

Concert noise rings on

By Sophie Finnemore

Live music venues have been asked to provide warning signs and earplugs for concert-goers to prevent hearing damage.

There are no specific regulations governing concert noise levels which are causing permanent damage, say hearing associations.

After attending a concert at the St James Theatre on Queen St, sound was so muffled for Maree Smith she felt as if she was underwater.

"[During the concert] it didn't seem as though the noise was doing damage. A couple of times I thought, 'Ow' but it was really quite deceptive."

A week after the gig the muffling was replaced by a constant ringing in her ears which her doctor diagnosed as tinnitus, a temporary condition that goes away after a week.

A month later, the ringing is still there.

Smith wants venues taking steps to protect their patrons by having earplugs available and signs to alert people to the potential danger of hearing impairment.

Murray Whiteman, of the New Zealand Hearing Association, says it is common after concerts to see an increase in the number of people coming to hearing clinics suffering problems or discomfort.

"I really, truly believe that people are risking their hearing in going to see live music – the noise level is very high and it doesn't have to be."

Mike Sneaton, from Oceania Audio, a company which provides the sound for many concerts in New Zealand, supports Whiteman's claim.

"I agree on the basic argument. A lot of guys mix too loud because they are going for maximum impact."

PHOTO: SOPHIE FINNEMORE



EARPLUGS: Hearing associations would like to see more warning for concert goers.

He says in his time in the industry he has rarely encountered any restriction on noise level with current noise restrictions solely aimed at preventing neighbour disturbance rather than protecting concert-goers.

Dr Geraint Ermys, chief advisor for OSH, says live music venues "tend to exceed regulations" and it is an area OSH has begun looking into.

Despite this, he thinks it is a minor concern for concert-goers because they are not consistently exposed to extreme noise levels.

Ana Parkes, from the Nelson branch of the Hearing Association, has had hearing aids since the age of 33 as a result, she says, of going to see live bands.

"There is no history of hearing loss in my family. I can say with certainty that my hearing loss

was the result of damage done then."

Parkes opposes Emrys's assertion that concert goers are not at risk because of the infrequency of their exposure as "just ridiculous".

At speedway venues, where the noise levels are often quieter than at concert venues, signs warn patrons that the noise level is hazardous and the majority of attendees wear earplugs.

Whiteman would like to see similar developments at live music venues.

However Sneaton believes concert venues have a long way to go to get to this stage, with only one venue in Australasia utilising warning signage.

In addition, he says that from his experiences, generally "less than 10 percent of the audience wear earplugs".

Maree Smith is concerned by this figure, and hopes to counteract the "uncool" stigma attached to wearing earplugs at concerts by informing people of potential risks.

"It's pretty embarrassing when people who go to speedway are smarter about protecting their hearing than concert-goers."

Despite his concern for concert-goers, Sneaton does not support the proposal for venues to warn crowds of hearing risks, believing that its benefits will be reaped by "the kind of people who stub their toes as soon as they take their jandals off".

But Parkes says if warning signs had been up in the venues she went to, even if they did not stop her going, "at least I wouldn't be able to say I just didn't know".

Theatre preserves legacy

By Jemimah O'Leary

The colourful legacy of Mt Eden's Crystal Palace Theatre may reach another milestone as Auckland City pushes for its appointment as a heritage building.

The theatre is regarded by many as an iconic building with a unique history.

It was officially opened on January 26, 1929, by the mayor of Mt Eden, Ernest Herbert Potter, becoming Mt Eden's third moving picture theatre, and the first suburban cinema in New Zealand to screen a talking film.

An added drawcard was the special lighting, which changed colour at half-time.

The building was unique because it had no stairs, simply a single sloping floor, designed by famous builder-of-the-time Noel Cole.

Sarah Pocklington, from the city's heritage division, says many things are taken into account when deciding to protect a building.

"We get a researcher to look into the history of a place and evaluate whether it is significant," she says.

"We don't protect just any old thing. We need to be able to justify it in a court of law."

When the council feels a building has important historical significance a researcher is hired who evaluates the site, and gathers enough information to prove its significance.

"We advise the owners, and if they are averse to it, then we negotiate," says Pocklington.

During its time the theatre has had a varied role in the Mount Eden community, beginning as a popular dance hall called the Crystal Winter Garden which held dances in the basement, and was in high demand at the time.

It substituted as a jazz joint and a lecture theatre during World War II.

Wartime civilians were taught in first-aid and survival.

The theatre was also used for meetings by the local teachers training college.

The Crystal Palace gained a risqué reputation during the 1970s when it became a cabaret spot, complete with naked girls swimming in a glass tank.

It has been an integral participant of Mt Eden for more than 70 years, and in its most recent incarnation showed Bollywood movies.

It is one of eight Auckland buildings, which the council hopes to add to the Isthmus District Plan heritage schedule.

Submissions from the public closed in March, and a hearing before the planning commissioner is planned.

But still it is unclear if the Crystal Palace will be scheduled and the process could take years, something which the council considers carefully.

"There are some that just don't make it. If it takes too long then it is not worth spending the ratepayers' money," says Pocklington.

Education key to grasping graffiti

By Emma Darwen

A prominent Auckland graffiti artist believes it is not the fault of the artists their work is often mistaken for vandalism.

North Shore graffiti artist Cinzah Merkens believes if there were more public exhibitions of "graf art" then people could learn what "tagging" is and what is not.

"If you're a graf artist, you don't tag. A lot of New Zealanders cannot recognise what graf art is because there is no education," says Merkens.

"It's still a reasonably new art form here so many older people are against it because it's unfamiliar," he says.

Graffiti Busters worker Kevin Hellyer feels it is the artists' own fault for giving their work a bad name.

Hellyer acknowledges graffiti art: "Some of the stuff those guys do is pretty clever."

"It's a shame, though, because they shoot themselves in the foot by plastering it on buildings and fences without permission. How do they expect people to feel good about that?"

Although Auckland's contemporary art scene has grown more accepting of graf artists' work, Merkens says it still has an underground status.

He was disappointed this year when a graffiti removal company painted over a North Shore skate park's historic graffiti.

The Devonport skate bowl received visits from some of the world's top graf artists and skaters, meaning the designs were iconic to the park.

"It's really sad. Skate parks are meant to be places for creative outlet, where people can go and do their thing without others caring," says Merkens.

"Graf artists just want a place where they can work on their pieces and not have people think they are thugs."

PHOTO: EMMA DARWEN



GRAFFITI: Cinzah Merkens wants his work to be perceived as art.