

# Horn-driven band Cold Duck has generations of fans

In the late 1960s and early '70s, there was a phenomenon going on in popular music. It was the era of horn bands, large-sized ensembles that incorporated horn sections with rhythm sections.

The bands played flashy, vibrant pop music that was sonically charged, infusing it with jazz and/or Latin flavorings. It was music that was felt as well as heard.

Many of those bands are now history, but a few have survived the test of time and are still lighting up audiences today. Chicago, Blood Sweat and Tears, Tower of Power and Cold Duck are all still plugging away.

Cold Duck? The eight-piece band, which will be playing Feb. 23 and 24 at the Hop in Puente Hills, belongs in the same breath as those other legendary groups.

When Cold Duck was formed in 1969 in trumpeter Jose Cuadra's garage, the members were 15- and 16-year-old high schoolers with dreams of becoming a force in pop music.

Within a short period, the group established itself as the premiere dance band in the L.A. area. By the time it won a "Battle of the Bands" competition at East Los Angeles College in 1971, it looked like Cold Duck was well on its way.

"Man, it was quite a time," Cuadra said. "After that concert, it felt like we were the Beatles. We had record companies knocking on the door trying to sign us."

The group settled on a deal with A&M Records and prepared to



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entered the studio as the new management dissolved amid legal problems. The band members veered off into different professions.

Yet somehow over the years the drive remained alive and, in 1978, the band revived itself. For the last 22 years, it has maintained the same lineup. There is a difference now, however, and it may help explain the band's longevity.

"Now we do it mostly for fun, more as a hobby than as a business," Cuadra said. "We play Top 40 covers, mainly from the '70s, and we have a great time doing it."

There no longer is the need to become pop stars. After all, the group is now made up of engineers, scientists, even a boys dean from a local high school.

Keyboardist Gregg Smith stayed with music as a career and tours the world with artists such as Jose Feliciano.

"But he always comes back because he loves playing with the

guys," Cuadra said. "He went through the star thing with the group Animation, and I don't think he wants any part of that again."

Today, the band still gets together once a week to rehearse. In addition to its own local club circuit, including the Hop and Zendas restaurant in San Dimas, the band does a lot of civic and charity work.

In 1997, Cold Duck was honored with the Chicano Music Award. It also has a self-titled CD that the band released on its own, one of the better get-down-and-have-a-good-time party CDs you will find.

Over the years, the band has had the opportunity to play for a number of generations of fans.

"I've had people come up and say, 'Hey, you played my mom's graduation,' or 'You guys did my granddaughter's prom,'" Cuadra said, laughing.

"And since we do a lot of civic parks concerts, it seems like we're on somebody's local access cable channel all the time.

"As long as we can keep giving people what they want and still have fun, we'll keep going."