

Dancing queenlet: Monthly kids' dance party Baby Loves Disco held a Halloween event in Harajuku this past October. Launched three years ago in the United States, BLD parties have spread to Japan and six other countries. BABY LOVES DISCO

Japanese might have more offspring.

Kinno is hopeful, and her packed parties bear her out.

"I know we are coming to a point in a social movement when parents are looking for an alternative lifestyle that is beyond going to Disneyland," she says.

How the event develops will depend on what the audience wants. At ¥6,000 a ticket for adults, for instance, the Tokyo events are rather high-end compared with those in the U.S. or Europe.

"Every time BLD moves to a new country, it has had to be adjusted

slightly," says Hurwitz. "In Israel, we have a pool and serve hot dogs. We would never do that in the U.S."

BLD Japan has already expanded to include record releases from the affiliated Baby Loves Music label and also by beginning parent-and-child dance and movement classes that encompass a slightly hipper soundtrack.

So is Baby Loves Disco the beginning of a Grups revolution in Japan? Maybe.

"We are not trying to be cool or act young," says Hurwitz. "We are just trying to be ourselves, not compromising our

personalities just because we have kids."

The next Baby Loves Disco event is on Dec. 7, 2-5 p.m. at Shibuya's Legato restaurant, 15F E Space Tower, 3-6 Maruyama-cho ([03] 5784-2121; www.legato-tokyo.com); admission ¥6,000 for adults, ¥4,000 for children under 12 and seniors, free for non-walkers. For more information visit www.babylovesdisco.co.jp Suzannah Tartan's new blog, www.tokyorockmama.blogspot.com, will launch in December.

Other alterna-activities for alternaparents

Most alternative child-rearing info in Japan tends toward the crunchy, tie-dyed hippie variety. One option (in Japanese) is the semiannual Mammoth magazine (mammothkids.com/hub/), which combines groovy fashions, cool crafts and kid-friendly themes such as the environment and travel. It also holds an annual family music festival and camp on

New York (where my kid was actually carded), most live-music venues allow in children with their parents and most shows end conveniently before a 9 p.m. bedtime. Rock festivals can also be great family events. Fuji Rock has even had child-care facilities at past festivals.

For music listening at home, the "Baby Loves Music" (www.babylovesmusic.com) series now includes albums dedicated to

programs of their Western counterparts; the exception is Roppongi's Mori Art Museum, which generally has activities and brochures designed to make exhibitions more enjoyable and more enlightening for the younger set. In the same complex, the Toho Cinema Roppongi Hills holds regular parent-and-baby matinees where parents and tots can enjoy watching films listening to

Baby Loves Disco hopes to change views of parenthood in Japan

Dancing babies get mom out of the house

Suzannah Tartan
SPECIAL TO THE JAPAN TIMES

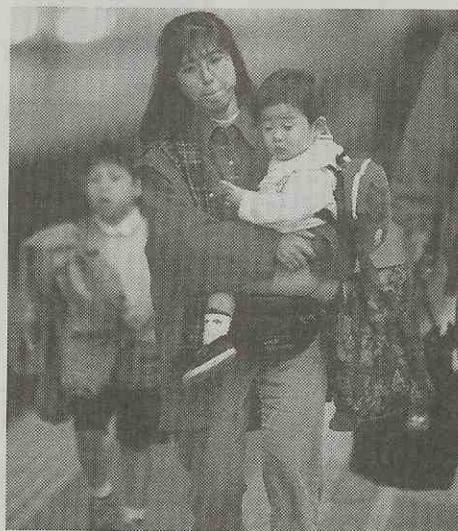
In the last year, my son and I have seen concerts by Bob Dylan, Spoon, Alice Cooper, The Raconteurs, The Roots (twice) and Cheap Trick. He worships Ray Charles but is anxiously waiting for The Zutons and AC/DC to tour. His iPod spins a similarly eclectic mix. His younger sister is already showing a marked preference for metal.

He's eight. She's two.
Yes, childhood isn't quite what it used to be. And though I'd like to think to that my kids' musical precociousness is innate, it's not just because of the children. In the past, the arrival of parenthood signaled a distinct lifestyle change. A new generation of parents, however, have become unwilling to give up their indie rock for The Wiggles or French cafes for family restaurants.

New York Magazine journalist Adam Sternbergh, in his 2006 article on this trend, called such parents Grups (a contraction of "grownups" taken from an episode of the American sci-fi show "Star Trek"). It makes somewhat painful reading. According to Sternbergh, Grups buy extraordinarily expensive jeans to remain edgily fashionable (guilty), troll My Space in search of the latest cool bands (also guilty) and colonize previously adult-only spaces such as art galleries, chic eateries and yoga studios with their offspring (yep, guilty).

Tokyo, while not Brooklyn (the epicenter of the Grups phenomenon), is surprisingly amenable to children [see sidebar]. Hang out in Aoyama on weekends and you are bound to see a hipster thirtysomething couple perusing an art gallery or drinking a latte with their funky dressed kids in tow.

There has been one exception. Though my kids possess killer dance moves and have, of course, requested DJ decks



The rules: In Japan, often the role of mother eclipses whatever a woman's previous lifestyle was. AFP-JIJI

Halloween bash, its fifth Japan-based party so far. It wasn't quite like a night out at Womb or Liquidroom. For one thing, it was 5 p.m. There were cocktails, but also juice boxes. A light show, but the tattoos were removable. A cushy chill-out area was peopled by napping youngsters and, yes, a few drunk dads. But we got our family groove on. The kids danced. I danced. Dad danced (and probably contributed to my son's future psychotherapy bills). And not to any of that fluffy baby stuff, but to real disco hits from the likes of Prince and the Bee Gees.

Since its 2005 inception in Philadelphia by professional dancer and mom Heather Murphy, BLD has grown to more than 20 monthly parties across the United States, with a growing presence abroad.

"At first we thought people (who wanted to do the parties in other places) were kidding," says Andy Blackman Hurwitz — Murphy's business partner, BLD's Disco Daddy and the father of

American vibe of the event.

The parents of 17-month-old Max from Canada have become regular visitors to the parties. "It's harder being expats, because you don't have a family network to baby-sit," says his mother. "I'll be thrilled when he can actually dance."

The large number of expats is somewhat intentional, says Tokyo organizer and resident Auntie Nanna Kinno. "Expat families get it," says Kinno. "In the U.S., there is a tradition of kids' dance parties like proms, whereas in Japan, kids going to clubs might be viewed as somewhat unsavory at first."

But it isn't just kids hitting the dancefloor that is new to Japan: It's mom hitting the dancefloor or frequenting the bars, restaurants and clubs that she might have gone to before she had kids. Moms in Japan may have Grup fashion sense, but they have yet to have the Grup lifestyle.

Although there are some very high-end baby-sitting services in Japan, asking "strangers" to take care of your children is extremely rare, and while grandma might pitch in while mom's at work, as one American expat with a Japanese wife explained, "My mother-in-law just couldn't get her head around my wife and I wanting to go on a date the way we had before we had kids. She was shocked."

Indeed, the Japanese mothers at the event, such as 2-year-old Murai's mom, tended to stress how much their kids loved music and dancing, as if it would be too embarrassing to say that mom, too, wanted to bust a move. In the divided world of *soto* (outside) and *uchi* (inside), moms are supposed to stay home.

Even in the celebrity world, whose mores are often a little more advanced than the rest of society, glamorous hipster moms have yet to take hold. In the U.S., photos of Angelina Jolie holding one of her brood to a tattooed bicep is a regular staple of celebrity magazines. Although Amuro Namie also has a kid

Japanese mothers stressed how much

some other person's screaming baby. Dressing the hipster kid is enticing but... Prince Paul, "Baby... Tokyo, salsa, jazz and a killer hip-hop album with... Hysteria Glamour's