

## Nostalgia junkies lose out

By Ruth Ostrow

LOU Reed is coming. It's the talk of my friends who are all running around as if God were descending on our shores.

Everyone is scrambling to get tickets. Everyone is telling stories about where they were when Walk on the Wild Side became a hit. What they were doing, who they were sleeping with.

"Oooh, too many drug parties, man," one friend says, reverting to the lingo from a bygone era. "I remember I was living in a shared house, I was travelling around Greece on a motorcycle with this hot guy ..."

Every time Reed's name is mentioned, people around me break out into that legendary verse: Hey babe, take a walk on the wild side/ Said hey honey, take a walk on the wild side/ And the coloured girls go doo du doo du doo, doo-du-doo.

I went on like this when Art Garfunkel came north recently. Somehow he summed up my childhood more than Reed did. While others were getting ripped and getting high, my youth looked more like a scene from *The Graduate*, with Scarborough Fair and Sounds of Silence playing pensively, moodily, in the background.

Listening to Garfunkel felt like flicking through living photographs. And then along trotted Jose Feliciano a few months later singing *Light My Fire*, which was another treat. Ageing pop stars, preserved in formaldehyde, brought out of cold storage for One Last Performance are as daggy as wearing flannelette pyjamas to bed. But they are just as warm and nurturing to the soul.

Many of my friends made the pilgrimage to Sydney when the Rolling Stones toured. I won't travel that far for a nostalgia fix but will happily cram into the car and drive two hours to Brisbane. Because, the truth is, Walk on the Wild Side is one of the most fabulous songs ever written and it makes my heart thump each time I hear it.

Ironically, the same weekend as Reed is playing, there's a nearby performance by another famous visiting American. He is guru economist, adviser to two US presidential administrations, software multi-millionaire-turned-speaker, Paul Zane Pilzer -- and he's in Australia to tell us about the growth industries of the next decade.

Pilzer explains that the biggest and most affluent demographic group in the Western world remains the baby boomers, born from 1945 to 1964 -- of which I am a tail-ender. Ageing boomers are the market that everyone is targeting.

They are obsessed with recapturing their youth. Boomers don't just want to keep their youth with pills and creams, they want to remember it. They love their memories. Pilzer says every advertising pitch, jingle written, product developed for this market, plays on the tendency to youth worship and nostalgia that plagues those born in this era.

Other demographic groups are forced by advertisers and marketers to wear retrograde fashion like '70s-style vests and flared pants so that boomers can reminisce. Even '80s-style jackets with three buttons are making a comeback.

One of the latest Fords is modelled on an old Chevrolet convertible, he says.

Deep down, boomers want nothing to change -- not their ageing skin, not the political climate, not their creature comforts. And certainly not Lou Reed.

True to form, the Queensland Performing Arts Centre building in Brisbane is packed with boomer fans. For those of us here, time has stopped. Though we sport jackets and nice pants, though we are at a venue better suited to classical music than rock'n'roll, we're going to take a walk on the wild side. We're going to close our eyes and hold time as a prisoner. Locked in our hearts where it can't escape.

On to the stage steps Reed, still in black leather pants and t-shirt but looking considerably worse for wear. It's only the drugs, we reassure ourselves, to avoid the truth of ageing.

He begins his repertoire in that great, detached sing-speak, playing the beginnings of Wild Side as we cheer wildly. He sends himself up for making a career out of three chords. But he doesn't come back to the song. Instead he moves on.

He plays different music -- or the same music differently. He has a cellist, classical backup singers and, most unusually, his tai chi master. Reed has exchanged drugs for Eastern philosophy. As he sings, his master moves gracefully on stage.

The concert ends. There is no Wild Side. For me, it's like two hours of foreplay without a "happy ending". I'm frustrated. I stomp my feet with the crowd, like a child demanding a dummy. Reed comes back. He sings something about embracing the new man within, while his master kicks the sky.

We stomp our feet again after the first encore, waiting to relive those wilder moments, to dance in a frenzy, to scream out the words of the song we've come so far to hear. To open the photo albums of our minds. Doo du doo du doo. But the lights come on. And it's time for us baby boomers, us nostalgia junkies, to face the music. The truth that no advertising corporation will let us admit -- everything changes.

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