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Reliving the '80s: Nostalgic implementation of the '80s pop music in the media

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RELIVING THE '80S: NOSTALGIC IMPLEMENTATION
OF THE '80S POP MUSIC IN THE MEDIA

by

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Bachelor of Journalism
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1998

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

**Master of Arts Degree in Communication Studies
Hank Greenspun School of Journalism and Media Studies
Greenspun College of Urban Affairs**

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ABSTRACT

**Reliving the '80s: Nostalgic Implementation
of the '80s Pop Music in the Media**

by

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The major focus of this thesis is the examination of the ways in which the American television, radio, and the music industry in particular are attempting to cater to the interests and demands of the resurgence of the 1980s popular music in the current decade.

The current popularity of the 1980s pop music not only reflects the demographics of the audience but also the producers and executives in the media, including television, radio stations, and record companies. The phenomenon is one in which the media professionals and audience engage and re-emerge themselves in the nostalgia of their generation.

To examine the re-emergence of the '80s pop music in the media today, a taxonomy on the notable '80s music-related media contents will be developed. This taxonomy helps illustrate how the various culture industries' increasingly systematic attempts to revive the 1980s in the current decade affect the development, production, marketing, and the aesthetic form of the 1980s pop music.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the decade of 1980s, there were Blondie, Culture Club, and Duran Duran, leading the new wave movement with electronic sounds and pop hooks. In the stadiums, Foreigner, Van Halen, and Journey forged a combination of power chords and sweet melodies that would be known as arena rock. For those with dancing fever, “King of Pop” Michael Jackson and “Material Girl” Madonna got them into the groove. Deep in the heart of the inner cities, Run DMC and Beastie Boys combined fast-talking and slamming beats to create a new sound that would be called rap music. Meanwhile, back in the suburbs, the malls were filled with the sounds of everything from the danceable teen pop of Debbie Gibson and Tiffany to the pop-flavored heavy metal of Def Leppard and Bon Jovi. Outside the mainstream, Depeche Mode and The Cure brought an artsy, moody quality to pop, thereby opening the door for the rise of indie rock. Now in 2006, the times have changed. We all know the good old days of the 1980s are long gone... Or are they really?

Purpose of the Study

Any culture can be defined by its nostalgia. However, there is little scholarly work on nostalgia as a cultural commodity as exemplified in the re-emergence of the 1980s pop music. As such, this work will fill a significant gap in the existing literature, addressing

pop music culture from a nostalgic paradigm and its role within the media, its promotion, and distribution.

The focus of this thesis is the examination of the ways in which the American television, radio, and the music industry in particular are attempting to cater to the interests and demands of that generation who find the music of the 1980s in the current decade interesting. This research also deals with the proliferation of popular music nostalgia in the United States and the discussion on the retrograde tendencies in the history of popular culture for each generation. The condition of this “retro” trend is an endless lifestyle loop of repeating, retrieving, rewinding, recycling, reciting, redesigning, and reprocessing of culture from one generation to another (Plasketes, 2005).

The audience and producers who grew up during the 1980s remember the fashions, events, personalities, and icons of the decade. Nothing evokes lost youth so vividly as the music of our teenage years because the music people grow up listening to defines them and their musical interests. Those who grew up during the ‘80s relish all of those sometimes-hazy memories imprinted upon them from TV shows, movies, arcade games, current events, and just the general feel of things back then. Michael Hirschorn, VH1 programming vice president and executive producer of “I Love the ‘80s,” says that there is a point where we stop caring about new music and start caring about things from a point in our youth. “We’re most impressionable when we’re 12 to 24 years old, so that what we wore, what we watched, what we listened to has greater import at the time, when you had yet to be distracted by things like jobs and families,” Hirschorn says (as cited in Breznican, 2005, p. 1D).

Nostalgia is recurring and reusable commodity in popular music, and the '80s popular music is an example of this. Historically, companies marketing consumer products seem to have enthusiastically embraced the burgeoning influence of nostalgia. As a result, there has been a proliferation in the use of popular culture from the past aimed at target segments (Holbrook & Schindler, 2003b).

Juke (2002) writes that in the '70s we saw the initial rise of the "oldies" radio format, seemingly creating an unstoppable groundswell of interest in everything '50s music. The movies of the '70s were filled with the retro style of the '50s, such as *American Graffiti* (1973), *The Buddy Holly Story* (1978), and *Grease* (1978). In music, there was an incredible explosion of the '50s cover bands on the local and national scenes (led by television darlings Sha-Na-Na), along with attendant use of the '50s style music in radio and TV commercials. In the 1980s, along with the then popular new wave bands (e.g. Duran Duran, Culture Club, and Human League) that recaptured the spirit and success of "British Invasion" back in the 1960s, we experienced a major '60s rehash in film, spurred on by films like *The Wanderers* (1979), *Eddie and the Cruisers* (1983), and *The Big Chill* (1983), which helped to re-popularize Motown and soul music, along with a related explosion in the marketability of bands like The Doors, and more cover band activity and advertising use of the '60s music. By the time the '90s arrived, along with the high profile and huge record sales attained by R&B, hip-hop, grunge, and alternative artists, we also saw a major trend towards the retro '70s music and culture. There were "classic rock" radio formats, the second "disco explosion" with movies like *Boogie Nights* (1997), and the proliferation of networks such as VH1, with the then '70s focus on "Behind the Music." The '90s also saw the jam band phenomenon—which could be argued as

homage to the '70s psychedelic music—the return of punk movement, and such movies and TV shows as *The Brady Bunch* (1995) and “That ‘70s Show.” In addition, the film *Grease* (1978) enjoyed a renaissance in the late ‘90s, some 20 years after its initial release. The reunions of the ‘70s bands, such as Kiss, Eagles, and Fleetwood Mac, were also big news in that decade.

Thus, it should not be surprising that the music of the 1980s has begun to reappear into the public consciousness lately. The decade defined by big hair, pompous sound, and cheesy synthesizers is back. The media are in the center of this retro fever, and we are seeing more and more of it. The ‘80s tunes are turning up on TV, commercials, and on the airwaves as they attain classic status.

Justification for the Study

The current popularity of the 1980s music not only reflects the demographics of the audience but also the producers and executives in the media, including television, radio stations, and record companies. The phenomenon is one in which the media professionals and audience wrap themselves in the nostalgia of their generation—the re-establishment of youth.

But, why is this almost sudden “comeback” happening right now after such a lengthy break? Cook (2003) contends, “For all its rebellious posturing, pop music is an intrinsically conservative affair that always harks back to a nostalgically imagined past” (p. 98). He writes that although the 1980s are habitually mocked as the decade that taste forgot, they were inarguably the golden age of pop. But when does the pop culture of an era go from out-of-fashion to retro-cool? Producers say that it is when the children of the

era grow up and settle down (Breznican, 2005). Robert Thomson also explains that nostalgia for the '80s comes as no surprise to pop culture experts. He says, "There is usually a two-decade break between a TV show and the resurrection of its stars. Over the next 10 years, the '80s stuff will be all over the place" (as cited in Cosgrove, 2002, p. 16). Poniewozik (2004) notes that those remember the past are doomed to repeat themselves and Generation X, the generation that grew up with '80s pop culture, "remembers its tackiest, most disposable icons the most fondly of all" (p. 66).

Whitcomb (1973), in his pop music reference book, *After the Ball*, documents the effects of the so-called "20-year rule," reaching back into the 19th Century, the dawn of what we now call popular music. "We digest culture in 20-year cycles," says Rob Tannenbaum, senior reviews editor for the music monthly *Blender* (as cited in Leopold, 2000, para. 6). He says that using this cycle is a marketing device, which helps tap into our good feelings about childhood when we have disposable income. He says, "When you're 30 or 35, you want to be reminded what it was like when you were 10 or 15" (para. 6). These examples lead us to some clues as to why the 20-year cycle works. Every 20 years or so, a generation collectively comes to terms with adulthood, reassesses itself, its culture and achievements, and pines for the good old days. At the same time, a younger generation may be able to discover the music of 20 years past.

Popular music (or pop music) was chosen as the central subject of this thesis over other popular culture forms because popular music is important to people in their everyday lives, and according to some, it is young people's central cultural interest (Willis, 1990). Lewis (1992) says that music is symbolic communication and can easily evoke a whole time and place, distant feelings and emotions, and memories of where we

were and with whom. Music can also be a theme, a rallying cry, a protest around which we gather to speak out against social injustice. “It can be a badge of identity—a means of showing others (and ourselves) to what cultural group or groups we belong” (p. 135).

Popular music still chronicles the feelings and life experiences of large sections of young people, providing a medium through which an affective grounded aesthetic can be developed to enable personal and private feelings to be expressed and shared. Willis (1990) claims, “Pop songs provide young listeners with a set of public discourses which both play back to people, their own situations and experiences, and provide a means of interpreting those experiences” (p. 69). He explains that young people use song narratives to make sense of their everyday conditions of existence, and particularly the experience of growing up.

A Brief Look at the ‘80s Music in the Media Today

The ‘80s pop music is becoming a force in its own right, and the numbers prove the glorious return of the decade. The retro tendencies can be clearly seen in the media presentation, specifically on TV, radio, and in the music industry. For instance, VH1’s ratings jumped more than 100% among 18 to 49-year-old viewers since adding the programs related to the 1980s music and culture. “The key to the channel’s success is capturing the tone of Gen X nostalgia, at once snide and affectionate” (Poniewozik, 2004, p. 66). Meanwhile, more and more radio stations seek ratings hits with the 1980s revival. For instance, KVMX-FM, a Portland, Oregon station known as Mix 107.5, switched in June 2000, to a pure ‘80s format from a mix of rock oldies and current tunes. It surprised the radio industry by jumping to number one in all major demographics in its market

from the 16th place, according to the summer Arbitron ratings (Ho, 2000). In the music industry, the album entitled *Billboard # 1s - The '80s*, has become one of the most successful pop music compilation discs in a long time. Rhino/Warner Strategic Marketing (WSM) executive VP Kevin Gore says that the Billboard-branded line with the music from the 1980s is healthy and continues to sell and this particular title is the one that the company hopes will stimulate the series (Whitmire, 2004). More and more artists from the decade are either making new records or touring, and the retro line-up artists are seeing chart success as well. They are not playing little local clubs, but huge venues such as Wembley Arena and profiting from this retro fever. "It's a fantastic opportunity to play the big arenas again," says Howard Jones, a British singer-songwriter from the '80s (as cited in Cook, 2003, p. 99).

The success defined by numbers is not the only thing that intrigues us. What equally interests us is that nostalgic phenomena usually recur as a 20-year cycle. Nonetheless, the comeback of the '80s music is one thing, and how the media and industries cater to the interests of people is yet another story. What makes the '80s nostalgic may have little to do with the '80s revival in which we currently find our culture immersed. Again, the thesis will illustrate the media's implementation of the '80s pop music that brings about the success of the industries as well as the interest of the public.

How the Thesis is Structured

The thesis will be a critical analysis of specific entertainment texts, including television, radio, and the music industry products. The literature review examines the basics of nostalgia—its meaning, origin, and nature—its place and relationship with

popular culture, and how nostalgia has historically played out in pop culture. Then, the thesis will address the factors that turned the entertainment industries' attentions to the 1980s music scene and illustrate how the current economic and institutional changes—including increased media conglomeration, sense of nostalgia, and the growing interest in global markets and the rise of digital technologies—shape the significant aesthetic traits of the 1980s-oriented popular music.

The breakdown of the thesis is as follows; the first chapter covers the purpose, background, and justification of the study; the second chapter will be a review of literature on nostalgia in pop culture and music as well as an historical overview of pop culture nostalgia in the 1970s; the third, the fourth, and the fifth chapter will be a critical review of specific entertainment texts in a categorical order—TV, radio, and the music industry, respectively. The primary sources used are magazine interviews with the media executives producing the '80s-related programs and products, popular journal articles—such as *Billboard*, *Time*, and *USA Today*—including quotes and statements from the media personnel and audience, news sources on the Internet, and TV and radio programs' Web sites (such as television channel VH1 and Las Vegas based radio station, Star 102.7 FM). The sixth chapter is conclusion and discussion.

Definition of Terms

The concept of the '80s or 1980s is defined as the decade from the year of 1980 through the year of 1989. The '80s popular music or the '80s pop music, similarly, describes the music produced during that decade. The '80s artists refer to the artists whose highest level of success came during the decade of 1980s. For instance, even

though Michael Jackson has been around for four decades in the popular music scene (from the 1970s to 2000s), he is often defined as the '80s pop artist because of his unprecedented success in the 1980s, with most of his hit songs and albums making the waves during that period. The Generation X refers to those who are now in their 30s and 40s, have first-hand experiences of popular culture of the 1980s and grew up listening to the music of the '80s in their youth when it was first available. According to Schewe, Meredith, and Noble (2000), they were born between 1966 and 1976, and currently 41,119,000 people belong to this generation and represent 21.9% of the adult population.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

What is Nostalgia?

Perhaps it is no coincidence that at a time when people are increasingly becoming uncertain and anxious about the future, the media are encouraging them to return to their past. In the last three decades of the 20th Century, nostalgia was commodified and aestheticized in American culture as perhaps never before (Grainge, 2000). One may posit a variety of factors contributing to this emergent retro fascination, including diversifying markets for memory, the growth of the heritage industry, the political aesthetic of Reaganism, the demographic size of a baby boom generation entering middle age and the attendant selling of the “boomer” past, the proliferation of technologies of time-shifting and digital reproduction, and a representational economy of recycling and pastiche. These factors all helped develop nostalgia as a cultural style, a consumable mode as much as it can be said to be an experienced mood.

Nostalgia is generally known as an individual’s longing for the past, a yearning for yesterday (Holbrook, 1993). Defined by Holbrook and Schindler (1991), nostalgia is generally considered to be “a preference toward objects that were more common when one was younger” (p. 330). As might be expected, the emergent body of literature on nostalgia has offered a number of propositions and findings regarding the nature of the nostalgic experience. Nostalgic thoughts may be evoked by a number of different

sources, including music, movies, family members, and special events (Holak & Havlena, 1992). Davis (1979) argues that nostalgic thoughts and talk about the past are, by definition, always infused with imputations of past beauty, pleasure, joy, satisfaction, goodness, happiness, love, and the like, in sum, any or several of the positive affects of being. He writes, “Nostalgic experiences help the individual to maintain the sense of continuity in identity always threatened by life cycle changes” (p. 52). It is intriguing to note that Lowenthal (1989) characterizes nostalgia in similar terms by saying, “Nostalgia can also shore up self-esteem, reminding us that however sad our present lot we were once happy and worthwhile. Nostalgia is memory with the pain removed.” (p. 8).

Theoretically, nostalgia is understood as a socio-cultural response to forms of discontinuity, claiming a vision of stability and authenticity in some conceptual golden age. This approximates the conventional sense of nostalgia as a yearning. “As a form of idealized remembrance, the nostalgia mood emerges from, and is made to relate to a grounding concept of longing or loss” (Grainge, 2000, p. 28).

The concept of nostalgia has evolved over time, and Grainge (2000) describes the current aspect of nostalgia as follows:

As a cultural style, nostalgia has developed in accordance with a series of cultural, demographic, technological, and commercial factors that have made the past an expedient and marketable mode. The aestheticization of nostalgia has emerged in a cultural moment able to access, circulate, and reconfigure the textual traces of the past in new and dynamic ways, that has taken up nostalgia in particular representational and taste regimes, and that has generally disjoined nostalgia from any specific meaning located in the past. I would argue that the proliferation of

nostalgic modes, markets, genres, and styles may instead reflect a new kind of engagement with the past, a relationship based fundamentally on its cultural mediation and textual reconfigurations in the present. (p. 33)

Nostalgia in the Postmodern Era

Nostalgia, as much as it is a phenomenon, is a commodity as well. That is, the consumer society has made nostalgia a “product.” The postmodern notion of nostalgia is that the content and context of everyday reality are changed in today’s mass media and mediated society (Baudrillard, 1988).

Fontana and Lyman (1995) use the 1950s popular culture icons Marilyn Monroe and James Dean to examine the forming of a postmodern self based on pastiche and nostalgia. The authors suggest that even long after their deaths, nostalgia for both Monroe and Dean went beyond seeking doubles or looking for their heirs. “Postmodern consumerism indulged in nostalgic recreation of its two icons of the fifties, and the stories changed, more and more allegedly based on new found ‘facts’ or newly created rumors,” write Fontana and Lyman (p. 167). In other words, the public could not let go of them and tried desperately to recreate them in many settings, but with the involvement of commercialism. Fontana and Lyman (1995) contend, “Movies and documentaries about the two followed by the dozens, along with posters, mugs, ties, and dozens of other memorabilia items” (p. 167).

The authors put an emphasis on “self” and explain that the “postmodern self” of pastiche and nostalgia, which becomes ambiguous because it comes to encompass more than its everyday life renditions—history, myth, and media add to everyday life

combining signifiers and signified to create a pastiche self. “This is self which never finds closure in the interaction but is always being negotiated and changed, as old fragments fall out and new ones are added, in a forever incomplete puzzle” (p. 159).

The authors conclude by saying that we still speculate and re-write the texts about the icons of the past. Monroe and Dean are open-ended texts, and there is always something that we can do to re-create their selves. They claim, “The irony of the postmodern self, as exemplified by Monroe and Dean is that the self is a pastiche, a continually shifting and negotiated entity, both real and created, and that no closure is possible, as nostalgic memories and new dreams change it constantly” (p. 169). Even though Monroe and Dean are deceased and long gone, we, as consumers of the postmodern society, yearn for something still to be found in them, and that is why nostalgia is a phenomenon in which we immerse ourselves.

How does this relate to 1980s popular music nostalgia? The generation that grew up listening to the ‘80s music uses numerous cohort and configurations of their own devising, with which to identify and make sense of the past. As George H. Mead (1938) suggested more than sixty years ago, a past was never in the form in which it appears as a past. “Its reality is in its interpretation of the present. It treats the individual as an agent who actively conducts the interactional work of the present” (p. 616).

Nostalgia, Popular Culture, and Media

Despite the insight gained as a result of past research efforts, little attention has been given to examining the subject of nostalgia within the realm of popular culture, not to mention pop music. DaSilva and Faught (1982) approached nostalgia in relation to

popular culture by looking at historical elements of nostalgia found in popular culture and the nature of phenomenon. Their argument starts with an interesting point that today has evolved into a recurrent theme in the highly industrialized capitalist world. The recent preoccupation with nostalgia has been constructed on the selective isolation and petrification of cultural objects whose existence was predicated on another basis of material production. They say, “By transporting artifacts, unencumbered by the negativity of the past, they may now be used to fictionalize past and present experience” (p. 48).

The authors explain one possible reason for the emergence of nostalgia by arguing that objects of nostalgia frequently recall pleasurable experiences prior to one’s adjustment to a socially defined role. This is especially true today when the level of acquiescence demanded by the regularized and calculated routines of education and job performances leave little opportunity for liberal association of work and play. As previously stated, this is one example where people use cohort configurations of their own with which to identify and make sense of the past.

DaSilva and Faught (1982) characterize the nature of pop culture nostalgia by mentioning that with its loose mixture of abstract elements, nostalgia gives one a sense of freedom from present social forces. But in effect, the consequences are just the opposite. “Nostalgia restrains activity by separating an object from its existential conditions,” they explain (p. 50). The general orientation to life encouraged by popular culture’s use of nostalgia intentionally lacks focus. It is instead a diffuse gestalt image incorporating notions from personal recollections, collective memories, and their objectification in past

remains or newly produced replicas. “Together these elements are fused into a reconstructed nexus that attempts to reestablish a context that time has passed” (p. 50).

DaSilva and Faught (1982) also point out, “Nostalgia requires a collective emotional reaction toward, if not an identification with, a symbolization of the past” (p. 49). Nostalgia also helps link group with individual identity as remembering past events operates at both individual and societal level. Similarly, Phillips and Nauright (1999) write that nostalgia, as a form of identity, can also be used by dominant power groups to legitimate their position through promoting a sense of cultural security through cultural practices common to many members of society. People also utilize nostalgia to challenge new ways of thinking promoted by political and cultural elites; if we see nostalgia as a contested cultural terrain and try to understand its uses in specific historical moments, we will be better equipped to understand how people make sense of their world in cultural terms.

What about the role of commercialism in nostalgia? Is there a relationship between the two? “The selling of nostalgia is commercially profitable and its sale via mass media encourages a certain level of response” (p. 50). This tells us that nostalgia sells, especially through mass media. The receiver of a nostalgic message is left only with vague impressions and feelings. It may be hypothesized that the appeal of nostalgic material is enhanced by a medium of expression (i.e. television and film) which makes it possible to present numerous discrete details without analysis. “The uprooting of past activities and their commercialization for purposes of mass entertainment is geared toward stereotyping, action, and artifacts” (p. 50-51).

Specifically, from the industry's standpoint, nostalgia has become something of a genre in a media culture of "narrowcasting," a term denoting the pursuit of narrow but profitable segments of the audience (Grainge, 2000). Grainge (2000) also writes that as a commodity, nostalgia designates a particular kind of programming in radio as well as television. From a commercial point of view, nostalgia provides the film and television industries with a means of repackaging their products, enabling consumers to watch again their favorite movies and shows, including the classics that might otherwise have been laid to rest in company vaults. That is, new technological innovations and their ability to recycle and reconfigure the past in the cultural and media terrain have helped the return of the past.

Nostalgia and Consumer Relations in Popular Music

Holbrook and Schindler (2003a) explain that studies of music, motion pictures, movie stars, and fashion products have shown that styles popular during a consumer's youth can influence the consumer's lifelong preferences. Research on several entertainment products has indicated that the consumers' early experience plays a significant role in determining subsequent artistic favorites. For example, consumers form lifelong attachments to the styles of popular music that they encountered in their late teens and early 20s (Holbrook & Schindler, 1989). Similarly, consumers show enduring preferences for both movie stars and films that they experienced in their youth (Holbrook & Schindler, 1994, 1996). This early-experience phenomenon can be considered an example of the influence of nostalgia on consumer tastes (Holbrook & Schindler, 1991).

Recent research on the formation of tastes for entertainment products has relied on what Holbrook and Schindler (1996) have termed the method of time-dated stimuli. This approach involves finding products that are primarily identified with a narrow time frame, usually because their widespread popularity was limited to that brief period. The results are analyzed by treating relative preferences as a function of the consumer's product-specific age—the age of the responding consumer at the time the relevant object was popular.

An empirical investigation was conducted earlier to find out that tastes for popular music tend to fixate during a relatively narrow age span, sometime in the years of late adolescence or early adulthood (Holbrook & Schindler, 1989). Through a correlational approach, the study provided an empirical examination of whether popular musical preferences peak at a certain age, thereby achieving a more precise estimate of that age than those permitted by informal observation or journalistic wisdom. Holbrook and Schindler (1989) investigated the development of tastes in popular music by asking consumers ranging in age from 16 to 86 years old to evaluate a set of excerpts from popular songs dating from 1932 to 1986. The results showed a strong relationship of relative liking for a musical excerpt to product-specific age ($R^2 = 0.71$) in the form of an inverted U-shaped curve. Songs that were popular after respondents were fully mature adults or before they had reached puberty were liked less than songs that were popular when respondents were in their late teens and early 20s. The peak of this age-related preference function occurred at a product-specific age of about 24 years old. Possible explanations for this relationship include a developmental period of maximum sensitivity analogous to the critical periods documented in ethological studies of imprinting or

extrinsic components, such as social pressures from an individual's peer group that reach peak intensity during a specific phase in the life cycle.

Holbrook and Schindler (1991) have further suggested that the age-related preference peaks for entertainment products reflect a form of nostalgia. Specifically, they have proposed that nostalgia involves preferences for things or experiences that were more common when one was younger. Generally, this implies that the nostalgic targets are no longer as available, accessible, or widely circulated as they once were—songs no longer heard on the radio, pop stars whose careers have ended, or records that have disappeared from the shelves. Conversely, it would not make sense to speak of nostalgia for objects from one's youth if those objects have continued to be commonly or easily experienced.

How Nostalgia Played Out in Popular Culture: The '50s in the '70s

Kotarba (2002) says that journalists and other mass media workers have popularized the idea of the "decade" by using it as a simple and convenient framework for portraying history in a nostalgic framework. The journalistic use of the 10-year period has become a taken-for-granted feature of our public culture. He contends, "Accordingly, decade-based nostalgia serves as a valuable marketing tool" (p. 397).

As an historic example, in the 1970s, nostalgia of the 1950s pervaded popular culture, and the 1950s began to count above all as a time of youth, innocence, and security that presaged a movement into adulthood, experience, and trauma—a movement that was associated in public discourse with the 1960s (Marcus, 1999). "The '50s revival expanded in the 1970s, and existed primarily as the consumption of entertainment with Fifties themes, and the attendant reporting on cultural fads by mainstream media" (p. 32).

The '50s coexisted as cultural commodity with numerous social phenomena, fads, and cultural strains, some of which assuredly involved Americans in more participation through ongoing cultural practices than did the '50s revival. While retrospective accounts of the era do at times depict Americans of the mid 1970s as immersed in the '50s-inspired music, fashion, and behavior on a daily basis. "The revival put into circulation a set of markings and meanings by which the era came to be publicly defined, and a set of experiences that was validated as the basis for the historical relevancy of the recent past" (p. 33).

The 1950s marked the rise of a distinct cultural world for teenagers, which encompassed fashion, film, and especially music. Rock and roll fandom became particularly useful in the rebellion against social constraints on bodily expression, constraints that fell particularly hard on girls. American society increasingly became perceived, by both adults and teenagers, as bifurcated along generational lines, and rock and roll was one of the first, most pervasive, expressive manifestation of the schism. The interest in nostalgia took many forms; old radio shows from the 1930s and 1940s were re-circulated, and magazines were published reprinting articles from the same period. The author says, "Films such as *What's Up, Doc* and *Chinatown* paid tribute to the old film genres of screwball comedy and the hardboiled detective mystery" (p. 33).

Then, how did the media portray the retro trend? Marcus (1999) writes that national television news programs paid scant attention to the nostalgia movement, in accordance with their emphasis on hard news reportage, and even ABC News—which of the three major networks had the least amount of prestige invested in the hallowed traditions of its news department—devoted more airtime discussing cultural issues. Mainstream mass

market magazines were predictably behind the alternative press in reporting on a trend originating in youth culture, even though attendance at revival concerts was cross-generational. *Newsweek* and *Life* devoted cover stories specifically to the re-emergence of the '50s nostalgia in 1972, and the other magazines carried personal testimonials on the '50s teenage life the same year. "By then, the popularity of Fifties culture had been evinced by the popularity of the musical comedy *Grease*, which was beginning the longest theatrical run in Broadway history up to that time" (p. 35). Specifically in music, Marcus (1999) describes that early rock and roll was deemed the dominant music of the era, ranging from Little Richard to Pat Boone.

No one can fully recreate the past; representation becomes the process by which social actors provide the definitions and markers of what is worth remembering, often based, as theorists of social memory state, on present-day needs and desires. Marcus (1999) argues that in the press reporting on the '50s cultural revival, these markers centered around youth culture, and involved music, film, fashion, and sexual practices, and to a lesser extent, race relations, politics, and television.

Nostalgia is used to validate past selves by the invocation of old popular style and the distinctive shared experiences that create identity formation. This nostalgically renewed identity can hold particular appeal for its transcendence of social divisions that have become recognized in the intervening years, among a group now driven with fragmentation and conflict. "Hence, by celebrating the staying power of rock and roll and the '50s celebrity culture, the press reports positioned teenagers of the period as culturally triumphant; even outdated styles were useful in generating a feeling of community and shared remembrance," writes Marcus (p. 38).

CHAPTER 3

TELEVISION

From reruns to cable channels dedicated to the programs in a distant past, nostalgia has recently become a marketable commodity on television. With the proliferation of cable channels and programming on satellite, TV has kept much of pop culture in all decades alive and well. Cable channels like The Nostalgia Network, radio syndicators like The Nostalgia Broadcasting Corporation, and more specific programs such as Nick at Nite and TV Land are fairly indiscriminate about the constitution of nostalgia in their broadcast formats. Within the broadcast industries, the commodification of nostalgia has not been a market response to generalized cultural longing but can be explained through commercial imperatives such as market segmentation and media syndication. That is, the media but not the public, have always been the instigator of a certain retro trend.

As a generic category, nostalgia can encompass anything from sports footage to rerun marathons of popular programs. The content and meaning of nostalgia is, in many respects, secondary to strategies of production and the imperatives of niche consumption. If nostalgia is a marketable product in the broadcast industries, it has become so in the context of the fragmentation of the television audience. Grainge (2000) writes, "While not denying that nostalgic loss may well be experienced and played upon in contemporary media culture, the commodification of nostalgia perhaps more accurately

demonstrates the contingencies of niche marketing than any particular index of cultural longing” (p. 31-32).

The nostalgia in television gained much attention with the advent of “That ‘70s Show” on FOX in the late 1990s. Aside from past reruns and nostalgia channels, “That ‘70s Show” has been one of the most popular programs that directly deals with the theme of nostalgia. The show, which premiered during the week of August 24, 1998, became FOX Entertainment’s first ever debut to rate as the week’s top-rated show among adults 18 to 49 (Schneider, 1998). The reasons the program has been so successful, according to Poniewozik (2002), are use of nostalgia and getting a decade’s spirit. With its depiction of lower-middle-class teens coming of age in a decade of lowered expectations, it also brings out a good-hearted remembrance of people. The program is also an example of 20-year cycle.

The characteristics found in “That ‘70s Show” can be traced in many TV programs related to pop music nostalgia as well. Popular music began to see the nostalgic theme on television with the catalytic success of “That ‘70s Show,” and in the late 1990s, VH1 started airing “Behind the Music” and “Storytellers” series, which focused on the history and whereabouts of the ‘70s pop music artists, such as Bee Gees, Elton John, and The Doors. Although the series later expanded and shifted towards the artists of both past and present, the ‘90s were immersed with the ‘70s nostalgia, and the programs were very much ‘70s centered. The retro style in popular music has carried on into the 2000s, and television today has become the main means for nostalgia marketing for the ‘80s popular music. This chapter examines how certain television programs portray the ‘80s popular music today, and how the phenomenon has become a marketing tool for television

industry. Several television programs and commercials that deal with nostalgia of the 1980s are examined in this chapter.

VH1's "I Love the '80s" Series and "Bands Reunited"

Video Hits 1 or VH1 is an American cable television channel that was created in January 1985 by Warner-Amex Satellite Entertainment (then a division of Warner Communications and then-current owners of MTV, which originally came up with the idea of the channel). With the then four-year-old MTV's popularity rising drastically among teens, VH1 began with the intention to capitalize off of the success of the music video. However, VH1's aim was to focus on the lighter, softer side of popular music, including such musicians as Elton John, Sting, Diana Ross, Billy Joel, Kenny G, and Anita Baker, in hopes of appealing to people between the ages of 18 and 35, and possibly even older ("VH1," 2006).

VH1's popularity and clearance (number of cable systems carrying the channel) was minimal until the fledgling network was acquired by Viacom (along with MTV, Nickelodeon, and Showtime) and placed into the MTV Networks stable. In 1994, in a bid to make itself more noticeable, VH1 started to market itself with a new campaign, "New VH1: Music First," and dropping the hyphen from its official name, and introduced its new "Big 1" logo. It altered its format slightly from adult contemporary (AC) to adult Top 40, now including musicians such as Ace of Base, Melissa Etheridge, Sheryl Crow, and other slightly more rock-oriented popular music than what it had originally played, although AC favorites such as Des'ree, Elton John, Madonna, Céline Dion, and Mariah Carey still received heavy video play. Since then, VH1 has slowly reinvented itself as

the nostalgia channel for those who grew up listening to the music of the past. A standard explanation for traditional nostalgia's appeal is its ability to create a comfort zone that, for a moment, takes people away from the tribulations of current affairs.

Many people consider VH1 primarily a music channel, but executives were surprised by research that found music was the third thing mentioned by viewers when they thought of the network. Nostalgia and storytelling came first. MTV/VH1 Entertainment President Brian Graden says that people think of VH1 in a multidimensional way, not just as a music channel. So the obvious place the channel went was to tap into the broader sense of nostalgia, across all of pop culture, but still leading with music ("Channel Surfers," 2004).

The shift to the 1980s-oriented programs began in late 2002, with the success of the "I Love the '80s" 10-part series. This spawned "I Love the '70s", which was not nearly as successful. Eventually, VH1 accomplished the similar rating several times more with the spin-offs of the original, namely, "I Love the '80s Strikes Back," "I Love the '90s," and "I Love the '90s: Part Deux." In late 2005, VH1 premiered "I Love the '80s 3-D", the third edition of "I Love the '80s," which profiles more entertainment text from the 1980s. The format in which various entertainers give their takes or opinions on popular culture has been repeated for the weekly program, "Best Week Ever" ("VH1," 2006).

Poniewozik (2004) contends that in 2002, with its ratings scraping bottom, the network brought in new management to decide, in effect, what VH1 was about. This meant they needed to determine the demographics of their viewers. They found out that "Generation X had demonstrated an early appetite for nostalgia" (p. 64). In just over a year, thanks to the first '80s-related nostalgia related series of the network, "I Love the

'80s," VH1's ratings jumped more than 100% among 18 to 49-year-old viewers (Poniewozik, 2004).

According to Viacom, the owner of some of the most popular television channels in the United States, several ratings records at VH1 were broken in the first quarter of 2003. One of them revealed January was VH1's most watched month ever in its history, while New Year's Day was its highest-rated day ever due in part to a marathon of the highly popular "I Love the '80s" series. The first week of the quarter was also the highest-rated week in the history of VH1 ("First Quarter Ratings," 2003). "I Love the '80s" serves almost as a template of VH1's new direction as a mirror of pop culture, for it chronicles the decade looking not only at the music—which, by far, the most dominant content in the show—but also the people, films, politics, and major events. It showcases old videos, news clips, and commercials but updates it with commentary from contemporary actors and comedians from the '80s and today.

The retrospective series have stirred quite a sensation and has contributed to the stimulation of the memories as well as the return of stars and trends of the era. For example, VH1 has produced a follow-up 10 episode series, "I Love the '80s Strike Back" and 10 more spin-offs, "I Love the '80s 3-D," thanks to a strong demand by viewers fascinated by the original series, and there have even been online petitions by netizens, asking for an immediate DVD release of the series. Some of the '80s stars featured on the show, such as Duran Duran and Lionel Richie—who have been on hiatus since the end of the '80s or the early '90s—are returning to the music scene once again and making frequent appearances in the media.

Each one-hour episode takes viewers on a tour of one year of the '80s with vivid flashbacks of the people, music, movies, television shows, products, fashions, fads, trends, and major events that defined pop culture that year. "I Love the '80s" brings a cast of characters together for each show—pop music stars, actors, writers, comics, and other celebrities past and present to celebrate the decade's good, bad, and ugly. They analyze, personalize and interpret the things about the 1980s. They criticize what deserves to be criticized, reminisce about the '80s moments they hold dear and talk about the same things people have all been discussing since that decade.

Most notably, though, the '80s pop music is what makes this program special and memorable. Not only is each show filled with background music from the '80s but also has a segment dedicated to '80s popular music artists and music videos, "Deja-Video." In the episode of "I Love the '80s Strike Back -1986," big hit songs of that particular year such as The Bangles' "Walk Like an Egyptian," Genesis' "Land of Confusion," and Samantha Fox's "Touch Me" are featured with music videos; this makes viewers to relive the exact atmosphere of that particular year again and bring about old memories. And what appear constantly along with these segments are promotions of music products by the artists featured on the series (such as compact discs and ring tones) as well as VH1 Web site. This demonstrates that these series are not just targeted for viewers' enjoyment but also for commercialism, a clear example of commodification of nostalgia.

Hanamirian (2003) sums up the significance of the series by saying that the memory trip alone is worth wasting hours and the past has everything to do with the present. She contends, "As stars that were once '80s teenagers recount their favorite pop-culture moments of the decade, one cannot help but stay wistfully glued to the couch, held in a

perpetual state of ‘Oh yeah, I remember that!’” (p. 3). She also argues the indispensability of nostalgia in popular culture. “In our uncertainty of the future, we seek comfort in the past. Enter shows such as ‘I Love the ‘80s,’” she claims (p. 3).

The effort to evoke Generation X’s (now in their 30s and 40s) sense of nostalgia can be seen from VH1’s own description of the series. “I Love the ‘80s: Strike Back” promotion notes read, “VH1 is bringing its highly successful and hilarious ‘I Love the 80s’ approach back for ‘I Love the 80s: Strike Back,’ a whole new bodacious trip down a day-glo-colored memory lane for the Gen X crowd” (“About the Series,” 2006, para. 2).

Aside from the ‘80s artists still enjoying their popularity via record sales and promos, there is little news coverage on the artists who made a splash and then suddenly disappeared. The media enable us to witness the return of those forgotten artists as well. “Bands Reunited” is hosted by Amer Haleem, and the show documents the reunion of a formerly-popular musical ensemble for a one night only special concert. A show normally consists of the crew first hunting down the ex-members of the band (often first in disguise) one-by-one, and convincing them to agree for the one-time concert; the members are “contracted” by signing a classic album of their former band. The band members are then interviewed, usually focusing on the reasons of the breakup. It is followed by the formal reunion of the band in the rehearsing studio, and a joint interview about why the group parted ways. If the reunion was successful, the episode ends with the final performance.

Each episode of VH1’s “Bands Reunited” chronicles the effort to reunite a popular band from decades past, long since broken up. The show’s host travels the globe to track down the former band members and convince them to come together for a one time only

reunion and performance in Los Angeles or London. Shock, embarrassment and sometimes anger are just a few of the reactions host Aamer Haleem finds as he shows up unexpectedly and surprises each band member with the possibility of reuniting with their former bandmates. Some are thrilled for the opportunity to relive their youth, while others would rather keep the past in the past. Convincing the band members to put their divisive break-ups behind them is not an easy task. Emotions run high from past conflicts about money, music, heartache, and the rock and roll lifestyle. Bands that have appeared on the show include A Flock Of Seagulls, ABC, Berlin, Dramarama, Extreme, Frankie Goes To Hollywood, Haircut 100, Information Society, Kajagoogoo, Klymaxx, New Kids On The Block, Romeo Void, Scandal, Squeeze, The Alarm, The English Beat, The Motels, and Vixen. All the bands featured in the series have either formed in the 1980s or had the biggest success of their careers during that time. More intriguingly, even with their success back in the '80s, these artists are no longer talked about today and typically labeled as "one hit wonders."

Kim Rozenfeld, executive producer of the series, says that the '80s were a natural target for this show. "We always look back 20 years in our culture and reclaim things," he says (as cited in Spanberg, 2004, p. 11). He also notes that the channel shows that nostalgia is a really powerful tool, specifically the '80s. He explains that when VH1 looked at the success of "I Love the 80s," it was hard to ignore the fact the '80s are a really resonant time in terms of pop culture. "It's very pop-stalgie," he says (as cited in Mervis, 2004, para. 7). The drama of "Bands Reunited" is seeing what became of artists who were once the toast of MTV and watching their emotional reunions—the artists that made big in the 1980s. Rozenfeld says, "You're dealing with people who have had really

amazing experiences, sort of being on top of the world, flying in private jets, the world on a string for them. That's taken away. It was important for me to show both sides of those characters. To show being on top and adjusting to a life of normalcy" (para. 9). MTV/VH1 Entertainment President Brian Graden says, "We tapped into the one thing we all have in common, which is our relation to pop culture" (as cited in Poniewozik, 2004, p. 65). This suggests that nostalgia is the producers' aspiration as much as it is the viewers'.

In the premiere episode, airing on January 20, 2004, "Bands Reunited" chronicled the effort to reunite the '80s pop group Berlin, best known for "Take My Breath Away," the smash hit theme song from the motion picture, *Top Gun* (1986). Five original members successfully reunited for a one time only performance in this very first episode of the series. The vocalist for the band, Terry Nunn, says that being on the show has changed her life and has stirred up new interest among some of the members to work together again (Rahman, 2004).

The show got an overwhelmingly positive response, as the VH1 message boards became flooded with giddy fans passionately exchanging inquires about the bands and the show. Many of the artists themselves joined the board to talk to their fans. The demand for the show was massive. As for the 10 featured bands in season one, their fame has re-launched and skyrocketed to a new level. In addition, they gained a whole new generation of fans. "What this show is doing is bringing back so much great nostalgia and happy memories that I find myself welling up every time I watch the show," a viewer said on the message boards at VH1 (as cited in Rahman, 2004, para. 14).

The network is finding fresher and more dramatically rewarding ways of plying nostalgia. Between the fascination of discovering what happened to these performers and what happened to their looks are an undeniable sweetness. The episode where former Romeo Void saxophonist Benjamin Bossi deals with his hearing loss and members talk about record industry snubs of singer Debora Iyall because of her weight reminds us that former MTV icons have feelings, too. Graham (2004) says that reuniting bands with Hall of Fame credentials is not the point but more compelling is that the idea of people trying to bury past transgressions as they remember and recapture what drew them together in the first place. “As the bandmates try to put their hard feelings behind them, we see a reflection of every once-close, now-faded, if not downright busted relationship in our own lives” (p. E5).

Showhost Aamer Haleem reveals his point of view on the show by saying, “The beauty and fun of doing this show is being able to come up with a solution” (as cited in Shah, 2004, p. C1). Often, he had to explain to band members that “Band Reunited” was not an expose, but rather a way to reunite band members and to give some needed exposure to the importance of their music during the era of ‘80s because this was about so many things that had not been dealt with in a long time. In other words, the significance of the program is that musicians, even after a two-decade layoff, can render a respectable facsimile of themselves at their zenith, thanks to the viewers who remember them and cherish the past. Graham (2004) offers a much more trenchant view. She posits, “But more than just a trip down memory lane for former rock stars, it’s an effective mirror on who we were, who we are, and who we still hope to be” (p. E5).

Reality Show Format: NBC's "Hit Me Baby One More Time"

Another popular form of the '80s music nostalgia-based programs is the reality show. "Rock Star: INXS" on CBS in 2005 was the beginning of the '80s pop music artist-based reality show in the format of popular "American Idol" series on FOX. "Hit Me Baby One More Time," whose title comes from a line in the Britney Spears song "...Baby One More Time," is a 2005 reality show aired by NBC; the U.K. version was done earlier in the same year for ITV on British television. During each program, five former pop stars sing their biggest hit along with a cover version of a contemporary hit. Each week one winner is picked from each show by a studio-audience vote, leading to the grand final when the overall winner can have \$20,000 donated to a charity of their choice.

Veteran hit-makers, almost all of them from the 1980s, compete in this unique competition show. The first "Hit Me Baby One More Time" featured the bands, such as Loverboy, A Flock of Seagulls, and Arrested Development and singers Tiffany and Cece Peniston, all playing their old hits and covers of today's contemporary hits. Also included in "Hit Me Baby One More Time" are background stories on what made the hit-makers famous as well as updates of their current lives and careers. The show aims to tap into the nostalgia post-baby boomers have for their youth by bringing back the bands who recorded some of the touchstone songs of the '80s and early '90s (Porter, 2005).

"Hit Me Baby One More Time," the show that pits Reagan-era bands against each other in a competition for cash prizes to go to charity, gained solid ratings during its inaugural season. It was the top-rated show among those 18 to 49-year-old viewers during its first week. Although the first full post-May sweeps week was dominated by repeats, "Hit Me Baby One More Time" helped the NBC network take the top spot in the

adults 18 to 49 demographic for the week ended June 5. It scored a 4.7 in adults 18 to 49, according to Nielsen Media Research. (“NEWS,” 2005, p. 4)

The appeal of “Hit Me Baby One More Time” might have something to do with having a laugh at the expense of some musical “has-beens,” but it is also deeply rooted in nostalgia (Wolgamott, 2005). Commenting on the show, Charles Bethea, director of the Lied Center for Performing Arts, says, “We all get to a point where we say, ‘I wish I had my life back’ even though we don’t want to live it again. The longer we go, the better it looks. The music is part of that” (as cited in Wolgamott, p. K1). Paul Levinson, a Fordham University media-studies professor, suggests that this kind of remaking pop culture, as in “Hit Me Baby One More Time,” is a facet of something becoming even more a part of the establishment (Neumaier & Farber, 2005). He says that even when we are mocking the music, it is with a kind of affection, as often happens with old television shows. “I think ‘Hit Me Baby One More Time’ will lead to laughing again at this music, but with affection this time, not derision, as when it was first heard,” Levinson says (as cited in Neumaier & Farber, 2005, p. E4).

For host Vernon Kay, who also hosted the British version of the show, the warm feeling and nostalgia people have for the ‘80s music comes down to one thing: fun. “It was a fun decade. I think maybe pop music wasn’t as taken as seriously as it is now. From my experience back in the U.K., where I’m a radio DJ and play at universities—the students, when they hear tracks like Tiffany’s ‘I Think We’re Alone Now,’ they just go crazy. And it’s because they’re fun songs,” Kay says (as cited in Porter, 2005, para. 7).

Vanilla Ice, an early ‘90s rapper who topped the Billboard singles chart with “Ice Ice Baby” in 1990 and appeared on one of the episodes, approaches the meaning of the show

from a slightly different point of view. “Exposure is the No. 1 way to get your name out there and for people to recognize you, and reality television is just another way to do it,” he says (as cited in de la Vina, 2005, para 5). Before the advent of reality shows, semi-retired pop stars didn’t have many options. They could embark on a nostalgia tour, play the state-fair circuit or hope that an old hit was picked up for a television commercial (de la Vina, 2005). In other words, from the artists’ perspectives, nostalgia means a possible re-exposure on the media spotlight that has been absent for them for quite some time.

Advertising with the ‘80s Music and Starbucks’ “Glen” Campaign

Vogel contends (2003) that nostalgia marketing and legislated nostalgia are such potent marketing techniques that they are being used by everyone from politicians to McDonald’s with increasing frequency. The tactic is especially effective during difficult economic or socially stressful time, and social experts say much of the appeal of nostalgia stems from a longing for a return to simpler times.

On television today, there are numerous commercials that feature the ‘80s popular songs as jingles or background music. Regardless of the content and type of product, these songs contribute to bringing about the retro feel of the ‘80s. For instance, Verizon Wireless used “Video Killed the Radio Star” by The Buggles in a 2005 ad for camera phones, and more recently, Mountain Dew used Lionel Richie’s “All Night Long.” K-Mart and Old Navy have chosen a more focused direction to the ‘80s nostalgia by featuring a number of ‘80s songs as their vehicles for promotion. Most of their recent advertising feature popular ‘80s songs, such as “Fame” by Irene Cara, “Kids in America”

by Kim Wilde, “Bust A Move” by Young M. C., and “Who Can it Be Now?” by Men at Work, either with altered lyrics or as original recording.

Peter Johnson, strategic account manager at 3 Marketeers Advertising says, “If anything, I think if we’re using the ‘70s and ‘80s references from a nostalgic point” (as cited in Vogel, 2003, para. 19). He contends that although we may be laughing at them, humor is one of the best advertising tools available and people, especially Gen-Xers, are just smarter towards advertising. “We have a sense of what you’re trying to sell and how you’re trying to sell it,” he says (para. 19). He adds that as many marketing experts note, nostalgia is turning on a faster and faster track, producing more and more media, much sooner than anyone imagined. What used to take 20 years to reach cool levels of kitsch might now be sentimentalized in five. Companies often try to create their own cycle of nostalgia, bringing back old logos or spokespeople and spokescharacters (Vogel, 2003).

One of the most notable campaigns of this ‘80s resurgence in advertising industry is by Starbucks. For Starbucks, Fallon ECD enlisted Survivor to re-record “Eye of the Tiger” with goofy new lyrics, telling the tale of an office worker striving for middle management and perhaps reviving the ‘80s pop band’s career. In the 60 seconds advertisement for *DoubleShot Espresso* coffee, the spot first features Glen, a tired young man who jump-starts his morning by reaching into his refrigerator for a Starbucks *DoubleShot Espresso*. As he opens up the can and begins to drink, we hear the opening riff of the song, “Eye of the Tiger,” a famous rock and roll tune from the ‘80s circa *Rocky III* (1982), and the camera reveals that the actual band, Survivor, has appeared in his apartment. The band plays a personalized version of the song to Glen, following his every move—during his shaving in the bathroom, waiting of a bus to the work, and even

on his trip to the office in the elevator. They inflate his ego as he goes through his morning routine on the way to work and energizes him for his journey to the office.

The commercial has received a tremendous reception and has become one of the most famous and beloved advertising moments of the year 2004 because it has succeeded in grabbing viewers' attention right away. Tracey Doucette, the general manager and vice president of North American Coffee Partnership (NACP), says that the ad has pushed up sales by high single digits and the buzz on the ad has been very positive from people (Howard, 2004). The consumers were surveyed by Ad Track, *USA Today's* weekly poll, and of those familiar with the ads, 26% liked it a lot. That beats the Ad Track average of 21%. "The ad appealed about equally to men and women, with 28% of men and 25% of women saying they like the ad 'a lot,'" Howard says (p. 11B). The impact of the commercial has earned the ad a Cannes Lions prize in Shortlist category in International Advertising Festival of 2004—one of the most prestigious honors offered in the field of advertising.

The commercial does not use fancy, state-of-the-art technologies—which more or less have become a trademark in today's world of advertising—and there are no superstars performing. Then, what is the driving force behind these successful commercials that feature a 20-year-old rock music song? Anne Bologna, president of Fallon New York, the agency that created the ad, claims, "Music is the key ingredient to the popularity" (as cited in Howard, 2004, p. 11B). Fallon ECD Ari Merkin also says that putting Survivor in felt natural for the product, which is what he likes to call liquid motivation. According to him, the idea of using Survivor just transcended any of the other ideas because Survivor was an idea unto itself because they are the kings of

motivational rock and the association with Rocky Balboa is a memorable one. “Indeed, Survivor’s classic is a sure fit, its inspirational message and nostalgic ammo converging in perfect harmony with the spot’s concept and humor” (as cited in Diaz, 2004, p. 27).

The use of music in the “Glen” advertisement not only gives the product a habitat, that of a competitive environment, but it also generates an emotional response and sense of nostalgia from consumers. The re-writing of this song invokes a visceral response from anyone who has seen the movie, and arguably, even those who have not. The song is played at countless athletic contests, often before the contest begins or when the home team is losing, and fans of almost any sport associate it as a source of inspiration. The band Survivor catches our attention when it suddenly appears in Glen’s kitchen. The presence of the original band not only lends an air of authenticity to the message and adds celebrity credibility but also brings sense of nostalgia to whoever grew up listening to the band and the song.

Summary

This chapter has examined the characteristics and significance of the ‘80s popular music nostalgia on TV. The programs and ads successfully capture the attention of targeted viewers, mainly Generation X audience, with the broadcast of the ‘80s-related theme. In another important dimension, not only do the programs reflect the demographics of viewers, they are also produced by the people who miss the ‘80s and understand the nature of popular culture of the period. Furthermore, the commodification of nostalgia is evident from the promotion of the Web sites as well as music-related products, such as compact discs and ring tones. This characteristic becomes more

obvious in advertising because its goal is to “sell.” Finally, the ‘80s artists use these programs as a platform to re-launch their careers and achieve a substantial amount of exposure to viewers, which enables them to be on the media spotlight once again.

CHAPTER 4

RADIO

Anderson (1998) illustrates the significance and implications of the emerging all-'80s format radio in her doctoral dissertation. She writes that throughout the history of radio, the music formats have emerged in cycles, and with the beginning of the new millennium, the all-'80s format will have the chance to take center stage. The targeted audience for this format would be ages 25-40, with the programming being skewed towards women. This is an attractive group to advertisers as they are influential consumers and most have at least some college education. The targeted listeners are those who grew up during the 1980s and remember the fashions, events, personalities and icons of the decade. Anderson (1998) writes that faced with a troubled economy and many societal problems, the '80s generation needs to experience the optimism they knew while entering adulthood with bright eyes and big ideas. "The all-'80s format focuses on the biggest, most familiar hits of the decade, with a mix of alternative/punk rock, hard rock, easy listening, and rhythm and blues" (p. 1431).

Radio station WXST in Columbus, Ohio was widely credited as the first radio station in the United States to broadcast an '80s-based format full-time in 1998 (Taylor, 1998), and since then, a number of '80s radio stations began to emerge nationwide. In 1999, Infinity Broadcasting introduced the '80s format at KYPT-FM in Seattle, known as "The Point," and grabbed strong ratings. Coupled with the Portland station's ratings success

announced in late 2000, radio chains such as Cox Enterprises Inc.'s Cox Radio Inc. of Atlanta and Clear Channel Communications Inc. of San Antonio, Texas, began jumping on the bandwagon. Two stations in San Diego switched to the '80s programming within a 24-hour period in November 2000, setting up what looks to be an old-fashioned format war between their owners, Clear Channel and Jefferson-Pilot Corp.'s Jefferson-Pilot Communications Inc. of Greensboro, North Carolina (Ho, 2000). WXST (Star 107.9) PD Jason Roberts says, "If you look at the historical time line of gold formats, all generally seem to pop up approximately 20 years from the earliest song in the format. It seems to be a natural progression of formats" (as cited in Taylor, 1998, p. 84).

Not only are there regional '80s format stations all over the country, but also syndicated radio programs play a big role as well. The roots of this phenomenon can be traced to a DJ named Kid Kelly, who decided to mine the '80s when they had barely ended, back in 1991. He shopped around a weekly two-hour syndicated '80s music show called "Backtrax USA" and persuaded 50 stations to jump aboard. Today, he says that the show is played on 250 stations, reaching 20 million potential listeners (Ho, 2000). "A lot of those artists that were mainstays of the '80s really offer a fond throwback to the 30-year-olds of today who were 15 and 20 back then," he explains (as cited in Taylor, 1998, p. 84).

Radio has long been dominated by personalities, but in addition to traditional radio broadcast, newly emerging technologies, such as satellite radio, are set to bring the '80s music to listeners. Holloway (2006) says that the Web and satellite radio have thousands of stations to choose from and without advertising. The Web and satellite radio are

perceived as a high-growth engine for radio companies. Web and digital technologies allow broadcasters to target listeners and open up local stations to a global audience. This chapter examines a '80s format radio station in Las Vegas, namely, Star 102.7, and the growing popularity of the '80s music in satellite radio with the arrival of two service providers, XM and SIRIUS.

Las Vegas' KSTJ - Star 102.7 FM

Founded in 1961, Beasley Broadcast Group, Inc. currently owns or operates 41 radio stations (26 FM and 15 AM) located in ten large and mid-size markets across the nation, and Star 102.7 (KSTJ) in Las Vegas, Nevada is a part of Beasley Broadcast Group, Inc. ("Arbitron," 2006). Also, it is one of the first all-'80s format radio stations to surface on the market. Its slogan, "Best of the '80s and More," makes listeners expect the station will be a pure '80s music-based station. Beasley converted the station from adult contemporary to the '80s hits format in 2000. Since then, KSTJ has enjoyed solid gains with the format change, reflected in the two most recent Arbitron ratings books (Hudson, 2001).

"It is the country's newest format for contemporary radio," says Ken Carson, program director for Star 102.7 FM, KSTJ (as cited in Abowitz, 2005, para. 7). He says that when they went for the all-'80s format in August of 2000, they were one of the first '80s stations in the country. They had started experimenting by conducting the '80s weekends a few months before that period. "People were calling and calling to request the '80s during the week, and we finally decided that we have a format here. So the station did some research and sure enough there was a love for '80s in Las Vegas" (para. 7).

Carson says that in the '80s music, a style of music is not bounded by any strict chronology, and the format is made up of three types of the '80s music: pop, postmodern and rock. He describes that a pop artist would be Madonna, Prince or Billy Joel; on the postmodern side, there are artists like Duran Duran, Depeche Mode, and The Fixx; in rock, there are John Mellencamp, ZZ Top, and Van Halen. This suggests that the station gives listeners a variety of choices with different tastes in music. When the station first switched to an all-'80s format, it was more pop-oriented. The more the station fine-tuned the research, the more it learned and figured out the percentages that people wanted to hear. Carson notes that for Star 102.7 FM, the formula in Las Vegas is about 40 percent rock, 35 percent postmodern and 25 percent pop, a fairly well balanced distribution:

We changed our positioning about 10 months ago to say we offer the best of '80s and more. What that 'more' means is that we do play some late-'70s and early-'90s music. The average listener doesn't care what year a song was released, but they do have a strong sense of the time period. We are trying to find records that sound like they are from that era. The Cars is a perfect example. The group had hits in the early '80s, but a lot of its hits are from the late '70s. (para. 10)

Regarding indie bands and many of the underground '80s bands such as Husker Du, X, Black Flag, Sonic Youth and the Dead Kennedys being singled out, Carson says that listeners may hear that kind of music on some syndicated specialty shows, but the truth is that the majority of the audience does not have taste that eclectic. Also, the station's flexibility does not extend to any new music; not even new releases by major '80s bands. "The Pet Shop Boys just came out with a new record. But we won't play it. That would

be like a pizza place suddenly serving hamburgers. We want to give people what they expect when they tune to the station: '80s music," says Carson (para. 11).

The radio personnel are the ones who also grew up listening to the music back in the '80s. "Star 102.7 is so much fun because I played all of these songs on the radio when they were brand new," exclaims Larry Martino, DJ and music director of Star 102.7 FM, who fills the spot of the station between 2 P.M. and 7 P.M. on weekdays. He says, "It's deja-vu all over again!" ("Larry Martino," n.d., para. 5).

The typical Star 102.7 FM song selection consists of notable "Top 40" hit songs from the 1980s and few songs from the late 1970s and early 1990s, which still retain overall "feel" of the '80s as earlier described by Carson. Some of the frequent airplay includes artists such as Pet Shop Boys, Huey Lewis and the News, Blondie, Genesis, Michael Jackson, and Bon Jovi, whose music styles range from new wave to heavy metal and rhythm and blues to hard rock, covering almost all pop music genres of the 1980s. Between the segments, concert information and various commercials fill up the spots as well, and the DJs often chat about latest news of popular '80s artists and whereabouts of so-called "one hit wonders" from the period.

The following is the airplay list between 3 A.M. to 4 A.M. on March 10, 2006:

REO Speedwagon – "Keep on Loving You" (1981)

Duran Duran – "The Reflex" (1984)

Tears for Fears – "Head over Heels" (1985)

Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark (OMD) – "If You Leave" (1986)

The Cars – "Let's Go" (1979)

Peter Gabriel – "Sledgehammer" (1986)

Phil Collins – “I Missed Again” (1981)

Bon Jovi – “Runaway” (1984)

Blondie – “Call Me” (1981)

Dead or Alive – “Brand New Lover” (1986)

The Bangles – “Manic Monday” (1986)

Naked Eyes – “Always Something There to Remind Me” (1983)

Berlin – “Take My Breath Away” (1986)

As the airplay indicates, the songs are evenly balanced in terms of year of the release and genre. REO Speedwagon, The Cars, Bon Jovi, and The Bangles can be categorized as rock, while Duran Duran, Tears for Fears, Blondie, Dead or Alive, and Naked Eyes are new wave. OMD, Peter Gabriel, Phil Collins, and Berlin are best represented as standard pop. They were all Top 40 singles on the Billboard with the total of six songs topping the singles chart; all the songs are mainstream and popular tunes, with which listeners can easily familiarize.

With the popularity of the station, Beasley Broadcast Group, Inc. also announced in early 2005 that its Star 102.7 FM would broadcast the first public demonstration of an HD Radio™ multicast on a commercial FM station. The demonstration took place during the annual National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) show in Las Vegas from April 16-21, 2005. Star 102.7 FM has used HD Radio technology since late 2003, and was the first commercial radio station licensed to broadcast using HD Radio technology in Las Vegas (“iBiquity Digital,” 2005). The technology enables multicast of several program streams simultaneously, with the audience treated to three digital audio channels and two datacasting navigational channels. “We’ve been committed to HD Radio

technology since the very beginning because we believe it will make radio a better and more competitive medium,” said Beasley Broadcast Group VP/Chief Technology Officer Bob Demuth (as cited in “National Association,” 2005, para. 2). He says that having more channels to program allows the company to reach a larger audience with more timely and entertaining content and also provides advertisers creative new ways to reach an audience.

Satellite Radio: XM and SIRIUS

In the United States, the two companies dominate satellite radio: XM and SIRIUS satellite radio. A monthly fee is charged for both services (as of 2005 SIRIUS also offers a one time fee of nearly \$500 valid for the lifetime of the equipment). Originally some XM music channels had commercials, while SIRIUS was commercial-free. As of September 2005, XM has 67 commercial-free music channels; 39 channels of news, sports, talk, and entertainment; 21 dedicated traffic and weather channels, and 23 play-by-play sports channels. SIRIUS has 65 music-only channels as well as traffic and weather reports for major cities (“Satellite Radio,” 2006).

Rosen (2006) contends that these two satellite radio providers have changed the notion of popular music business and future of popular music as well. She says that XM and SIRIUS are the largest payers of public performance rights to artists and record companies. She claims, “Their customers are music buyers, and they are buying radio; that is something the traditional broadcasters have told us could never happen” (p. 6).

For the music lover, satellite radio means a cornucopia of different genres to choose from, and the ‘80s music is no exception. The battle of the two companies is heating up

between their sole '80s music format channels: XM's "The '80s" and SIRIUS' "Big '80s." Because satellite radio is a fairly new technology and both XM and SIRIUS are at the infant stage of business, the direct comparisons or media coverage between the two stations have been little. Max (2004) writes that there is a close competition between the two companies by specifically exemplifying "The '80s" and "Big '80s." "Although the SIRIUS and XM Web sites suggest that one or the other has superior programming, it would take me more than one road trip to determine whether XM's all-'80s station was better than the SIRIUS' all-'80s station," she says (para. 15).

For XM, Channel 8 (The '80s) is dedicated to the '80s pop music. The focus is on reliving and recapturing the decade of the 1980s. The Web site of the channel claims that "The '80s" captures the musical high ground between nostalgia and now with timeless music from groups like Culture Club, The Go-Gos, and Styx, as well as classics from signature artists like Madonna, Bruce Springsteen, and The Police. Its Web page promotes the channel by mentioning that the music sounds as fresh as ever now. It says, "Relive it on XM Radio's 80s on 8" ("The Awesome '80s," n.d., para. 2).

The songs the channel lists as "What you'll hear" section on its main Web site are "Call Me" by Blondie, "Physical" by Olivia Newton-John, "I Love Rock & Roll" by Joan Jett, "Every Breath You Take," by The Police, "Like a Virgin" by Madonna, "Beat It" by Michael Jackson, "Careless Whisper" by Wham featuring George Michael, "Walk Like An Egyptian" by The Bangles, "Invisible Touch" by Genesis, "I Wanna Dance With Somebody" by Whitney Houston, and "Blame it on the Rain" by Milli Vanilli, which all enjoyed successful chart positions on the Billboard singles chart during the decade of

1980s and still bear “classic” status by the fans. This airplay list clearly suggests that the channel offers a balanced song selection with popular mainstream tunes from the ‘80s.

XM’s business rival SIRIUS has its own ‘80s channel positioned at Channel 8 (“Big ‘80s”) as well. The channel characterizes itself by claiming that it is the first commercial-free ‘80s channel dedicated to reviving and maintaining an unforgettable and groundbreaking musical era. Similar to its XM counterpart, SIRIUS’ “Big ‘80s” focuses on the theme of reliving the past. Its promotion line on the official Web site describes that the listeners can relive the decade when greed was good, hair got big, girls just wanted to have fun, and everyone learned what a music video was (“Big ‘80s,” n.d.).

The marketing strategy for “Big ‘80s” channel is to not only bring back the music but also the ‘80s icons themselves. SIRIUS has added a unique nostalgia factor by enlisting famous 1980s video jockeys from the MTV era. It has reunited Mark Goodman, Alan Hunter, Nina Blackwood, and Martha Quinn, four of MTV’s original five VJs, to host its “Big ‘80s” channel. Along with the late J. J. Jackson, they were the five original MTV VJs when the network premiered on August 1, 1981 (Torpey-Kemph, 2004). Steve Blatter, SIRIUS VP of Music Programming, says that these VJs helped pioneer a music and cultural phenomenon in the ‘80s and SIRIUS is pleased to reunite these innovators and bring their talents to satellite radio exclusively on SIRIUS (“SIRIUS Satellite Radio,” 2004). Martha Quinn, by joining the channel in mid 2005, completed the reunion of the original MTV VJs. “I’m so exciting to be joining SIRIUS. When I’m done surfing and chasing my kids around, I can go into the studio and get back to a time when ‘M’ stood for music,” Quinn says (“Big ‘80s,” n.d., para. 2). Mark Goodman also shares his thought by saying, “I’ve been searching for the next revolution in music, and I’ve found

it at SIRIUS. Playing music on 'Big '80s' with my fellow former VJs is like having lightning strike twice" ("Big '80s," n.d., para. 3).

Summary

This chapter illustrated radio's marketing of nostalgia with the '80s music. Las Vegas radio station Star 102.7 has made a successful transition from a contemporary radio to an all-'80s format, and its popularity is growing still. Nostalgia has been a tremendous factor in its success, and the high ratings prove it. On the other hand, for satellite radio, the channels heavily rely on a new technology to attract listeners. Although satellite radio is still a new concept and in its development stage, the competition between XM and SIRIUS has ignited the marketing battle between their '80s format channels as well. The characteristics and significance of the radio is as follows; first, radio found that the demographic for the '80s popular music was demanding, and all-'80s format turned out to be profitable; second, as illustrated in the previous chapter, personnel in charge understand the significance of nostalgia in the '80s popular music market and employed relevant marketing strategies; third, the focus is on the airplay of mainstream tunes, which leads to an easier and effective access to listeners so that they can identify with the tunes. Moreover, technology is becoming a huge factor today, as radio is going through a transition to "state-of-the-art" from traditional radio that we have known over the years.

CHAPTER 5

THE RECORD INDUSTRY

Frith (2001) notes that the music industry's question is straightforward and it is how to make money out of music. The industry has a significant role to play in popular music culture and has constantly to respond to changes within it. The music industry has rarely constructed a new music market for itself. Frith (2001) challenges that the music related company's sales activities have meant, rather, responding more or less quickly and efficiently, to musical taste patterns emerging from the market itself, and given meaning by music media. "What matters for music industry here is not whether their records get good or bad reviews, but that their acts find a place in the appropriate music world" (p. 39).

Two dominant media formats in music today are CD (compact disc) and DVD (digital video disc). Although the sales of materialized media have ebbed due to the recent popularity of downloadable music, these two formats have been arguably the most widely used music media over the years. CDs have overshadowed the popularity of vinyl records in the 1980s, and DVDs have done the same over video cassettes in the last few years.

On average, 1980s music sells between 8,000 and 40,000 copies, according to EMI marketing manager Warren Stewart (Clark, 1999). Bands that were cult favorites 15 years ago can sell more than they did in the 1980s. Technology has allowed the artists of

the past to resurface on the market in terms of public interest and commercial success. Today we can see the steady sales of the discs by the '80s favorites, such as Guns N' Roses, whose *Greatest Hits* album is ranked high on the Billboard albums chart as of March 2006, well after the band's prime in the late 1980s.

Historical branding strategies utilizing a 20-year cycle were a growing novelty in the 1990s. Back in 1994, Faithe Raphael of Rhino Records noted that the record company's 1970s series sales increased significantly because people are into nostalgia for the 1970s music (Miller, 1994). In the mid 1990s, Razor & Tie Records put together a compilation album called *Those Fabulous '70s* and sold it on television, and the CD grossed \$2.25 million (Godsey, 1997).

In the 2000s, the 20-year cycle seems to fall in place in the record industry once again. Leeds (2005) acknowledges that the music industry was slow to react to the '80s music nostalgia, but since 2003, it has belatedly started trying to cash in on it. A lot of big name artists from the '80s, such as Duran Duran, Tears for Fears, and New Order, shook off the dust and signed new recording contracts in the past year or two, releasing CDs of new music in some cases for the first time in 15 years. "Credit booming music nostalgia market, which has stirred up enough interest in the '80s to entice Morrissey, New Order, Duran Duran, Motley Crue, and others back into recording studios," says Tyrangiel (2005, p. 74).

Although nostalgia is a big factor in bringing back the biggest names of the '80s in pop music, there is a fine line between the '80s music nostalgia and the '80s artists making new music. Since the thesis deals with the return of popular music that was created in the decade of the 1980s, this chapter specifically focuses on the music

industry's nostalgia marketing with the music of the '80s, rather than the '80s artists' resurgence with new material.

Compilation Compact Discs

“Almost every week, a new 1980s greatest-hits CD is released,” claims Clark (1999, p. 124). He says that one of the reasons the decade-based compilation discs are on the market is because retro CDs are cheap to produce. On any given day, the promotion for a number of compilation discs from the decade of 1980s can be spotted in a form of advertisement, infomercial, or commercial on TV, radio, magazines, and even on the Internet. The record companies leading the '80s compilation market are Rhino Records and Razor & Tie Records, whose concentration is the production of compilation discs featuring the music from the past several decades.

According to Beirne (2000), The Warner Music Group label, Rhino, has a 2,750 plus title catalog comprising compilations and box sets. Its eclectic content and reputation as the place to go for all things retro have formed the Rhino brand identity. “We’re the retro pop culture experts that get it,” says David Dorn, senior director of media relations and new media at Rhino (as cited in Beirne, 2000, p. 40).

On February 24, 2004, Rhino Records' *Billboard #1s: The '80s*, a collection of 30 number one tracks pulled from the Billboard charts of the 1980s, marked the first time the series have issued a luxurious double-disc (Whitmire, 2004). “We chose the '80s because of how the compilations within the original series had performed and because of the amount of reflection that the media in general is directing toward the decade's

music,” Rhino/Warner Strategic Marketing’s (WSM) executive VP Kevin Gore says (as cited in Whitmire, 2004, p. 5).

Whitmire (2004) contends that the ‘80s decade’s single year compilations make up more than half of the sales total for the Billboard-branded line, with a combined Nielsen SoundScan tally of more than three million units. By offering the set for \$19.98 instead of the single-disc price of \$9.98, the label was able to justify the TV direct marketing margin—another first for the line—prompting WSM to place spots on MTV, Lifetime, Comedy Central, E! Entertainment, and BBC America.

In 2002, Rhino Records also released *Like Omigod!: The ‘80s Pop Culture Box*, which consists of seven CDs packaged in black vinyl format—a luxurious package for a compilation title. According to Flick (2002), the set does little to affirm the artistic merit of the decade, but it provides a firm reminder that the ‘80s were a sight more fun than the new millennium has been so far. He says, “The beauty of this collection is that it does not strive to be intensely cool, nor to function from any one point of view—instead, it’s a simple reflection of what the masses were plunking down their bucks for throughout the decade” (p. 62). In this box, according to Flick, all musical styles from the 1980s are covered, from country pop (Dolly Parton’s “9 to 5”), rock (Starship’s “We Built This City”), and new wave (The Vapors’ “Turning Japanese”) to electro (Gary Numan’s “Cars”), hip-hop (Kurtis Blow’s “The Breaks”), and dance (Laid Back’s “White Horse”).

It took producer David McLees four years and two co-producers to choose tracks for the collection. Although he says that this box set is not a scholarly survey of the ‘80s trends, it is more like skimming a stone over the decade and hitting the highlights, with an obvious emphasis on kitschiness. He hopes this kind of nostalgia-based product

makes people smile when they hear something they have not heard in years, regardless of the genre, because the key is revoking the sense of nostalgia. “It should remind the listener of whatever their skinny-tie new-wave experience was,” he says (as cited in Ali, 2002, p. 54).

The strong sale figures of the compilation discs are clearly reflected on the charts as well, directly resulting from an aggressive marketing. New York-based Razor & Tie has marketed the most successful music compilations in the marketplace since the late 1990s. Razor & Tie launched a Web site in late 2000, Musicspace.com, which offers for sale compilation albums the label has sold directly to consumers through TV marketing (“Newslines,” 1999, p. 68). Most of its products are nostalgia-related CDs, whose music periods range from the 1960s to 1980s.

Razor & Tie took more of a multi-categorized approach in its compilation series by not only focusing on the “decade-based” but also “genre-based” marketing, specifically hard rock and heavy metal music of the 1980s. The company made the Billboard Top 20 debut with its latest compilation *Monster Ballads: Platinum Edition* in February 2006. The album reached number 18 on the Billboard Top 200 albums chart in early February. It features the collection of power ballads from what they call the “hair metal” era of the 1980s—the period where long-haired heavy metal bands achieved a huge commercial success—and is filled with songs from Skid Row, Warrant, Poison, and Damn Yankees. The first *Monster Ballads* compilation as well as *Monsters of Rock* back in the beginning of 2000 had a similar success back then. The initial installment of the series, *Monsters of Rock*, was conceived after Craig Balsam and Razor & Tie Direct co-owner Cliff Chenfeld

noticed the increasing pace with which nostalgia “speeds its way up to the present” (Marshall, 2000, p. 42).

Monsters of Rock, the first release of the “Monster” series, features hard rock and heavy metal tunes from the decade of the 1980s, such as Twisted Sister’s “We’re Not Gonna Take It,” Alice Cooper’s “Poison,” and Winger’s “Seventeen.” The follow-up, *Monster Ballads*, features the softer side of heavy bands, including Warrant’s “Heaven,” Poison’s “Something to Believe In,” Scorpions’ “Wind Of Change,” and Extreme’s “More Than Words.” *Monsters of Rock* has since its release gone gold (500,000 copies sold), while *Monster Ballads* has been certified platinum (one million copies sold), hitting gold status before it was even available in stores.

Olson (1999), regarding the success of these compilation series by Razor & Tie, contends that the nostalgia factor is clearly striking a chord. Craig Balsam, co-founder of the company, says that the target market is comprised of the MTV generation. These products are targeted to people who were in their teens in the late ‘80s and early ‘90s and today are with full-time jobs, obligations and responsibilities. “Enough time had passed between their wild teen days and the days of their new youth, that they could look back on something like this nostalgically and say, ‘This stuff was great, it was a lot of fun and we loved it,’” he says (as cited in Marshall, 2000, p. 42).

Music DVDs and *Live Aid* Box Set

The music DVD is the hot product on the nostalgia market, and if 2004’s numbers are any indication, we will be hearing and seeing more of our favorite artists in the coming years. “It’s what happens when the live concert album of yesteryear meets today’s

technology. You get everything,” says Michael Linton, executive vice president of consumer and brand marketing at Best Buy (as cited in Baca, 2004, para. 3). Baca (2004) writes that the year’s music DVD sales—projected to make up more than 5% of the total music market revenue—have more than doubled 2003’s numbers. He also explains that the medium’s primary artists are the classics—Rolling Stones, Led Zeppelin, Bruce Springsteen, and The Beatles—which attract many viewers from generations both past and current.

Jim Urie, president of Universal Music & Video Distribution, reports that music DVD sales are up 119% in 2004 for the world’s largest music company because of hot sellers featuring the ‘80s acts, such as Guns N’ Roses (McCarthy, 2005). DVD product manager for Virgin Megastores, Bob Bell, contends that production costs have come down, and record companies have realized that music DVDs are really viable stand alone pieces. “The music DVD is no longer just an afterthought—not just old stuff from the vaults. They now know that it’s viable to go out and do an elaborate, multi-camera shoot to make one of these things,” says Bell (as cited in Baca, 2004, para. 15).

One DVD product that revives one of the more unforgettable music events some 20 years past is the extensive four-disc DVD box set of *Live Aid*. On July 13, 1985, *Live Aid*—a pair of simultaneous, internationally televised all-star rock shows in Philadelphia and London—raised tens of millions for the Ethiopian famine, launched an era of concerts for political causes, and assembled a bewildering cast of pop talent—from Patti LaBelle to Judas Priest. For all its pioneering power, the DVD release of *Live Aid* in late 2004—almost concurrent with its 20-year anniversary of the event—is a reminder that the fans were waiting for this event to come alive once again (Gilgoff & Silver, 2004).

The Southland Times (2004) reported that the last thing that practical humanitarians like Bob Geldof and Bono wanted for the 20th anniversary of *Live Aid* was for the focus to be misty-eyed nostalgia for what was achieved in 1985. However, with the release of the DVD in line with the anniversary, *Live Aid* was received as a nostalgic revisit to the past than an historical event. On November 1, 2004, the DVD hit the stores in the United States, under the nostalgic banner, "Relive the Day the Music Changed the World." The four-disc DVD set of *Live Aid* has sold about 100,000 copies in the U.S. in its first week of release, according to Nielsen SoundScan (Levine, 2004). In the U.K., the 20th anniversary *Live Aid* bandwagon has gotten off to a flying start on course to become the fastest-selling music DVD of all time by selling 20,000 marks in three days, outstripping its nearest music DVD rival by a factor of eight sales to one (Ashton, 2004).

As a music event, *Live Aid* was a key moment that continues to hound emotional responses from us at an ever-intensifying rate because of its motives and goals. Even today, the legacy of *Live Aid* still lives on, and the line-up of stars put together by Bob Geldof in a matter of months remains both remarkable and unsurpassed. Osborn (2004) says that one nostalgic reason to sift through all this live material is to realize how dreadful fashions were back in the 1980s and marvel at a myriad of laughable hairstyles. Also, he claims that the concerts are a revealing chunk of musical nostalgia which will revive memories of that long summer day all those years ago. Deziel (2004) puts the meaning into reliving the past and praises the latest technology. "Camp out all day in the living room-and watch 10 hours of footage-just like you did back on July 13, 1985. Only this time, you can skip past the ubiquitous U2 and Sting performances and refamiliarize yourself with the harder-to-remember sets of Spandau Ballet and REO Speedwagon," she

says (p. 56). Edlund (2004) writes that *Live Aid* DVD is useful as more than just a political reminder and is also a time capsule, an indispensable document of the mid 1980s music and culture. He says, “The DVD is worthwhile for the nostalgia trip alone. But even more so than the music and fashion, you may find yourself wishing to revisit the sense of purpose and the moral clarity *Live Aid* represented” (p. 15).

Even though *Live Aid* happened 20 years ago, the event had a special meaning to today’s contemporary artists, too. A group of artists—including Coldplay’s Chris Martin, Bono of U2, and members of The Darkness—reunited in late 2004 to record a new version of Band Aid’s “Do They Know It’s Christmas?,” the song that spread the whole movement for *Live Aid* in the first place back in 1984. In addition, the 20th anniversary of *Live Aid* led to another major live music event in 2005. The anniversary coincided with *Live 8*, a series of benefit concerts that took place in July 2005, in the G8 nations and South Africa. The concerts were timed to precede the G8 Conference and Summit held at the Gleneagles Hotel in Perthshire, Scotland from July 6-8, 2005. The performers included such ‘80s *Live Aid* alumni as Madonna, U2, and Sting, and the line-up also featured children of the ‘70s and ‘80s, who grew up in a time when original *Live Aid* was broadcast. Some of those artists include Dido, Good Charlotte, and Green Day. They speak of being inspired by the original *Live Aid* and the level of commitment that it reflected. “It was in every kid’s living room. It was the MTV generation’s glimpse of poverty and injustice in Africa,” recalls Green Day’s frontman, Billie Joe Armstrong (as cited in Gardener, 2005, p. 1E). This tells us that the original event holds a nostalgic significance to those who remember the past, both past and current generations, and this

specific instance demonstrates that, as Hanamirian (2003) challenges, the past has everything to do with the present.

Summary

The prosperity of the music industry, compared to television and radio, depends on commercial success because higher sale figures simply mean more money to the companies. Compact discs and DVDs are major products for the industry, with digital music formats—such as the Internet based digital downloads—becoming new media sources for the future. The '80s pop music has been very successful in the music industry, when considering its sale figures, popularity, and demand by the audience. One significant characteristic of the record industry concerning the '80s music nostalgia is a highly segmented nostalgia marketing strategy. Rhino and Razor & Tie utilized a 20-year cycle for their compilation series, and Warner released *Live Aid* DVD coinciding with the event's 20-year anniversary. In addition, since the music industry deals with tangible products, the record companies think highly of the outer appearance as much as contents. We can find this trait in genre-based products, luxurious packages, and extensive box sets. A second characteristic is that high sale figures reflect high demand by the audience for this period's music. Unlike TV or radio ratings that are relatively subjective and not particularly accurate, the sale figures are the exact numbers that indicate the success or failure of a certain product. The '80s music products generally have a high demand, and a lot of them are resurfacing on the market as compilations, reissues, or repackages that could not be offered in a similar fashion back in the '80s. A third characteristic is that the artists get exposure with the repackages or reissues of their

once popular music. With the development of new technologies, DVD has particularly become a solution to occupy a niche market.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The American public's interest in nostalgia, usually an historical 20-year cycle, is recreated and commodified by the media. Considering that the typical use of the media per day for the American public in 2006 is projected about 4.3 hours of TV, 2.7 hours of radio and satellite radio and roughly a half-hour each of the Internet, newspapers and music compact discs (Lindsay, 2006), the media's influence for creating any kind of trend, not to mention the retro '80s, would be enormous.

In this chapter, four assertions will be made. These are as follows; (1) nostalgia, indeed, is the main reason in the resurgence of the '80s popular music; (2) the '80s pop music nostalgia has become a product of itself, and the media—television, radio, and the music industry—rely on the nostalgia factor as their marketing strategies and treat nostalgia as a commodity; (3) the trend not only reflects the demographics of the audience but the media (i.e. producers and executives) as well; (4) popular music, for last several decades, has strongly re-emerged as a 20-year cycle.

Assertions

First, popular music, just like any other form of popular culture, has meanings, values, effects, and significance. Nostalgia is a natural phenomenon in popular music, and the aestheticization of nostalgia has emerged in new and dynamic ways. The classic

notion of nostalgia was a collectively felt and culturally realized experience of longing, but in the postmodern culture, nostalgia has also become a consumable style reflecting economies of taste. The current popular music scene, as far as the media's presentation is concerned, is dominated by the '80s retro style.

Second, it can be argued that the proliferation of nostalgic markets has to do with commercial success. This retrograde tendency suggests a moment distinguished by its re-evaluation and re-presentation of the forms, contexts, and values of the past. Nostalgia is our economic destiny, and a generation of relentless media consolidation has made dips into the archives inevitable. With so many options in today's state-of-the-art media technology, resurrecting a certain trend in the past has never been easier. That is, popular music nostalgia has become a commodity. Pop music is often defined as music produced commercially for profit, though it may more usefully be defined by market, ideology, production, and aesthetics. "Pop is not a do-it-yourself music but is professionally produced and packaged" (Frith, 2001, p. 95-96).

Third, the '80s nostalgia reflects the demographics of the audience and the producers responsible for the production of the '80s-related music programs and products. The thesis introduced some of the media executives and producers, who had first-hand experiences of the 1980s and found out that nostalgia would be the key to their success. The audience, particularly the generation that grew up listening to the music of the '80s, responded with enthusiasm and high demand in return. This has developed a synergy effect between the audience and producers. This is one reason why the decade's retro trend is still going strong in this current decade.

Fourth, the 20-year cycle is occurring in popular music, at least from the media's standpoint—judging from the history and past marketing instances of the media and the music industry. Although it is difficult to conclude that this cycle is a definite formula, the attention of the media on a 20-year-old pop culture trend usually seems to outweigh other ones. Even though there may be no answers that can clearly explain the exact reasons for this 20-year gap for a trend's resurgence, the thesis showed that people revisit the trend from two decades earlier in order to transport themselves back to the halcyon days of youth, based on the comments from the media personnel and popular culture experts.

Implications

Future research can look further into consumer and media relations or what the future holds in terms of the popularity of pop music nostalgia. It can also focus on the phenomenon from the audience's perspectives as much as the industry's viewpoints, rather than a general approach to the trend. What needs to be observed further into details is the discussion of nostalgia in popular music with the emphasis on the notion of generations. For instance, the nostalgic experience of Generation X, the party concerned with the '80s popular music nostalgia, is to be different in many ways from the experiences of other generations, such as baby boomers.

Also, the resurgence of music of the past can be approached from a new generation's point of view. As Snowsell (2004) contends, these high profile returns are not intended exclusively for reasons of nostalgia but may be aimed at a new generation of record buyers, members of an age group who know these acts only through their reputation as

having been once big 20 years ago. After all, popular music's main target has always been the youth.

Moreover, nostalgia in pop culture should be discussed with a new concept because of ever-changing nature of the media sources and advance of technology. Robert Thompson notes that sources of nostalgia can become depleted because nowadays our entire pop culture history is available on cable 24 hours a day. In an era of cable TV and retro radio stations, old TV shows and hit songs are always available (Bruinius, 2001). Also, some may argue that culture is moving at such a rapid pace now that we are at this point where we reminisce about last week, and nostalgia is not what it used to be (Neumaier, 2005).

Limitations

The limitation of the study includes the lack of observation of the trend from a variety of perspectives, especially when it comes to the rising popularity of new media. Online media are becoming some of the most prosperous, if not the most popular, media types today, but they were left out of the discussion because of their massive nature. Future study can focus on the Web sites or online services dedicated to the '80s popular music or possibly more state-of-the-art features, such as digital downloads and Web casts.

In addition, this phenomenon may be limited to American culture because of cultural differences. For instance, underdeveloped countries with limited access to the media and even the countries influenced heavily by the music other than the American popular music may have a different reaction to the '80s pop music than American standards.

Taking an intercultural observation—seeing if a similar trend is taking place in other countries—would be an intriguing approach.

It is also important to recognize that nostalgia in popular music is not limited to the decade of the '80s. For instance, in radio today, many different music genres stemming from different periods of our culture are presented. That is, people enjoy the music meaningful to their own generations, and the resurgence of the '80s music in this decade is just another retro trend among many others. As illustrated earlier, nostalgia in popular music is a recurring phenomenon, but the music of other genres and of other periods bears a significance of its own.

However, there is no denying that the '80s music has been enjoying a tremendous success over the last few years and become a standard for “retro-trend” in this decade when it comes to media presentation of nostalgia in popular music. Altogether, as discussed throughout, the '80s music nostalgia is proof that the decade's synthesizer-powered pop songs and hair-sprayed headbangers of that era still have a strange hold on the 30 and 40 something demographic.

The pop music culture may be once again on the verge of a predictable evolution as the first decade of the millennium is already entering its second half. Should that 20-year cycle be in effect, indeed, we will witness the resurgence of M.C. Hammer and Nirvana on TV or radio on a full scale any time soon. Only time will tell.

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