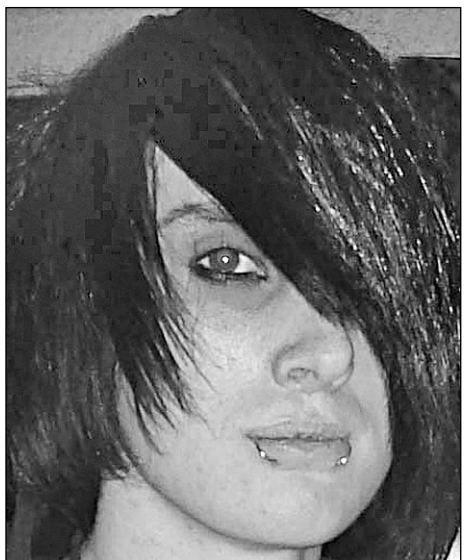




PHOTOS: LAURA BOND



# Dear diary, mood: apathetic

**Stalking Queen St after 7pm, these black-clad, mascara-eyed, chicken-legged kids with 45 degree fringes are the new breed of cool. LAURA BOND discovers the world of the emo.**

I was already on the back foot when I entered the concert. My cheery yellow button-up cardigan and pointy shoes stood out a mile away in a pit of black stovepipe jeans and greasy black hair. I definitely wasn't wearing enough eyeliner.

My younger sister had expressed interest in A Taste of Chaos, a sort of mini Big Day Out for the punk/hard-core/emo/screamo scene. So when tickets fell into my lap, it was too good an opportunity to miss. This I had to see.

Emo. A new word for my vocabulary. I had seen them lurking around town. Mainly in packs and herds. My original thoughts were a cross between 1980s punk rockers and 1990s goths. I presumed (correctly) that the word stemmed from 'emotional'. Did this refer to a music style or a sub-culture or a value system? Surely the concert would answer some of these burning questions. Apparently popular international acts were attending, so I figured anyone who was anyone in the emo scene would be there.

The last Sunday of the school holidays seemed like odd timing considering the number of out-of-towners who had made the pilgrimage to the St James Theatre.

On getting past the mob of black at the front door, I felt like I had walked into a Subway restaurant that had branched out into clothes. You start with the basics. Then build from there. No consideration given to gender.

Pants. Two choices. Tight Black jeans no larger than a child's size 12 or... Tight black jeans smaller than a women's size six.

Shoes. Two styles. Vans or Chucks. You can assert your individuality by adding colourful laces. If you're really creative you can even have different coloured laces in each shoe.

Make-up. Black eyeliner was as compulsory as purchasing a ticket. Optional pink or red eye shadow can be added, starting from the eye and spreading as far as 6cm outward. Make-up is gender neutral.

Tops. T-shirts that are two sizes too small. Preferably screen-printed with your favourite band or an angsty slogan. You don't have to look further than your local mall to find the appropriation of perceivably emo elements in major fashion chains.

Hair. There was a bit more variety akin to choosing your favourite Subway dressing — ranch, mayo, honey-mustard,

sweet chilli to top it all off. Most options involved a jet-black hair base but the selection extended to redish tinges, or highlighted chunks of peroxide blonde.

Spiked at the back, long fringe covers one eye and extends down to the mid-cheek area. Once again, hairstyles were irrespective of gender. The word androgynous comes to mind.

I tried my best to soak up the atmosphere. I felt terribly overweight in my size eight jeans. The music didn't really do it for me. How I wished I had taken earplugs.

I encountered the Circle of Death at one point. Comparable to a break-dancing circle but with a bit of risk chucked in. In fact the name, Circle of Death, aptly describes it. Think possessed Tasmanian Devil on acid. I'm still trying to comprehend where the fun part comes into the scenario. A roundhouse kick to the face on a Sunday night isn't exactly my thing. But then again, that may just be me.

Despite the sombre faces and demure appearances, I was surprised to find that most of those I talked to chatted quite freely about the emo culture and the stigma surrounding it. I even managed to see a few smiles behind the greasy fringes. Those who I talked to were very forthright. They were happy to tell me about the misconceptions and aspersions cast on them. They talked of the stares and whispers as they walked down the street. I couldn't help but think, "What do you expect?"

I struggled to find anyone who actually labelled themselves as emo. In fact many of the concertgoers refuted the title.

One 17-year-old who had travelled from Hamilton for the show says the term gets used as an insult.

"People will see our mates on the street and yell out 'emo', like it's a bad thing. I don't see it like that. It's a music genre, not an insult." His mate did his make-up for him. I'm sure they must spend more time in front of the bathroom mirror than the likes of Liza Minelli. Maybelline must be making a killing.

Many of the younger crowd, particularly the boys, confessed their parents didn't know they wore the heavy make-up. Those whose parents did know told me that their parents refused to be with them in public if they were wearing their emo "getups". Most were not allowed to wear the look to work and the myriad of facial piercings also had to be removed come Monday morning.

On taking a break outside away from the deafening racket I met a very polite young man. From a farm outside New Plymouth, he told me he was a farmer's son. He works on the family farm, feeding hay to the beef cattle, and fencing. His twin brother thinks his look is "weird".

"He is more of a bloke's bloke," he told me. "A rugby and beer sort of guy. He doesn't really like to be seen with me when I dress for the gigs. Back on the farm in my gummies and swandri it's alright though."

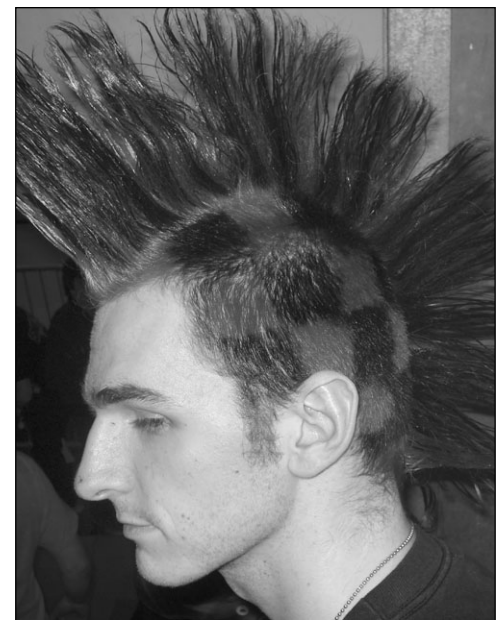
He says his family have never really seen him totally decked out. The only give-away is his full-length arm tattoos, known as sleeves, and his tunnels — wide, circular earrings that have stretched the ear lobe. He proudly told me his were 1.2. Meaning 1.2cm in diameter.

If they were enjoying themselves I certainly couldn't tell.

An actual definition of the emo was harder to find than someone who wasn't wearing an item of black clothing. Urbandictionary.com has 1222 definitions of emo posted on the website. There were many identikit pictures of a typical emo but few that really delved into the ideology of the emo culture. Unlike the original 1970s punks whose political stances said as much about them as the way they dressed.

I found it easier to learn what emo wasn't. I was firmly told it wasn't goth. It wasn't punk rock. It wasn't a mixture of the two. It wasn't hardcore. It definitely wasn't secular punk pop.

It was both a music genre and as a result, an emerging sub-culture. Self-



pity. Anti-depressants. Svelte figures. Perhaps a result of the trend towards veganism.

Urbandictionary.com allows individuals to post their own definitions of popular culture elements then people vote on the definitions that they feel best fit. Crying was mentioned frequently. As was the word melodramatic. There was also a lot of anti-emo sentiment. Definition 57 included an "emo tagline": "My heart bleeds black tears". Definition 13 summed it up simply: "How many emos does it take to screw in the light bulb? None. They all cry in the dark."

After a very sweaty group emerged from listening to the "metal-core" band Underoath (who funnily enough are professed Christians), I was relieved the group didn't subscribe to the punk ethos of no showering or deodorant in rebellion to conformity.

It would be a lie if I said I enjoyed it. I'll put it down to an interesting experience. My cue to leave was when I got poked in the eye by a pink mohawk. You know what they say about losing an eye. It's all fun and games 'til it happens. Next time I venture to the St James I think it will be for John Mayer.

Online: [www.urbandictionary.com](http://www.urbandictionary.com)