

From the Archives, 1980: Violence, arrests at New Year's Eve concert

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A crowd of 60,000 gathered at the Sydney Opera House to see in the eighties with a night of rock music, merry-making, and pelting celebrities with beer cans.

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High spirits at free concert

Fireworks and the singing of Auld Lang Syne at midnight ushered in 1980 at the Sydney Opera House, where more than 60,000 people gathered for the New Year's Eve merry-making.



Crowd at the New Years party at the Sydney Opera House. *Credit: Scott Whitehair*

The crowd that gathered for the free concert at the forecourt of the Opera House was about 25,000 at 9.30. Final estimates varied — one was as high as 80,000.

Beer flowed freely among the crowd. Injuries from flying beer cans were common among the 38 casualties admitted to hospital. Drug and alcohol cases were also included in this figure.

A guitarist hit on the face by a flying can was among those taken to hospital. The incident ended the show.

There were 25 arrests on various charges.



Attending to the wounded at Sydney Hospital. *Credit: STAFF*

Among those hit by cans was Rolf Harris who escaped good humouredly with the noisy reception to his act in the free concert.

In spite of the beer cans and some fighting the crowd was in high spirits and the mood was good natured.

At 9:40 pm, musicians on the stage were sent scurrying to protect their electrified equipment as a sharp rain-shower swept across the crowd.



Cans and a bottle litter the stage at the feet of Lord Mayor Alderman Nelson Meers. *Credit: STAFF*

As the rain persisted, organisers began to fret but after about 15 minutes the rain eased, then stopped. The spirits of the revellers seemed undampened.

While the free concert, organised by the Festival of Sydney Committee, was swinging in the forecourt, sponsors of the festival met for dinner inside the Opera House.

The lord Mayor, Alderman Nelson Meers, and Mrs Meers, were among the guests who came to see the 1980s arrive.

Out in the Harbour lights on small craft cut holes in the darkness as people found every vantage point to hear the music.

Occasional lightning and the swing of spotlights set the mood for the fireworks display the crowd was waiting to see at midnight.

Thousands of teenagers showed their appreciation of the music by groups and artists, including the Dave Nesbitt Band and The Sports.



One of the injured in the crowd being attended to
Credit: STAFF

Individual artists awaited by the crowd with eager anticipation were Marcia Hines and Jon English.

One TV viewer, however, was not so appreciative. He rang to lodge a complaint about the choice of music.

Meanwhile, teenagers swayed, danced and beat time to the music, their beer cans and soft drink utensils adding to the percussion.

Among the crowd the middle-aged and the elderly mingled with youth, everybody out to greet the new year and to celebrate the evening.