

Loitering fight hits high note

Piped-in classical music targets corner loungers

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SANTA CRUZ — When Pyotr Ilich Tchaikovsky composed "Waltz from Serenade for Strings" in 1880, he could not have imagined how it would be used one day on Pacific Avenue.

The city's Redevelopment Agency believes the sounds of classical music broadcast from a speaker near New Leaf Community Market will persuade loiterers to disperse.

And they may be right.

'It's anti-hippie audio warfare.'

'WOBBLE,' DOWNTOWN LOITERER

"It's anti-hippie audio warfare," said a young man named Brian — known as "Wobble" to his friends — who was hanging out with others near Pacific and Soquel on Wednesday.

Residents and merchants say some downtown loiterers are too aggressive in their panhandling, they harass women and even try to sell drugs.

In December, the Redevelopment Agency hired Julie Hendee to deal with the situation, which some merchants claim is hurting their businesses.

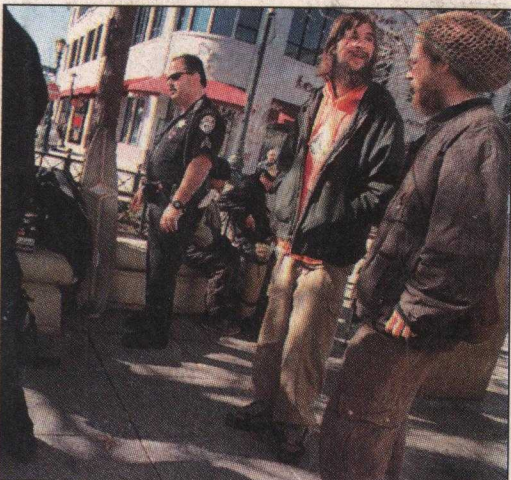
"I dealt with a lot of this right in front of our store, where things were pretty bad," said Hendee, who owned Cat 'n' Canary on Pacific Avenue for more than 20 years.

Hendee, who said it's only a handful of loiterers causing problems, believes playing Beethoven, Handel and Wagner is a positive way to break up the crowd.

Shannon Murphy, who owns the nearby women's clothing store Jade, supports the plan. She says a lot of pedestrians move to the other side of the street when they approach the hangout.

"Some people get scared when people ask them for (money), some feel guilty when they say no. Some people just don't like the way it looks," Murphy said.

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Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Santa Cruz police Sgt. Butch Baker patrols the corner of Pacific Avenue and Lincoln Street on Wednesday.

Loungers: Facing the music

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About five years ago, Logos Books & Records played classical music to disperse a persistent crowd behind its building. The experiment worked, but Logos stopped the broadcasts when nearby residents complained.

Bayshore Lyric Opera conductor Claire Schneeberger found the idea amusing — and just a little insulting.

"I think all classical musicians would be mortified that they think playing classical music on the street will drive people away," she said.

Philip West of the Santa Cruz County Symphony said the variety of live music is one of the things he likes about downtown. He said a lot of young people like Brahams and Beethoven, and that it might not drive

people off as intended.

"They may find that it does just the opposite," he said. "That's my extreme hope."

Also in an effort to move the mix of "houseless" travelers, panhandlers and loungers, the city plans to spend about \$2,500 to erect a railing to mark off an expanded eating area for two kiosks at Soquel and Pacific avenues.

The wrought-iron barrier, similar to the one in front of Pizza My Heart and the King and I Thai Cuisine, would protect the dining space outside Matisse Selman's Sushi Now! and Ali Khah's Ali Baba falafel shop.

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