



CAMBRIDGE DISCOVERY, INC.

A NONPROFIT VISITOR AND RESIDENT INFORMATION CENTER

P.O. Box 1987
Harvard Square
Cambridge, MA 02238

TO: Cambridge City Council
FROM: Charlotte Moore, Executive Director, Cambridge Discovery *CBM*
RE: Street Musicians on Harvard Square Plaza
DATE: 22 June 1990

This memo reports on Cambridge Discovery's experience with one folk orchestra performing over the last few weekends on the Harvard Square Plaza next to our Information Booth. By reporting it, we hope to highlight certain issues related to the street musicians performing in public places. We by no means wish to convey any desire to discourage their performances.

On June 8, I was called by the volunteer in the Information Booth, who said "Just listen to this! Aren't they wonderful?" The volunteer clearly was enjoying the music of the Ecuadoran band that had set up next to the Booth. Later that afternoon, I spoke a band member, who said he spoke English. I conveyed how much we liked the music, but requested that they stand farther from the Information Booth so that the volunteers could hear and the audience would not impede traffic to the Booth. I was not sure the performer understood me.

I noticed over the weekend that the band kept getting closer to us. They set up their instruments to they were flush our wall.

On Monday, June 18, a message on my answering machine said: "I had to close the Booth at 2:30 on Saturday afternoon (the Booth's most active day). The band was so close I couldn't hear and visitors couldn't get through the crowd to the windows. I called the police three times. When I finally got response, the officer took one look at the band, shrugged his shoulders, and walked away."

I also had a phone call on June 18 from the Sunday afternoon volunteer. "Can you do something about the band? I am not prone to getting headaches, but I did on Sunday. Also, we couldn't hear the questions people asked. We had to do a lot of shouting at each other. Then, the volunteer from Saturday came by. He was clearly frightened, felt that he couldn't get police help. Thought the crowd would object if he tried to move the band."

I called the police on Monday work out a system for guaranteeing we get help when we need it. I also called Steve Baird from the Folk Arts Network, who gave me the name of a woman who spoke Spanish and who would meet with the musicians the next weekend. Steve Baird, himself, had been in Harvard Square over the weekend and had tried to help with the situation.

I am asking the City Council to consider this incidence as indicative of the problem we face: That of constructing a reasonable set of guidelines to which street performers must conform.

1. The proposed 80 decibels seems fine; lower seems too stringent to make sense for entertainment, which is by definition going to be louder than conversation.
2. Imposing curfews of 11pm on weekends seems too stringent. The end of the evening, toward midnight, is when people are out enjoying the freedom of the weekend and the gaiety of the setting.
3. The most important issue, to my mind, is setting boundaries at doors and windows of businesses -- to keep the crowds from interfering with the flow of foot traffic and to keep the music and other sounds from interfering with the conduct of business.

The sidewalks in Harvard Square were redesigned in the '80s to provide entertainment spaces. There is plenty of room, for example, on the Harvard Square Plaza -- behind the news kiosk and Cambridge Discovery's Booth and in the "pit" -- for street performers and their audiences.

From Cambridge Discovery's vantage, we welcome the performers, as long as they respect our space and our interactions with the public. The simple facts now are that street performers without a few guidelines are frightening and distressing the volunteers and interfering with the conduct of our activities.

The most narrow perspective is that the performers are interfering with an official activity (providing public information) paid for by city funds. And, we are given no protection by the city on whose behalf we operate.

The broadest perspective, on which the Council should focus, is that the performers bring vitality, color, and interest to the city. Their many talents should be encouraged and supported within the context of this unique city of Cambridge. They must be given guidelines that do not stultify their creativity yet help them to respect their hosts' needs and rights.



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EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT
ROBERT W. HEALY
City Manager

RICHARD C. ROSSI
Deputy City Manager

June 25, 1990

To the Honorable, the City Council;

Attached please find a communication received from Charlotte Moore, Executive Director of Cambridge Discovery, regarding Street Musicians near the Cambridge Discovery booth in Harvard Square.

Very truly yours,

Robert W. Healy

Agenda # 40

0-33

Comm. from Charlotte Moore, Executive
Director of Cambridge Discovery, regarding
Street Musicians near the Cambridge
Discovery booth in Harvard Square.

In City Council,

June 25, 1990

Placed on file