

Classical music and social control

Twilight of the jobs

How classical music helps keep order

THE question of how to control job-bish behaviour troubles many. One increasingly popular solution is classical music, which is apparently painful to teenage ears. Co-op, a chain of grocery stores, is experimenting with playing classical music outside its shops, to stop youths from hanging around and intimidating customers. It seems to work well. Staff have a remote control and “can turn the music on if there’s a situation developing and they need to disperse people”, says Steve Broughton of Co-op.

The most extensive use of aural policing so far, though, has been in underground stations. Six stops on the Tyneside Metro currently pump out Haydn and Mozart to deter vandals and loiterers, and the scheme has been so successful that it has spawned imitators. After a pilot at Elm Park station on the London Underground, classical music now fills 30 other stations on the network. The most effective deterrents, according to a spokesman for Transport for London, are anything sung by Pavarotti or written by Mozart.

When selecting a record to drive people away, the key factor, according to Adrian North, a psychologist at Leicester University who researches links between music and behaviour, is its unfamiliarity. When the targets are unused to strings and woodwind, Mozart will be sufficient. But for the more musically literate vandal, an atonal barrage probably

works better. Mr North tried tormenting Leicester’s students with what he describes as “computer-game music” in the union bar. It cleared the place.

If, however, the aim is not to disperse people but to calm them down, anything unfamiliar or challenging is probably best avoided. At the Royal Bolton Hospital, staff have begun playing classical music in the accident and emergency (A&E) ward, as well as in the eye ward and the main reception area. Janet Hackin, a matron in the A&E ward, says that patients do appear calmer, “rather than running around anxious and bleeding all over the place”. But classical music might not have much effect on the consequences of more liberal licensing laws. “If they’re stone drunk and past it then it doesn’t have much effect,” confirms Ms Hackin.



Beating bad behaviour