

SUNDAY

Living



The '80s are back!

From music to movies, the Me Decade has returned

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Our Present Day is

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PUT on your Frankie Goes to Hollywood T-shirt and grab that "Miami Vice" pastel blue jacket, because the '80s are back.

Everywhere you turn today — at the movies, in the bookstores and on radio and TV — the '80s have supplanted the '70s as the decade to remember. Culture Club played Radio City Music

'80s pop is everywhere these days. Blondie is performing on tomorrow night's American Music Awards, and VH1 keeps the decade alive, playing '80s videos in regular rotation.

Hall on New Year's Eve, Bret Easton Ellis and Jay McInerney are back in the bookstores and the smash comedy, "There's Something About Mary," placed its painfully unsuccessful prom date smack dab in the Reagan/Bush era.

Need more proof? On Jan. 14, entrepreneurs Bobby Watman and Tim Ouellette open their latest dance space, a 10,000-square-foot ode to the '80s called Culture Club. Located in SoHo, it joins their string of '70s-themed clubs, Polly Esther's, found here in New York and in a handful of cities across the country such as San Francisco, Seattle and Chicago. For Watman and Ouellette, re-creating the '70s was more of a history project. "We were only in our single digits then," admits Watman. But the '80s was the decade these two thirtysomethings could first drive, drink legally and vote, so filling Culture Club with the right pop cultural icons was as easy as popping in a "Flashdance" soundtrack or rewatching "The Breakfast Club."

The walls of Culture Club are bursting with larger-than-life images from the '80s: a recreation of MTV's early ads (the one where an astronaut plants a flag on the moon with the MTV logo), Tom Cruise in "Cocktail," Michael Jackson, Madonna, Bruce Springsteen (circa "Born in the USA") and, of course, Boy George.

The club also features oversized Rubik's Cubes, dangling from the ceiling; a Donald Trump VIP area; and even a Purple Rain dance floor, complete with purple lights. But the centerpiece — and the closest they come to digging into Hard Rock Cafes or Planet Hollywood's terrain — is a DeLorean automobile, parked in front of a "Back to the Future" logo.

"We searched for months on the Internet, trying to find one inexpensive enough," says Ouellette.



Tim Ouellette and Bob Watman (above) relax on top of this iconographic '80s DeLorean in their new Varick Street dance space, Culture Club. A poster of Tom Cruise from 1988's "Cocktail" and a blow-up of Duran Duran's "Rio" album cover (below) also adorn the nostalgic nightspot's bar.



"Finally we found one without an engine for \$5,000. We had to have it — it's so perfect for the '80s because of the Michael J. Fox movies, DeLorean himself and the drugs and everything else."

While collecting '80s artifacts wasn't entirely easy, the Culture Club should have no problem pumping in the right music. The '80s sound is everywhere these days. In fact, Blondie is publicly singing — for the first time in 17

years — on tomorrow night's American Music Awards on ABC, and she'll follow that performance with a new album and a U.S. tour in the spring. And OMD — best known for its hit single, "If You Leave," from the '80s classic "Pretty in Pink" — just released a greatest hits compilation that's garnered rave reviews. Additionally, Rhino Records is selling a 15-volume series called, "Just Can't Get Enough: New Wave Hits of the

'80s," bursting with that time's tunes like ABC's "The Look of Love (Part One)" and A Flock of Seagulls' "I Ran (So Far Away)." VH1 is also keeping the decade alive by playing '80s videos in regular rotation.

Then there's Culture Club — the band. (It has no link to the club that's opening since George O'Dowd, a.k.a. Boy George, and friends apparently failed to copyright the group's name for use as a bar/dance space.) The undram-

nous group is enjoying the full monty of '80s revivalism: Billboard magazine highlighted them as comeback kings (and queens), and they recently released a two CD retrospective set and completed a big concert tour on Friday. (For several dates, the band was joined by another '80s icon, Howard Jones.) Culture Club also has a Top Five single in Great Britain with "I Just Wanna Be Loved" and a new

More '80s-influenced movies are on the way. The coming-of-age comedy, "Edge of Seventeen," begins with the unmistakable stomp of Toni Basil's hit, "Mickey," and features a guy who worships Annie Lennox of Eurythmics.

album in the works that could be out as early as this spring.

To some, hearing '80s pop again is hardly surprising. "These things tend to go in 20-year cycles," says Rob Levine, the music editor of Details. "In the '70s, we were obsessed with the '50s — think of 'Grease' or 'Happy Days.' In the '80s, it was the '60s, with the Grateful Dead becoming big again and tie-dyed clothes in the malls. In the '90s, we wore bell-bottoms and made bad movies about Studio 54. So as we approach the millennium, it's only natural we revisit the New Wave of the '80s," says Levine.

That same pattern is appearing at the movies. The action of "There's Something About Mary" begins in the '80s while "Boogie Nights" ends there. And one of the surprise hits of '98 — Adam Sandler's "The Wedding Singer" — was set entirely in the Me Decade. The film featured a cameo by '80s star Billy Idol, jokes about Van Halen never breaking up, guys wearing only one glove like Michael Jackson, and a shot of Drew Barrymore's smarmy, no-good fiance driving a DeLorean.

And while two symbols of '70s movies flopped commercially with their new releases in '98 (Warren Beatty with "Bulworth" and Robert Redford with "The Horse Whisperer"), '80s alumna Ally Sheedy used her newly hip again status — at press junkets — to draw attention to her performance in the indie flick, "High Art." The result? Sheedy's been named best actress by both the Los Angeles Film Critics and the National Society of Film Critics and even has a shot at a possible Oscar nomination.

Still, more '80s-influenced movies are on the way. The most noteworthy is "Edge of Seventeen," a coming-of-age comedy.

Back to the Future



Ben Stiller snagged more than Cameron Diaz during his '80s flashback in "There's Something About Mary."



Adam Sandler sings the praises of the '80s in "The Wedding Singer."

set in Ohio, that's being screened at this month's Sundance Film Festival. Written by 31-year-old Todd Stephens, it starts with the unmistakable stomp of Toni Basil's hit, "Mickey." But that's just the beginning. The film also features a guy who worships Annie Lennox of Eurythmics, and is bubbling over with '80s memorabilia. For its filmmaker, though, "Edge of Seventeen" isn't a period piece. "This is my life," says Stephens, adding, "a lot of the props in the film were things of mine that I bought in the '80s and just saved — like a huge Eurythmics banner, a great Culture

Club school binder, and all those albums and clothes." He says crew members, who also came-of-age in the '80s, began bringing in props as well.

Just as George Lucas celebrated his childhood of the early '60s with "American Graffiti" and Richard Linklater gleefully recreated the '70s with "Dazed and Confused," artists like Stephens are similarly writing about what they know best when they recreate the '80s.

"There's always been nostalgia for childhood or some idealized past, of course, but this heavy mining of recent pop culture is

very new," says Herbert Gans, a professor of sociology at Columbia University.

It's precisely because of this harkening back that the best drama of the '80s, "Hill Street Blues" is rebroadcast on TV Land and "Cheers" is scheduled to enter the pantheon of Nick at Nite classics.

Perhaps that's also why "CHiPS" was recently resurrected on TNT — as "CHiPS '99" — with Erik Estrada and Larry Wilcox, still smiling and fighting crime without ever unholstering their guns. That TV special touch such a cord that it's likely to spawn two more, according to Estrada, who naturally remembers the '80s with fondness. "I got to meet Ronald Reagan," says the actor, who turns 50 in March and is still smiling after reprising his biggest role. "It was a fun time — post-Vietnam and pre-AIDS and pre-crack," says Estrada.

Ouellette and Watman also recall the '80s as a fun time, but they're mostly banking — an '80s obsession — on its nostalgic appeal. While other clubs play the music of the previous decade only on theme nights, the Culture Club owners took the extra step of tracking down a giant "Ghostbusters" symbol and an oversized can of New Coke.

Although they've been successful in summing up the '70s with a smiley face (for Polly Esther's logo) and the '80s with the cheerfully greedy video game Pac-Man, they haven't quite caught up to the '90s. When asked what symbol will define this decade, they're momentarily stumped. "That's a good question," they say. No doubt we'll all know — in a year or two.



Pac-Man, who, like other '80s men, greedily went after everything he could, is now the logo of the downtown Culture Club (inset photo).