separate them. It was all about leaving your parents' values and undertaking an awakening that was sometimes called "consciousness-raising."

The music was uncontrolled by record companies and played on low-power FM radio stations

affectionately called “underground radio.” Remembering the musical groups whose songs were played on underground radio is a worthwhile part of this show.

You will see three distinctive styles of graphic arts in this show: Art Nouveau-inspired handbills, Aubrey Beardsley-inspired bills, and photo-posterization silk-screened handbills, all tacked on community bulletin boards and urban telephone and lighting poles (when light poles were made of wood instead of aluminum or concrete).

The Velvet Underground poster is an example of the style borrowing heavily from Aubrey Beardsley. The gold border and the flower designs on the woman’s bell-bottom pants echo the winding-line motifs that recur in Beardsley’s work, but without that artist’s dark eroticism.

One handbill advertising Jefferson Airplane and The Butterfield Blues Band has a feminine form moving, as if to music. This and the flowing lettering draw some inspiration from Beardsley’s pen-and-ink drawings, and the whole poster sways. And although the female form is nude, it is in no way erotic; free love of the ’60s was more about a union of men and women, not about men exploiting women – until, of course, many men started showing up where they thought they could score some sex cheaply or for free.

Another poster advertising Big Brother & The Holding Company, Janis Joplin’s group, is lifted exactly from an Art Nouveau poster, showing the profile of a woman with stylized ribbons of hair. (This same image found its way onto the label of cigarette rolling papers.) The organic vines of hair become the lettering used for the handbill and suggest the smoke of whatever was being smoked. Another interesting concept in this poster is that dancing to the Jim Kweskin Jug Band gets a larger billing than Big Brother.

Finally, there are a couple of handbills with posterized-photo images: one of Grace Slick, the lead vocalist for the Jefferson Airplane, and one of man who looks like a Civil War soldier, advertising Big Brother & The Holding Company. At the time, artists were beginning to experiment with photo emulsions applied to silk screens. The obtainable resolution is called posterization, in which only gross darks and lights are reproduced. This causes a stark black-and-white image, more like a drawing than a photo, but with the accurate representation of a photograph, which in many respects stands in contrast to the touchy-feely, free-love anthem of the mid-’60s. These images are not as whimsical, and foretell a growing discontent for the slow pace of social change.

For folks who remember the era, *Feelin’ Groovy* will be a fantastic memory-refresher. And for those who never lived through the era, it’s a great opportunity to get a glimpse of what this generation thought it could accomplish before the establishment crushed its idealism. This show documents the best of times for my generation, and I had forgotten just how good and hopeful they were.

Feelin’ Groovy: Rock & Roll Graphics 1966-1970 *is on display at Quad City Arts (in The District of Rock Island) through October 5.*