

Surge of Rock Fans; Then Death, Grief and Anger: A Surge of Fans at a ...

By JANE GROSS Special to The New York Times

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By JANE GROSS

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SALT LAKE CITY, Jan. 24 — Jimmie Boyd Sr. barely earns enough as an auto mechanic to feed and clothe his family, but when his 14-year-old son, Jimmie Jr., pleaded for \$18 to go to a heavy-metal concert here last weekend, he acquiesced.

He drove his son to the Salt Palace, where the Australian group AC/DC was performing, and returned later to pick him up at the appointed corner. No Jimmie.

Hours later, as if in a nightmare, two police officers arrived at the Boyds' door. Jimmie was dead, they said, trampled and suffocated by a surging crowd that pressed toward the stage as the band played "Thunderstruck."

Today, at a bitterly cold grave site south of the city, Jimmie Boyd Jr., an American Indian boy with a learning disability, was laid to rest. Also buried today, in nearby Logan, was a second 14-year-old, Curtis Child, who was also asphyxiated at the concert Friday night, the first he had ever attended. On Saturday, a funeral will be held in Eugene, Ore., for the third person who died in the sweaty, noisy crush, Liz

Glausi, 19, a student at Brigham Young University in Provo.

The deaths have shaken this close-knit Mormon city, led to a barrage of name-calling about who is to blame and prompted an investigation by the County Attorney that could lead to charges of criminal neglect. One family has already hired a prominent personal injury lawyer and the other two families say they may do the same.

A County Commissioner has threatened to cancel further concerts unless adequate crowd control is assured and has proposed that someone at the

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arena be assigned the responsibility of halting a performance immediately in the event of similar pandemonium.

And the company that manages the arena for Salt Lake County, Spectacor Management Group of Philadelphia, has announced that pending the results of the investigation, all concerts in the Salt Palace will have reserved seating. The AC/DC concert used festival seating, a phrase that evokes the heyday of open-air rock concerts; in this case, it means that spectators were allowed to roam free on an open floor where professional basketball and hockey are usually played.

AC/DC is a veteran group, having formed in 1973, and it has a vast and



Jimmie Boyd Jr., who was one of three youths killed at the event.

loyal following. Its current album, "The Razor's Edge," has sold a million copies in the last five months.

Accounts of the Salt Lake City incident from witnesses paint a hellish picture of this particular concert, but also of many such events. Scott Carter, a guard near the stage who helped disentangle the pile of bodies, said "people go down" at virtually all heavy metal concerts and are usually passed from hand to hand, like rag dolls, over the heads of the crowd until they reach a paramedic station at the rear of the arena. It is also common, Mr. Carter said, to douse the crowd with water from squirt bottles or hoses to counter heat exhaustion.

'A Massive Jolt Forward'

"It's been pretty shocking to parents to hear what goes on," said County Attorney David E. Yocum, whose 18-year-old son is a regular concertgoer. "The kids don't come home and say, 'Would you believe what happened at this concert?'"

But last Friday, the conditions deteriorated further. The warmup band, Kings-X, had been dull, witnesses said, and the crowd was subdued until AC/DC appeared. Then, as the band tuned its instruments, there was a surge toward the stage.

"There was a massive jolt forward," said Brandi Burton, a Brigham Young student who wound up spread-eagled on the bottom of the pile of some 30 people, with her best friend, Ms. Glausi, lying across her chest. "We were on the ground before I knew what happened. Then people kept landing on us, hundreds of pounds at a time. There was so much pressure on my chest, there was no way to inhale."

Mr. Carter saw the pile-up but "couldn't get a hand to them." With the crowd pressed so tight, he said, nearby spectators, those not swept off their feet, "couldn't bend down to pick any-

In the Salt Palace, 'festival seating' was a prelude to chaos.

body up." From the tangle of bodies, Mr. Carter could see "hands reaching everywhere" and "the whites of their eyes, full of fear."

Mr. Carter said he and his fellow guards signaled the band to cut the music with hand gestures across their throats. According to a statement from AC/DC, the musicians did not see or hear the early warnings, and immediately stopped playing and ordered the house lights raised once they did.

Mr. Carter estimated that the band played for more than half an hour while he tried to reach the gasping, ashen youths. The band eventually stopped for about 15 minutes, and then resumed, with the house lights on, after consultation with arena officials, who said it was the safest course of action in terms of crowd control.

Meanwhile, Mr. Carter, a 240-pound bodybuilder, managed to circle around the pileup and reach in from behind. Peeling off bodies, he came upon Ms. Burton and Ms. Glausi at the bottom.

Ms. Burton recalls that the two young women were urging each other to hang on. "Liz, you've got to keep breathing," Ms. Burton said to her friend — once, twice, three times before Ms. Glausi "just closed her eyes." Moments later, Ms. Burton also passed out, waking later at a local hospital, where she was treated for cuts and bruises and released.

The rush toward the stage, many experts agree, is a risk of festival seating, which has been outlawed in many

cities, including Cincinnati, where 11 people were killed storming the doors at Riverfront Stadium in 1979 before a concert by the Who.

Festival seating can work two ways. Here at the AC/DC concert, where there were about 8,500 reserved seats on the upper level, the floor of the arena was empty of chairs and 4,500 people pushed their way toward the best viewing position. At other concerts here and elsewhere that use the festival configuration, there are unreserved chairs on the floor, occupied on a first-come, first-served basis.

"Every kid has potentially a front-row seat," said R. Craig Clark, a San Diego lawyer representing the Child family. "The situation is set up for tragedy."

Experts who object to the setup without chairs argue that it allows promoters to pack more people into the same space. Other experts say the unreserved chairs are even more dangerous because they can be tossed around, and in effect used as weapons. Spectator officials say the total crowd at the AC/DC concert was 13,294, or 626 below capacity as established by local fire marshals.

Promoters say that in recent years the trend has been away from festival

seating. Carl Freed, the executive director of the North American Concert Promoters Association, a New York-based trade group, estimated that it was still used at only 10 to 20 percent of shows with more than 10,000 people.

But not all promoters and arena managers agree that festival seating is dangerous. They say that the arrangement allows more fans into concerts and that the risks are slight, if a concert is well managed and the concert hall is suited for festival seating.

"You have to have security that can handle it," said Jerry Mickelson, a partner at Jam, a promoter in Chicago. "I think that what happened the other night was a quirk."

Families Plan Their Memorials

County Commissioner Jim Bradley, whose responsibilities include overseeing the Salt Palace, said outlawing festival seating was only a partial solution. Arena managers and music promoters, he said, need to organize concerts on a case-by-case basis; one set of precautions might apply to heavy metal, for instance, and others to rap concerts, where gang violence has been more frequent than stampedes. Mr. Bradley also urged that someone be assigned the responsibility of "pulling the

plug" in the event of mayhem, so a band would not play on, as AC/DC did.

The families who lost children here all said the best memorial would be a change in how concerts are organized. Bruce Child, Curtis's father and a steelworker in Logan, said a lawsuit was necessary since "the only thing people listen to is money." Ms. Glausi's parents are still weighing their options, busy for now planning a funeral in Oregon that will be attended by a dozen Brigham Young students.

The Boyd family, too, focused on mourning the youngest of their four children, who was buried today draped in a tribal blanket. Jimmie Jr. was eulogized by his brother, Troy, who serves on a Navy ship off California, by the family's Mormon bishop and by a Navajo friend, who addressed the gathering in their native language.

But the child's final memorial was in the language he would have chosen. Before the casket was lowered into the ground, Troy Boyd loaded a cassette into a portable stereo and hit the play button.

In the otherwise quiet cemetery, crusty with snow, AC/DC sang Jimmie's favorite song, "Money Talks."

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Don Grayston for The New York Times

Family members and friends of Jimmie Boyd Jr. attending his funeral yesterday in Salt Lake City. The 14-year-old boy was trampled to death at an AC/DC rock concert at the Salt Palace.