

# Where have all the boy bands gone?

Gone to hip-hop everyone. And that's a great pity, says *Sondi Bruner*

What ever happened to boy bands? You know, the Backstreet Boys, \*NSync, 98, O-Town, 5ive and any other group of four or five doe-eyed cuties with smooth moves, great haircuts and the ability to break hearts with just a smile or an eye twinkle.

Suddenly they're obsolete, swept aside by highly sexualized rebellious hip-hop and R&B rappers who rob their preteen fans of their innocence.

I'm not ashamed to yearn for the resurrection of boy bands, even if my 23-year-old heart is older and wiser than it was five years ago when I attended my first Backstreet Boys concert. I went with Mom to that one - and five more as well.

At Toronto's SkyDome in 1999, Brian waved to me. At Buffalo's Darien Lake in 1998, Howie threw me a rose. I was gracious enough to give the rose to the little girl sitting behind me. (My mother was outraged by this).

Everyone made fun of me, but I knew I was not alone. There were thousands of other girls like me; and, as I was told by a friend who worked at SkyDome's Hard Rock Café, a number of older females as well. On the afternoon of one of their concerts, my friend explained that she played hostess to a group of women from the "over 40" Backstreet fan club - a club that she described as a bunch of shellacked cougars trying to recapture their lost youth.

What magic did these sappy, prepackaged pop confections work on me?

Well, the boys were cute - and they told me what I most wanted to hear. They weren't the pimply-faced, mean boys who teased me.

They were telling me that in some parallel universe, not beyond reach, exist nice boys who said all the right things, loved and respected you and were perfect to bring home to your overprotective parents.

Lou Pearlman, founder of Transcontinental Records who launched bands such as Backstreet Boys, \*NSync and O-Town, has always said as long as God made little girls, there would always be boy



Members of once-hot band \*NSync (from left) Chris Kirkpatrick, Lance Bass, Justin Timberlake, JC Chasez and Joey Fatone.

bands. He was wrong. Boy bands have virtually disappeared.

When the boy bands began to multiply exponentially, people got sick of them. Faced with a severe backlash, boy bands were forced to reinvent themselves, or they broke up to pursue solo careers - some with success, like Justin Timberlake.

Suddenly it seems every music video features scantily clad, gyrating women. Forget the message of the Backstreet Boys: "I don't care who you are, where you're from, what you did as long as you love me."

Now it's 50 Cent telling 12-year-old girls: "I like 'em slim in the waist, curves in the right place. A bitch wit' hips, lips, and a nice face."

Christina Aguilera and Britney Spears have traded in their Mickey Mouse Club ears for gyrating

crotches and open-mouthed kisses with Madonna.

In a recent article in *The Globe and Mail*, Guy Trebay reported on the increasing number of young girls who are dressing inappropriately for their ages and the arguments this provokes between girls and their parents.

This clash has been dubbed the "whore wars" on the Internet. Trebay suggested that the whore wars might, in fact, be a "cultural alert."

Well, you would never have found an inadequately dressed female in a Backstreet Boys video, and, when I was 12, I couldn't have explained what a tube top was if my life depended on it.

Given such effects of current popular music on young girls, boy band culture doesn't seem so bad. Critics cried out against boy bands, claiming their

lack of talent, manufactured presentation and mundane lyrics.

But boy bands served an important function. They allowed young girls to be cool and innocent, at the very moment kids are trying to figure out where the line is drawn between love and lust, power and submission, cool and geek.

Today's hip-hop and R&B artists only encourage preteens to accelerate their adulthood and sexuality when they aren't ready to do so.

Still, I don't hear anyone calling for the return of the boy band.

Let's all rouse together and bring back the boy bands. Our young girls need them desperately.

*Sondi Bruner* is a student at UBC's school of journalism.