

Now, About Mt Smart

Last month, I penned a love letter to Mt Smart Stadium as a concert venue. This month, I'm going to completely contradict myself.

I think you'll find I called Mt Smart "the perfect venue," because it's no longer hard to get to, it's in an industrial precinct, you can turn the volume up loud and you can tear the place apart, because it's already falling apart.

Now while all that is true, and it's also true I have had countless good experiences in the old girl, it is fair to say that for many, slumming it is a drag.

After any gig, watch your social media fill up with complaints about the food, the toilets and the exposure to the elements you get at Mt Smart. This never bothers me because I like camping, I pre-load on food before every gig, and, so far, security has never discovered the hip flask I carry in my underwear.

So enter a new player into the market. Actually it's an old player who's been far too polite to cause a stir. Eden Park is now saying they want access to the concert market.

Now I'm sure you remember that the nation dropped a casual quarter of a billion on Eden Park back in 2007 to upgrade it for the Rugby World Cup. Even before then, there was debate as to whether it was the right place for a national multi-use stadium, considering it was smack bang in the middle of suburbia.

Right or wrong, we did it, and now it's time to live with the decision.

Every other town in the concert market has a big, comfy, stadium music venue. Think Suncorp in Brisbane. Melbourne has two, in Etihad and AAMI. In New Zealand, Wellington has the Cake Tin and more importantly, Dunedin has Forsyth Barr. Forsyth Barr has attracted Fleetwood Mac, Elton John and this year, Ed Sheeran. Sheeran is playing three concerts in Dunedin. Roll that through your mind. In three nights, Sheeran is playing to the entire population of Dunedin.

The reason Forsyth Barr is working is obviously the roof. No soaking Adele or Foo Fighters concerts there. But also, it's close to town, and the facilities are modern.

Not so at Mt Smart where a forest of port-a-loos has to be installed. (Is the collective noun of port-a-loos a swamp?). The food outlets are food trucks in a paddock, though there is a big tent now – with big queues.

So Eden Park is back in. They've got a relatively new chief executive who can see beyond the crippling arguments that have hamstrung Eden Park for so many years. The debate about a big entertainment venue in a suburban locale has been going on since the lights went in, in 1999. So near enough to 20 years.

Is there anyone left in the suburb who doesn't realise the implication of generations of investment in the park? Just like the arguments about Western Springs, if you don't realise that every now and then your streets will be filled, then don't buy

in that suburb.

Then there's the development of technology. Concerts are loud but the speakers are directional. I have family who back on to Western Springs, so I sometimes blag a free view of concerts. The directionality of the speakers is such that the sound is pathetic, even though they're on the edge of the stadium. The speedway is exponentially louder. A concert in Mt Eden won't keep you up.

Eden Park has great toilets and better food outlets. It's made for 50,000. Its transport options are good and, if need be, a visitor from out of town could walk from their hotel in the CBD to the stadium. It has roofs. It's the best stadium in the country and Paul McCartney should be allowed to play there. It's time.

Now, on the subject of Western Springs. I went to Auckland



City Limits this year. I have only two words. Grace Jones. Despite the fact we only got an hour because she played a festival set, that hour was possibly the best concert experience I have had in a long time.

After Grace, I saw Beck in the main bowl. Which was relatively empty. Now that was partly because the festival was undersold, but it's also that Auckland Council has overdeveloped the Springs.

A few years back, they got rid of the trees on the hill and created a terraced slope. A slope I've never seen filled, even for AC/DC. What a waste of money, just because some health and safety officer thought someone could fall down the hill. Of course someone could fall down the hill – that's been one of the funniest things I've seen. No-one ever fell down that hill and didn't get up. The terracing has killed the Springs' soul.

I've spoken to promoters who say that Western Springs will never get a big concert again. It's too primal. Audiences today demand seats and toilets and food and comfort. It ain't rock n'roll, but it's reality. Yet another reason why next summer, if there's a stadium act, I want it at the best stadium in Auckland. That's Eden Park.

– Andrew Dickens