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All right, babies — see you at the disco

■ This family dance party calls itself Baby Loves Disco, but mommies and daddies treat it as playtime too.

By Shana Ting Lipton, Special to The Times

Shortly after noon on a recent Sunday, two disparate scenes involuntarily collided at the Larchmont, a nightclub on Melrose Avenue. Bedraggled ravers — leftovers from Saturday night's festivities — crossed paths with Brooklyn, N.Y., promoter Andy Hurwitz and his crew.

There would have been nothing particularly unusual about this were it not for the fact that Hurwitz's club party, Baby Loves Disco, started at 2 o'clock in the afternoon and his extended crew consists of a bunch of parents and their children, ages 10 and younger. The kid-friendly monthly event, which made its L.A. debut June 25 and continues this Sunday at the Knitting Factory, has been touring the country since it became a New York hit last autumn.



Bubbly
(Ken Hively / LAT)



Daytime nightclub
(Ken Hively / LAT)



Socializing
(Ken Hively / LAT)

The seed for a kinderdisco was planted in Philadelphia — Hurwitz's hometown — when dancer Heather Murphy decided to create an alternative to the usual children's leisure time options of playgrounds, amusement parks and the like. Hurwitz, a small record label owner, attended the "dayclub" with his wife and two kids. They had such a great time that a plan began to stew in his mind. He recalls when it hit him: "I was at a Barney concert, thinking, 'This is my life?' You go see Barney and you want to put a gun to your head after."

Disdain for the overzealous purple dinosaur character

notwithstanding, Hurwitz saw a niche that needed filling. He helped Murphy bring the event to New York. Other cities such as San Francisco, Aurora, Ill., Chicago and Boulder, Colo., followed — the latter two thanks to petitions assembled by ardent local parents who had read about other cities' Baby Loves Disco club parties. "We arrived in Boulder and sold out 700 tickets in advance," Hurwitz says.

At the L.A. premiere, clubbers of all sizes relaxed with toys and games in the chill-out room upstairs. Downstairs, some hip parents held their toddlers as they rhythmically moved around the balloon-festooned dance floor, reliving their youth, no doubt, to the beat of music by Madonna and the Bee Gees. Children hula-hooped to tunes like Blondie's "Rapture," as bubbles wafted through the air.

Then the voice of Morty Coyle (aka DJ Morty) boomed over the sound system, announcing, "This is Baby Loves Disco. 'Saturday Night Fever' on a Sunday afternoon." This was a first for Coyle, who spins regularly at trendy Hollywood nightclubs like Shag and the Dragonfly. But, he jokes, "I'm used to dealing with a bunch of people that drool uncontrollably, walk into everything and are fascinated by shiny colors."

Ironically, his many years in L.A.'s music scene brought him right back to where he had his DJ training wheels taken off. His DJ debut came at the Larchmont a decade ago. "As long as I don't have to play the 'Tickle Me Elmo' song for nine hours, I'm good," he says.

Not only are the DJs at Baby Loves Disco not required to play children's music, they also seem to be discouraged from doing so. "It's real music by real DJs," Hurwitz says. "The not-so-secret secret is that it's for parents."

Indeed, alcohol is even available for the "Grups" — a term coined earlier this year by New York magazine to refer to hip parents who introduce their kids to their own retro counterculture movements, like punk and disco.

In the same vein, author Neal Pollack, wife Regina and son Elijah came to Baby Loves Disco anticipating that it would be "a different mind-set than taking the kids to Gymboree." Pollack has involuntarily become one of the pioneers of the so-called Grups movement. His upcoming book, "Alternadad," is a humorous memoir about being a father to his 3 1/2-year-old son while attempting to retain his identity as a purveyor of alternative music and culture. The goings-on during the afternoon premiere of Baby Loves Disco might easily fit into such literary musings. Recounting his foray on the dance floor with his son, Pollack says, "He was on my shoulders locking his legs around my neck as we danced to 'Mony Mony' between the bubbles."

Looking back over to the dance floor, Pollack notes some commonality. "You see a lot more dads"

Of course, if just a handful were single that would be great news for any single moms in attendance. Hurwitz says he received three separate thank-you e-mails from single parents who had met and started dating at Baby Loves Disco events — disco, apparently, has not lost its touch.

The concept of a club where parents can mingle with other parents and dance with their kids to yesterday's pop hits may seem as novel as a leisure suit did in the early '70s. Time will tell when it too will go out of fashion. Pollack predicts: "In three or four years, this is going to be the norm."