

Nostalgia for '80s may jolt Gen-Xers

The New Wavers and early Gen-Xers of the 1980s are in for a shock — they are getting old.

Cable network VH1 has found a way to pummel home the lesson with its latest installment of "Hard Rock Live," a series of live performances airing at midnight Saturdays.

Tonight's edition brings together two staples of 1980s college radio, the Cure and the Violent Femmes. Both bands still sound good, but it is shocking to see them graying at the temples and a bit broader in the beam.

VH1 makes the changes more striking by including short histories of the bands, including photos and films of the musicians in their younger — and thinner — heyday.

Of the two, the Cure's sound has survived the best. Singer Robert Smith looks ridiculous — he insists on maintaining his trademark flyaway hair and eye shadow — but still has the fluid and quirky voice fans will remember. Unfortunately, the cavernous and impersonal VH1 studio only highlights how sterile and monochromatic the Cure's music can be.

The Violent Femmes, meanwhile, have changed in strange ways. The tunes sound the same, but singer Gordon Gano now sounds exactly like former Talking Heads singer David Byrne. Mr. Gano's strange delivery of his classic hits, such as the college anthem "Blister in the Sun," is disconcerting and unlikely to please fans steeped in the band's early work. — *Sean Scully*

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