

## The Boston Globe



They love the '80s: Fast Times wants big hair, happy fans, and a chance to play their favorite songs

**By Jonathan Perry, Globe Correspondent, January 7, 2005**

Depending on when you were a teenager, the spectacle taking place in an upstairs room at the Black Rose Irish Pub on Saturday night is either a dream done up in "Miami Vice" pastels or a shudder-inducing "Nightmare on Elm Street." It's just after 9 p.m. and already a generously imbibing corporate crowd, packed into the bar for a holiday office party, is whooping it up, blurting out requests for something, *anything*, from the Flock of Seagulls catalog.

When Fast Times, a Malden-based '80s cover band, opts for Duran Duran's "Hungry Like the Wolf," nailing the song's slick hairspray-and-Eurotrash vibe, a gang of mortgage company employees hits the dance floor like a herd of promgoers. Even the guys in business suits clutching their Scotches start to surreptitiously twitch their hips.

"The '80s rocked -- it was [expletive] awesome!" recalls Mike Couture, 40, an account executive. "I did it all and saw everybody, from Loverboy to Molly Hatchet to Rush to Cyndi Lauper, Queen -- I saw 'em all!" For a moment, the buffet table loaded with Swedish meatballs and littered with cocktail napkins fades as Couture's Reagan-era college memories come flooding back.

Fast Times, named after the seminal 1982 flick "Fast Times at Ridgemont High," specializes in eliciting precisely this kind of reaction when it performs. And perform it does, all over New England, racking up 45 gigs in the last year alone, and roughly 70 shows since it began playing in public nearly two years ago. And the band is likely to get even busier.

If the recent boom of entertainment programming milking '80s nostalgia such as VH1's "I Love the '80s" is any indication, pop culture's fixation on the decade of "Dynasty" and acid-washed jeans is at its zenith. Even onetime fashion nightmares like those off-the-shoulder "Flashdance"-style sweatshirts are making a comeback. The zeal with which Fast Times is received by audiences is an unsettling reminder that *somebody* bought all those Bryan Adams records.

Its performances have been as varied as the color combinations on a Rubik's Cube: weddings and birthdays, cruise ships and ski resorts, graduation parties and rock clubs willing to take a chance that a cover band specializing in Joan Jett and Journey can fill the room and, more important, the bar coffers.

"All I want to do is get my hair bigger, and I can't!" says singer Sofia Trapotsis, who, with Israeli-born drummer Yotam Rosenbaum, is the youngest member of the band at 28. "You don't know how many hairspray bottles I've gone through." Nevertheless, when the light hits her teased hair, fishnet gloves, and torn pink T-shirt just right, Trapotsis looks like a less toothy Pat Benatar, or a shorter Sheena Easton.



For the Manchester, N.H., native, Fast Times is a girl's dream come true. "I used to sit in my room listening to Madonna songs and imagined one day singing them," she says. "And now I am."

But wardrobe worries aren't merely the concerns of a dance-floor diva. Assembling the right combination of cringe-worthy attire is everybody's priority. "My suit's pretty bad," keyboardist John Polischuk readily acknowledges, referring to the sky-blue, shoulder-padded ensemble he ensconces himself in for gigs. "If I walk out in public with that, my girlfriend won't be seen with me."

Band members take in stride the occasional online taunts they find themselves subjected to because they don't write original material. "Everybody's entitled to their opinion, but we're doing the music because we enjoy it. We're not doing it to sell out," says Polischuk, who graduated from Malden High in 1988. "Our focus is to get the crowd out on the floor and get the party hoppin'. Yeah, it's tongue in cheek, but we do take the music seriously."

These priorities, plus the band's ability to poke fun at the tackiest aspects of the era without condescending to it or its audience, appear to have put Fast Times on a fast track.

Polischuk and Hingham-born guitarist Greg Elsdon (Hingham High class of '87) knew they were on to a good thing when, as field reps for a life sciences company, they began jamming together after hours. The two quickly realized that what they had in common was an adolescence spent in the much-maligned '80s -- Elsdon still recoils at the thought of the stirrup pants girls used to wear -- and an abiding fondness for the pop and rock music of the era.

They never even considered writing their own material. What was the point with so many '80s classics waiting to be resuscitated? "We don't have an original thought in our collective mind," Elsdon says with a broad grin. He's got more important things to worry about, like choosing the right outfit. "You can't dress heavy with all the lights on you," says Elsdon, who, on this Saturday night favored a look reminiscent of Loverboy's Mike Reno: headband, black leather pants, and aqua T-shirt (sleeveless, of course).

Although there are other cover bands around New England (and at least two other '80s cover bands named Fast Times, both of which perform on the West Coast), the Malden outfit -- which also includes bassist Marc Fortier -- fervently believes, as all cover bands must, that it is the best qualified for the job of rocking the party. It's got almost 100 songs down cold, and there is something impressive about a group of musicians who can belt out an AC/DC number one moment and then break out the pompoms for Toni Basil's "Mickey" the next.

"You can go to any bar and hear [Rick Springfield's] 'Jessie's Girl,'" Polischuk says, "but a lot of the songs we perform you're not going to hear anywhere else. If you want to hear the studio version of a song, all you have to do is plug in a karaoke machine. It sounds the same every single time you play it. But we may take a song 10, 15 beats faster per minute if the crowd's into it."

Alex Kinnier and his fiancée, Adria Lazur, both 30, are planning an '80s-themed wedding in May. After coming upon the band's website ([www.fasttimes.biz](http://www.fasttimes.biz)), the couple trekked all the way to Boston from

Philadelphia to catch Fast Times in the flesh. Sure, it meant crashing the mortgage company's private party after a full day's drive, but seeing and hearing the band cheerfully rip through the Go-Go's "We Got the Beat" and Men at Work's "Down Under" was, in their estimation, worth the trip. The band's energy and personality sealed the deal.

"There aren't a whole lot of good '80s cover bands on the East Coast," says Kinnier, sounding very much like a man who's logged serious hours researching the subject. "There's a really good one in D.C. called the Legwarmers, but they tour professionally and couldn't do our wedding in May."

The way Polischuk sees it, as long as people continue to celebrate life's big moments, Fast Times will be there. "There will always be class reunions and there will always be weddings," muses Polischuk about his band's ability to remain gainfully employed. After all, the music of the 1980s will always be the soundtrack to somebody's high school yearbook