

A Bon Jovi kind of town



We love us some Bon Jovi

HENNY RAY ABRAMS/AP

Former hair band still has a place in 'Burgh rockers' hearts

By Jodi Weigand
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Bon Jovi doesn't need to live on a prayer — the band still has plenty of fans keeping the faith.

At least, that's the case in Pittsburgh, where the former hair band is as popular as it was in the '80s.

But that's not necessarily a sign that Pittsburghers are stuck in the past.

"I think healthy people have a healthy connection with the past," said Dr. Paul Friday, chief of clinical psychology at UPMC Shadyside. "Going to see Bon Jovi isn't a sign of living retro. I'm not worried that Bon Jovi is here and it's a sign that this rust-belt town is slipping down the Ohio River."

The young at heart and youthful club hoppers have kept Bon Jovi at the top of the music charts for more than 20 years. They'll no doubt be out en masse for tonight's concert at Mellon Arena and for a second show March 15.

"It's one of those bands that everyone kind of reminisces to," said Jeff

Kolbfleisch, manager and keyboardist with Bon-Journey, a local Bon Jovi and Journey cover band. "People kind of grew up with them, and they remember going out and having a good time with their friends."

Bon Jovi's down-to-earth lyrics resonate with Pittsburgh's blue-collar folks, Kolbfleisch said.

"It's not over anybody's head, and I think that's why it appeals to a mass group of people of all walks," he said.

Bon Jovi's attraction among 20-somethings is a bit of a mystery, Kolbfleisch said.

Perhaps it has something to do with the band's "It's My Life" attitude.

"We go on college campuses, and there's no way these kids should know this material," Kolbfleisch said.

"They're singing songs that were on the charts maybe before they were born, or, at least, long before they were listening to any type of popular music."

Pitt student Ben Denissen, 19, said Bon Jovi is "kind of weird" but still likes the band's music. He might even try to get concert tickets.

Friday said he met a 46-year-old woman who not only bought her 16-year-old daughter tickets to tonight's concert but is going with her.

"It's just a sign that people know what they like and like what they know," he said.

Part of Bon Jovi's success, Kolbfleisch said, is that the man and the band have been masters of reinvention.

"They started out with all the spandex, wild outfits and all the hairspray, and they've tamed themselves down and they're growing older with their original fan base," he said. "They've reinvented themselves time and time again as times have changed."

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\$6 million for Venetian blinds?

According to stage designer Douglas "Spike" Brant, the set for Bon Jovi's previous tour was rather ordinary.

"The show was very stripped down with no technology, and a very simple wooden set," said Brant, who works for ArtFag LLC, a New York- and Los Angeles-based company whose credits include design work for Mariah Carey, Green Day, Beyonce and the NFL.

But that's not what concert-goers are going to see tonight when Bon Jovi performs at the Mellon Arena. For the current tour, the band requested an elaborate set-up, in the round, no less.

Brant and his associates enlisted Tait Towers, a Lititz, Lancaster County, company in the heart of Pennsylvania Dutch country for assistance.

The firm, which manufactures staging and automation for the touring industry and whose clients include The Police, the Rolling Stones, U2 and Super Bowl halftime shows, came up with Venetian blinds.

Yep, good old-fashion Venetian blinds, albeit on a scale that supersedes

anything in your grandmother's sitting room.

Tait designed Venetian blind video screens made of double-sided monitors, allowing fans to see Bon Jovi from every angle possible. Expanding from 10 feet by 10 feet to 10 feet by 30 feet, and showing the concert in 360 degrees, the screens are unique to this tour.

"There's nothing else like it," said Tait Towers vice president Adam D. Davis, a Carnegie Mellon University graduate. "Bon Jovi is always pushing the frontier of what's possible, technically, with video, and they've done it again."

According to Davis, the blinds cost about \$6 million. One of the biggest hurdles was designing a system that could be assembled in about an hour and easily transportable. "It's one thing to make it and have it live there (in one place) forever," Davis said. "To make it and have it come apart in a matter of moments, then troop around to the next city, that's tough."

While fans are likely to be amazed at the technical wizardry of the stage design, Brant admits that the staging and design is meant to put the musicians in their best light; pleasing the audience is merely an offshoot of that.

— Regis Behe/Tribune-Review



The stage

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GET OUT!

Here's some stuff you can do today

- Acoustic open stage:** 9 p.m.
Thunderbird Cafe, Lawrenceville.
412-682-0177.
- All Pro Wednesday:** 7:30 p.m. \$8.
Funny Bone, Station Square.
412-281-3130.
- Deborah Acklin: Noon The War That Made America:** Illustrated talk by WQED Multimedia executive vice president and general manager. Foerster Student Services Center, Community College of Allegheny County, 808 Ridge Ave., North Side. 412-237-4670.
- Bang Marino, Josh Moore, Elliott Sussman, Gary Musisko:** 8 p.m.
Garfield Artworks, Garfield.
412-361-2262.
- Bang Camaro, Ninjas Who Met God:** 8 p.m. \$8-\$10. Mr. Small's Theatre, Millvale. 866-468-3401.
- Michele Bensen and Ron Bickel:** 7 p.m. Willow, Ohio Township.
412-847-1007.
- "The Big Bang":** 7:30 p.m. \$34.50 and \$39.50. Pittsburgh Civic Light Opera Cabaret. The Cabaret at Theater Square, 655 Penn Ave., Downtown. 412-456-6666.
- Kenny Blake jam session:** 9 p.m.
Gullifty's, Squirrel Hill.
412-521-8222.
- Blues-rock jam with the Freeport Road Band:** 8 p.m. Moondog's, Blawnox. 412-828-2040.
- Bon Jovi, Daughtry:** 7 p.m. Mellon Arena, Uptown. 412-323-1919.
- Carnegie Science Center:** 7 p.m. \$37; \$29 for members; \$31 for children; \$25 for member children. Guided tour of "Bodies" exhibit includes 40-minute, hands-on anatomy workshop. SportsWorks, 1 Allegheny Ave., North Shore. 412-237-3400.
- Cobra Starship, Metro Station, We the Kings, The Cab:** 7 p.m.
\$12-\$14. Diesel, South Side.
412-431-8800.
- Fuzz:** 10 p.m. \$5. Bloomfield Bridge Tavern, Bloomfield. 412-682-8611.
- Jazz/funk jam with Poogie Bell:** 9:30 p.m. Thunderbird Cafe, Lawrenceville. 412-682-0177.
- Amy Munoz:** 12:30 p.m. Organ recital by Duquesne University sophomore. Music at Midday Series, First Lutheran Church, 615 Grant St., Uptown. 412-471-8125.
- Pittsburgh Banjo Club:** 8-11 p.m.
Allegheny Elks Lodge No. 339, 400 Cedar Ave., North Side.
412-321-1834.
- Henry Rollins:** 7:30 p.m. \$30. Rex Theatre, South Side. 412-381-6811.
- "Spring Medley":** 12:15 p.m.
Performance by Pittsburgh Opera singers. Pittsburgh Opera, 801 Penn Ave., Downtown. 412-281-0912.
- Anthony Thomas Trio:** 7 p.m.
Sewickley Hotel, Sewickley.
412-741-9457.

Got something you'd like to see us mention? Send it to "The Big List" c/o Ticket, Pittsburgh Tribune-Review, 503 Martindale St., Pittsburgh, PA 15212, or e-mail ticket@tribweb.com.