

I hate the muzak

By Ruth Ostrow

Sitting on a plane before and during take-off could be just about the last straw for weary travellers. The muzak that is piped through the speakers is getting louder and sillier. In the old days, the rage was all Enya and those spiritual crooners with accompanying easy-listening frog or whale sounds that could make even a greenie like me want to bludgeon a sea beast to death. But at least the muzak was innocuous. There was a point where the brain simply shut out the repetitive blah blah blah (or burup burup).

Nowadays, most airlines I've travelled on play an assortment of greatest hits, all poppy boppy and largely annoying if you're trying to read a book or newspaper, write a proposal or relax after a hectic day.

"We always turn it off once the plane is in flight," promised one hostess recently, after half an hour of loud head-banging on the tarmac. Those around me nodded vigorously. But it never went off. When I complained mid-flight, it was simply turned down.

At the time I had to plead a headache. But the onus shouldn't be on me or fellow travellers - or shoppers for that matter - to prevent bad music or other people's sickly perfumes, bad mobile etiquette, or general public insensitivity. I recently walked out of a shop because the assistant was burning cheap and nasty incense.

Meanwhile, overhead, joy riders - sometimes with ad slogans - terrorise our skies, while noisy boats and trail bikes pollute our beaches and streets.

NSW Chief Justice Jim Spigelman lamented recently that we as a society have become more vulgar and boorish. We're increasingly bombarding each other with rude behaviour, without any care for the private space of others - aural, visual or nasal. With the pace of life speeding up and the population increasing, the absence of what he terms "ordinary manners" can only get worse.

I think there need to be enforceable rules, at the very least pertaining to places from which we can't escape: a ban on perfumes and nasal irritants in confined spaces; regulations governing mobile phones that ring incessantly in restaurants or movie theatres, not to mention those who like screaming into them. And do we really need muzak on planes?

By law, we're not allowed to throw litter out of cars. It's time we created some form of governance that stopped the pollution of our senses - lest the psyche of our country becomes littered and ugly.

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