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The Forgotten Legacy Of Classic 'Rock 'N' Roll Billboards Of The Sunset Strip'

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Banner for Robert Landau's Rock 'N' Roll Billboards exhibit at West Hollywood Library (Photo by Britt Bickel)

Reporting **Britt Bickel**

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Robert Landau, Rock 'N' Roll Billboards Of The Sunset Strip

Long before the Internet and social media became the main outlet artists used to get the word out about new music to their fans, it was billboards that reigned king.

[Photos: The Rock 'N' Roll Billboards Of The Sunset Strip]

Throughout the '60s, '70s and into the '80s, Los Angeles' prominent music hot spot along the Sunset Strip was dominated by these elaborately designed billboards that artists used to tease a

new album or tour. It's a medium that has been long forgotten in the digital age, but a new photo exhibit and book has brought this lost art form back to the forefront.



Photographer Robert Landau wit his book 'Rock 'N' Roll Billboards of the Sunset Strip' Fortunately for music lovers, local photographer **Robert Landau** captured these iconic billboards in an extensive photo collection during this bustling era of rock 'n' roll. He preserved his collection of Kodachromes in a new photo book capturing the impact of the **Rock 'N' Roll Billboards Of The Sunset Strip**.

To celebrate this important era of music and legacy of these long-forgotten billboards, the city of West Hollywood's Arts and Cultural



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Affairs Commission presents a photo exhibit of Robert's life-long work displayed throughout the West Hollywood Library. The exhibit's grand opening took place on Tuesday with Robert taking guests back to a time when rock was the most important music recorded in a brief presentation of his work.

Having grown up along the strip, Robert explained to guests that he was fascinated with the hand-painted masterpieces that towered over the street and began photographing this emerging music movement as a teen. In the mid '60s, rock billboards surged as the main marketing tool from record labels to promote an artists' new album or tour.

Robert explains that even though these billboards were costly and only reached a small segment of the population, record companies felt like it was the "right segment" to market new music to.

Artists too embraced billboards over TV ads as a way to promote music because they acted as an extension of their album cover art and created a visual energy for the music.

"Billboards, which looked a lot like the posters we were already tacking up on our walls, were a cool way to let everyone know a new record had been released," Robert said.

Once a music billboard was erected, Robert explains that the first thing an artist would do once they got to L.A. for a show was to drive by and see their billboard.

"In the stages of canonization that rock acts went through from unknown artists to major rock and roll stars can now rank right up there with seeing your face on the cover of Rolling Stone," he said. "The Sunset Strip billboard had achieved its own cache."

He notes that some artists who've reached global status like The Beatles, Pink Floyd and The Rolling Stones could simply just have a billboard with an image without any written copy because they were so well known.

By the mid '70s, the golden age of the music billboard was booming and both artists and record companies jumped at the chance to create a stunning visual message that represented SoCal's music culture.

"California had become the center of the rock and roll recording universe, and the California sound was getting global attention with hit-making groups like The Eagles," said Robert. "Talented local designers and photographers...produced billboards that perfectly captured the look and the feel of this locale."

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As the competition for album sales heated up, so did the complexity of billboards. Artists employed new techniques and visual effects to make their message stand out from the rest. These billboards not only promoted the music, but conveyed a group's specific image.

After the birth of the MTV generation and shift to music videos, the music billboard lost much of its popularity and impact with the current culture. Though the reign of music billboards has long been over, its legacy during the turbulent '60s and '70s will live on through Robert's work.

For those who'd like to relive the magic and nostalgia of these forgotten billboards, Robert Landau himself will be doing an artist talk on Saturday, August 10th at a 5 p.m. at the West Hollywood Library. Robert's exhibit will be on display through mid-October in the West Hollywood Library during regular hours.

For more information on Rock 'N' Roll Billboards Of The Sunset Strip exhibit and to RSVP to the artist talk with Robert Landau, visit www.weho.org/arts or call 323-848-6377.



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