I Want My HIV

Michelle Tan dives into the “awareness” buzz bin

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Supposedly the goal of this concert is to educate teens about HIV, but the parents seated in front of me in New York City’s Beacon Theatre have two boys probably still the age when you spell out S-E-X. But we’ve got something in common -- the guilty pleasure of saccharine pop stars, all benefiting the music industry AIDS organization LIFEbeat and taped for later broadcast on MTV.

VJ Dave Holmes, sporting unconventionally bland brown hair, steps to the stage to make the introductions. “Half the folks getting infected with HIV right now are between the ages of 13 and 25,” he shouts. “That’s you!” The audience erupts in thunderous applause. I can’t help imagining the logical conclusion of such infectious enthusiasm: starry-eyed teens screaming for HIV in a fit of drum-and-bass-induced elation. AIDS is so cool, everyone should have it!

In between musical acts, we hear from AIDS czar Sandy Thurman (lukewarm acknowledgement) and actor Laura Pepon from *That ’70s Show* (raucous applause), and a screen is lowered over the stage to show Levi’s World AIDS Day commercials. In the best ad, a condom outruns marathoners -- because you “last longer with a condom.” Snickering ripples among the crowd.

The screaming turns ultrasonic when *Total Request Live* heartthrob Carson Daly shuffles out in a baseball cap. After a short spiel -- “I know AIDS awareness is at the top of my priority list, as it is on yours” -- Daly introduces the real reason people shelled out $75 a pop: the fab four hunks of 98°. The World AIDS Day slogan this year does say that men will make the difference, after all.

After declaring AIDS to be a “worldly, worldly” cause, the boy band ends the event with their single "*Una Noche*,“ which they say is ”about having fun for just one night.“ It’s hard to tell over the hollering, but I want to believe they added ”with a condom."

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