

Barry vs. The Hoons

by Erik Deckers

To paraphrase Saturday Night Live alum Norm MacDonald, "Australians hate Barry Manilow!" At least the teenagers do. That's because Barry's dulcet tones are being used to chase off teenage hooligans ("hoons" as they're called Down Under) in Rockdale, Australia, a district outside Sydney. It seems the man who wrote the songs that made the whole world sing has become the man who makes the young hoons cringe. I know, I know. That was awful. But that's what the members of the Rockdale Council are counting on: pure, unadulterated awfulness. According to an article in Australia's Daily Telegraph, Rockdale's councilors are worried about the growing number of young ruffians and ne'er-do-wells whose "anti-social cars and loud music" are crowding streets and car parks. "There are restaurants nearby and people can't park in the car park because they're intimidated by these hoons," said Bill Saravinovski, a Rockdale councilor. Their plan is to install a loudspeaker and pipe in the "daggy" music to drive them out. ("Daggy is defined as "unfashionable, or lacking style, even eccentric or stupid," by the Oxford Concise Australian Dictionary.) See? See?! I've said for years that Barry Manilow is unfashionable and lacks style. For years, I railed against his "Bandstand Boogies," his "Copacabanas," and his "Can't Smile Without You." For years, I've rolled my eyes so far back into my head I could see my brain whenever someone sang along with "Even Now," "I Made It Through the Rain," or "Jump Shout Boogie." For years, I've cursed that these albums were ever in my house, because it was embarrassingly easy to recall all of these song titles without any assistance. And I've taken a lot of grief from all the women in my family over my feelings for Barry. I will -- very reluctantly -- admit that he's a good singer, and that I still know all the words to "Copacabana." But there's just something about the guy that's so totally, oh I don't know, unfashionable, lacking in style, and eccentric about his music. "He is not uncool," my female relations shriek. "He's totally cool and hip!" You can imagine my excitement at the news that the Rockdale District Council AND the Oxford Concise Australian Dictionary back me up on this. I feel totally vindicated now. The councilors got the idea after a 1999 experiment when officials played Bing Crosby's "White Christmas" album to shoo off their own infestation of teenagers in the Warrawong Westfield shopping mall in Wollongong. (That part isn't really important to this story, I just like saying "Warrawong Westfield shopping mall in Wollongong.") The idea of using annoying sounds to drive off unwanted guests is similar to an invention that made the news this past December. Welsh inventor Howard Stapleton's device is yet another teenager repellent. The invention is called the "Cheerleader," and it's a device that exhorts teens to show school spirit, but then, like, totally blows them off when they see her in the hallway because she's too busy getting the latest gossip about Amanda who started going out with Greg but I think Sasha's really ticked off because she and Greg had supposedly started dating over Christmas break and does this skirt make my butt look big? Actually, it's called the "Mosquito," and it emits an ultrasonic sound that is annoying to teens, but is inaudible to most adults over the age of 30, because of the natural deterioration of our hearing. That, and we listened to too much Van Halen when we were younger. So which would be worse, being Barry Manilow, or being the guy who has to tell Barry the news? And how would you even tell him? Friend: Uhh, Barry, I've got some good news and bad news. Barry: Great! Give me the good news first. Friend: The good news is they're going to start playing your music in public in Australia. Barry: Wow, that's great. So what's the bad news? Friend: They think your music is so uncool, they're using it for riot control. Barry: Gee, that IS bad news. Maybe Erik Deckers has been right all these years. Unfortunately, I don't think the Rockdale Council has thought this idea through. While it will drive off the teenage hoons and their loud music and souped-up cars, they'll instead be faced with rampaging hordes of middle-aged women in matching tracksuits, shaking their purple nylon-clad booties to the infectious beats of "Bandstand Boogie." They've already made a complete mess of the Warrawong Westfield shopping mall in Wollongong.