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# music

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## Guru of Nostalgia

**O**n a recent Sunday afternoon, the vinyl bins in the basement of Berkeley's Rasputin Music were sparsely populated, but Oakley resident Stephen Braitman is a regular fixture. He's scouring the 20th-century classical section for any post-WWII American music — one of his favorite genres — on obscure labels. No luck today.

Braitman has obsessed over records since the 1960s. He owns most of the albums displayed on Rasputin's walls: DOA's *Bloodied But Unbowed*, Sonic Youth's *EVOL*, Sham 69's *The Adventures of Hershman Boys*, The Jam's *Setting Sons*, New York Dolls' *Too Much Too Soon*. And the list goes on and on. He claims to have amassed a collection of 35,000 45s, LPs, ten-inches, and CDs — everything from '60s psych and garage to punk, indie rock, blues, and classical.

Now, Braitman, a music analyst for Gracenote and a columnist for the record magazine *Goldmine*, has turned his obsession into a business (Music Appraisals.com) appraising records, CDs, posters, fliers, handbills, and other music memorabilia. "There's a lot of valuable stuff out there," he says. "It's become a real big industry."

Several years ago, Braitman's wife was studying to become a real-estate appraiser. That's when he noticed that music memorabilia seemed to lack any formal appraisal standards. Today, he says he's the only music appraiser in the country who follows the certification principles of the Uniform Standards of Professional Appraisal Practice, used for estate-planning, insurance, tax, and investment purposes. He's also a candidate member of the American Society of Appraisers. He has had clients in Canada, Texas, and North Carolina, and has handled individual records worth \$20,000 and assessed half-million-dollar collections.

Music collecting has gotten huge in recent years. According to a 2005 article in *Rolling Stone*, the rock memorabilia market is "exploding," with major auction houses like Sotheby's and Christie's in on the game. But while Beatles or Elvis stuff may fetch hundreds of thousands of dollars, collectors also are looking for lower-profile items, such as '70s punk fliers or Fillmore posters. Jacques van Gool, president of Houston online music auctioneer Backstage Auctions, says the Internet has fueled the craze. "Memorabilia has become a hundred times more accessible," he notes by phone. "Prior to that, if you wanted to have anything above and beyond an ordinary T-shirt or



Crate-digger:  
Braitman.

poster, you had to physically go out of your own way to get it."

Local retailers have witnessed the phenomenon, too. Dennis King, owner of Berkeley's D. King Gallery, says the trade in modern posters is up tremendously thanks to a growing underground poster-art movement over the last two decades. And in the past two months, Paul Bradshaw, co-owner of El Cerrito record store Mod Lang, says he's sold an Alice Cooper promo sticker for \$30, a 1973 unused Rolling Stones guest pass for \$100, a Bruce Springsteen 1981 ticket stub for \$140, a John Fogerty press bio (without photo) for \$20, and a Glenn Frey postcard sent by his record label advertising an appearance on *Miami Vice* for \$12. "You have this baby-boomer generation of 45 and upwards who have a lot of expendable income, and a way for them to reconnect with their misbegotten youth is to collect rock memorabilia," he says.

As some of these items gain in value, the need for formal appraisals will likely increase. The Pension Protection Act of 2006 now requires that appraisers demonstrate proper licensing or equivalent training. King, however, says the requirements don't ensure niche expertise. "If someone

needs to get something appraised for insurance, they need to be extremely careful that they deal with an expert in that kind of music-memorabilia collecting," he says.

The frenzy sometimes breeds misconceptions among amateurs who think they have something valuable. That's one reason Braitman started his blog, Needle-Screech.com, a couple months ago. One week, three separate people claimed to have a rare Woodstock contract signed by the Who. "I had to explain: No, this was a reprinted piece of paper that was inserted in the album," he says, chuckling.

So before you start ripping fliers off telephone poles or looking for treasure in the dollar bins, consider that most music memorabilia won't be valuable — which van Gool defines as at least ten times its original worth — until it's at least twenty years old. Even then, bands that were one-hit wonders or only had a couple good albums may not be worth squat. Occasionally you could get lucky. Bradshaw says someone offered him \$4,000 for a Sex Pistols poster in his personal collection, but he couldn't part with it. "It's not a lucrative business," he laughs. "Because you have to hang onto everything for 25 years." — Kathleen Richards