

CONVERSATIONS

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# Legal highs

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**W**andering around the Edinburgh Fringe this summer I happened upon a group of 90 overexcited festivalgoers wearing big black headphones, dancing wildly through the city with abandon. They were part of a 50-minute outdoor Silent Disco - they were all listening to the same disco music at the same time. We couldn't hear the throbbing bass and the drums that were dictating their raunchy, jaunty steps, and they clearly didn't care.



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As they sashayed down the Royal Mile - twirling, grinding, flossing and gyrating - they resembled a group of lithe, confident exhibitionists. The truth was, though, that these flamboyant dancers included secretaries, grannies and insurance brokers - people who might never have imagined themselves prancing down the middle of a high street at 2pm under the bewildered gaze of a silent, sober public. However, when the magic of a silent disco begins a drug-like hedonism descends on the conservative, which leaves manners, decorum and inhibition way, way behind.

Place these two pads of external noise-cancelling plastic over your ears and you instantly eradicate the rest of the world. At the right volume (11) the music enters your veins, travels down your arteries, ignites your bones and fuels your heart. Suddenly you are the king of dance, the first, and possibly the last, truly great artiste on the planet, a creator of new, radical, beautiful, sexy moves. You become an entire dance orchestra, a solo performer with all the energy and charisma of an internationally celebrated dance troupe right there inside your frame. These new shapes you find yourself throwing are legendary, your facial gestures are primal and you are, quite frankly, magnificent. The only force more vigorous than your own physique is the power of the music, which becomes potent, profound, vital and intense, even if it does turn out to be Boney M.

Yes, the witchery of the headphones has created an entire party inside your being. Your body has become an echo chamber through which the music is amplified and electrified. Contact with other humans is fun, but not necessary - the real endorphin rush is realising that your head is the MP3 player and your skin is now the outside wall of the disco. It's all kicking off inside your skeleton - you are finally all you need - and the sense of internal empowerment, mixed with an unexpected self-love, becomes a drug-style rush in itself. There is no hangover, only an aching jaw from two hours of constant smiling. This is the pharmaceutical of choice.