

'Don't you forget about me'

■ Bouncy '80s music and parachute pants pop back up in radio stations, stores and Web sites.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CHICAGO — When Jay Schwartz and his brother started a vintage clothing and memorabilia shop eight years ago, retro meant '60s and '70s.

Nowadays, though, Schwartz's customers also are looking for parachute pants and Cyndi Lauper trading cards straight out of the '80s.

As much as those who lived through the decade might like to forget it, the '80s are awesome again, with music, fashion and television celebrating the Era of Excess.

"What's really selling for us is images of the '80s," Schwartz said. "Garbage Pail Kids are huge. 'The A-Team' is huge. Pee Wee Herman is huge."

Fashion designers have added leg warmers and ruffled skirts to their 2001 collections. Cable TV is rerunning "classics" such as "The Facts of Life" and "The A-Team." And a growing number of radio stations are switching to all-'80s formats of Billy Idol, Duran Duran, Boy George and the like.

It's all an attempt to appeal to a lucrative market — young professionals who wax nostalgic about their teen years and current teens crazy about anything retro.

Lisa Johnson, manager of The '80s Server, a Web site devoted to the decade, established her site in Overland Park, Kan., in 1995. She sensed a movement away from the depressing look and sound of "grunge" music and toward happier, bouncier times — the '80s.

She figured people in their late-20s and -30s would visit but was surprised by the influx of teen-agers too young to remember much of the decade in which they were born.

Jonathan Henningson of Tacoma, Wash., who was just 7 when the '80s ended, said T-shirts featuring "He-Man" cartoon characters are a cool fashion statement among his friends.

On Monday, the 17-year-old stopped by Schwartz's store, Strange Cargo, to pick up a pack of Garbage Pail Kids trading cards. The cards are gross-out parodies of Cabbage Patch Kids he collected as a child.

"Man, I had a stack of these about that big," he said, opening his hands wide and grinning.

Schwartz's customers also snatch up '80s heavy metal T-shirts as fast as he can put them on the rack.

The catwalks at this fall's Fashion Week in London and New York, a showcase for top designers, had a smattering of '80s-style pleated skirts and one-shoulder tops.

"We had a company come to us, and they wanted to have us sell their parachute pants on our site," said The '80s Server's Johnson, laughing at the memory of the noisy, zipper-bedecked nylon pants.

"I don't want to be responsible for bringing back that trend," she said.

Last week, Chicago's WXCD-FM switched from classic rock to '80s music, the second station in the area to try the format. Radio stations in places such as St. Louis and San Francisco have done the same.

"There was a tremendous amount of music that was just not getting played on the radio," said Bill Gamble, WXCD's program director.

"We'll play Bon Jovi, and we'll play Madonna, and we'll play Prince."

The taste for the '80s, though, may be short-lived.

Cable television has made nostalgia instantaneous, said Robert Thompson, a professor of media and popular culture at Syracuse University in New York.

He said TV shows from the '80s never really stopped being shown, and radio stations started doing '80s blocks almost as soon as the decade ended.

"The great thing about nostalgia, it was like going up in the attic and opening a box that hasn't been opened in 20 years," Thompson said.

"Now it's as if the box never went up to the attic."

Bar serves blues for nearly 27 years

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sounds. They get up occasionally to use the bathroom, which is next to the stage.

Because of the close proximity, those walking to the bathroom must be cautious not to get elbowed in the head by the stand-up bass player.

Despite the small crowd, the band is lively and colorful.

At one point, the bass player lies down on his back with his instrument while continuing to play.

At another point, the lead guitarist walks off the stage and out into the crowd while playing a guitar solo.

He walks up to the bar at the front of the room.

Those seated at the front turn and smile as the guitarist plays directly to them.

He makes it as far as the front door; then he turns around and returns to the stage.

The band takes a break, and they walk around the room shaking people's hands and handing out tour schedules.

The small Thursday night crowd is not an example of a typical evening at the Zoo Bar. The bar has been known to fill to its maximum capacity many weekend and week nights.

But the slow night does illustrate the intimacy and vibe that has made the Zoo Bar a mainstay for live music the past 27 years.

It is this intimacy that Larry Boehmer had in mind when he bought the bar more than 20 years ago.

Boehmer was a graduate student at UNL when he worked and managed the Zoo Bar in the 1970s.

During this time, the bar's goal was to attract college students.

While managing the bar, Boehmer began to book some live music acts to come in and play. The bar soon became a nightly music venue.

The success of the bar altered Boehmer's dream to go to New York and pursue a career as a painter.

In 1977, he bought the bar and made it into what has been a mainstay for blues music ever since.

Boehmer owned the bar up until this

past fall, when he sold it to his two sons, Tim and Jeff, and manager of 14 years, Pete Watters.

In explaining how the bar got started, Boehmer doesn't describe a plan or dream to bring nationally acclaimed blues music to Lincoln.

"It just happened," Boehmer said from his new home in Eureka Springs, Ark. "My idea was to run a bar with live blues. I never anticipated I would stay that long."

Boehmer said he grew up listening to the blues on the radio and got hooked on the sound.

"It was a strong sound that I couldn't get away from," he said.

During that time, he said, Lincoln didn't have any other blues bars.

Boehmer said it is difficult to specify some of the most memorable acts that have been at his bar through the years because during his ownership, the bar held more than 10,000 shows.

He mentioned Buddy Guy, Albert Collins, Charlie Musselwhite, Buddy Miles and Robert Cray as notable performers who have played in the bar.

Boehmer handled the booking at the Zoo Bar the entire time he owned it. Despite selling the bar to his sons and Watters, he still handles some of the booking from his office in Arkansas.

He described the booking as touch and go during the past 25 years, but said he has never had a problem filling the stage six nights a week.

He said over time he was able to "pick and choose" what acts came into the Zoo Bar. He never had to search out bands to come and play.

One limitation he has in booking is the size of the venue. No more than 125 patrons are allowed in the bar, according to fire codes.

It's difficult to get some big names because not enough money can be collected at the door to afford them, Boehmer said.

But this still hasn't kept some big acts away.

Boehmer said some big names have agreed to a pay cut just to be able to play in the Zoo Bar.

Boehmer also mentioned that the bar brings in more than blues musicians. The bar has featured everything from rockabilly to blues to reggae.

"It is small, intimate and has a vibe that has never been duplicated in other places I have been, even though it's just a little dump."

Sue Maryott
Nebraska ETV producer

The diverse music has led to a diverse clientele in the bar.

Boehmer said the age and socioeconomic makeup of the bar is mixed.

He said patrons range from college students to middle-age people, professors to blue-collar workers.

"The music is the common thread for all these people," he said.

Sue Maryott, Nebraska ETV producer, played an influential role in the station's broadcasting four shows a year from the Zoo Bar.

She became a Zoo Bar regular about six years ago when she moved from Omaha to Lincoln.

She was a long-time blues fan and was astonished at what Boehmer had going at the Zoo Bar.

She agreed that what has enabled the bar to last 27 years is the music and close-knit atmosphere.

"It is small, intimate and has a vibe that has never been duplicated in other places I have been, even though it's just a little dump" she said.

"When bands come to the Zoo Bar, they know they will get to interact with the crowd," she said. "Bands never leave immediately when they are done performing like at some other music venues."

She said she is amazed at how long the bar has been around and how it is known on a national level.

"In the Zoo Bar, Lincoln has something that is known across the country," she said.

She mentioned a time she was in New Orleans for a music festival. She said she wore a Zoo Bar T-shirt and was stopped by 10 different people asking her if she had actually been to the bar.

Randall Snyder, a UNL professor of theory/composition in the school of music, played with several jazz bands at the Zoo Bar in the 1970s and also was a patron for

many years.

Being a Chicago native, he has been to many blues bars in his home city, but he said the Zoo Bar rates up there with all of them.

"It is certainly a luxury and convenience to hear the same music in Lincoln as you would in a big city bar," he said. "You don't get any better than the people they've had play there over the years."

He described the Zoo Bar as being a mirror image to CBGBs, a famous bar in New York known for its live music.

Tim Boehmer, who recently became a part owner in the bar, got a taste of the bar's notoriety, when the Zoo Bar celebrated its 25th anniversary two years ago.

He said all the guests were asked to sign a poster for the event.

He was amazed that people from as far as England and Australia had come to attend the event.

Episodes such as the anniversary celebration may have influenced his decision to take over the bar, he said.

As a child, Tim Boehmer never would have wanted to take over his dad's business, he said.

"I saw dad struggle with it for years, and, as a kid, I never wanted to do that," he said.

But he said he eventually developed a love for the bar and the blues.

Earlier this year, Tim Boehmer, his brother, Jeff and Watters began to discuss the possibility of buying the bar from Larry Boehmer a few years down the road, but the idea snowballed quickly.

In running the bar, Tim Boehmer hopes to maintain the level of success his father developed during the past 27 years.

"I hope to see it around another 27 years," he said.

"We had some big shoes to fill, but we are doing our best."

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