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15 Accused of Dealing Drugs At Midtown Manhattan Club

By BENJAMIN WEISER
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Federal prosecutors charged 15 men yesterday, including a man they called the head bouncer at the Sound Factory, a midtown nightclub, in a scheme to sell thousands of dollars worth of Ecstasy and other drugs inside the Manhattan club and at other locations.

The trafficking was controlled by outside dealers, prosecutors said in a 117-page complaint in Federal District Court in Manhattan, and flourished under the supervision of the security chief, Alex Coffiel, in return for a share of the profits. Mr. Coffiel was also accused of shaking down clubgoers, taking their drugs and then giving them to dealers to resell.

Although Mr. Coffiel, 35, of Brooklyn, is the only club employee charged, the complaint said the operation relied on at least three other bouncers who worked with him.

No official or owner of the club was accused in the complaint, and two telephone messages left at the club seeking comment were not returned. A person who took the calls refused to identify who owns or manages the club, which is at 618 West 46th Street.

The charges come one month after the acquittal of Peter Gatien, the prominent nightclub owner accused of allowing drugs to be sold at two of his Manhattan clubs.

Mr. Coffiel and 10 of the other defendants were taken before a Federal magistrate in Manhattan and were granted bail. Four others have yet to appear in court. Mr. Coffiel's lawyer, James Kousouros, said he was still reviewing the case, but observed that his client and the other defendants, all accused dealers, were minor figures. "What you have here is the indictment of the nobodies," he said.

Prosecutors said the ring peddled MDMA, an amphetamine derivative known as Ecstasy or X, a hallucinogen long popular on the club scene in Manhattan, as well as methamphetamine and other drugs.

The prosecutors said the charges followed a nine-month investigation by the Federal Drug Enforcement Administration. Mary Jo White, the United States Attorney in Manhattan, whose office is prosecuting the case, said, "The distribution of Ecstasy, often thought of as a 'white collar' or 'designer' drug, in particular to young people who are unaware of its potential for abuse, is a very serious crime." She said her office "will prosecute peddlers of Ecstasy no less vigorously than we prosecute distributors of heroin or cocaine."

Prosecutors did not say precisely how much money was involved in the drug dealing, which involved at least 13,000 grams of MDMA, the complaint said. Individual tablets sell for between \$6 and \$12, it said, but because the drug is produced clandestinely, it was not

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Each defendant was charged with conspiracy to distribute narcotics, which carries a mandatory minimum sentence of 5 years and a maximum term of 40 years in prison, prosecutors said.

The complaint said Mr. Coffiel had the job of patting people down as they entered the club and removing any narcotics that he found on them.

On at least one occasion, it said, Mr. Coffiel removed drugs from one customer and gave them to a drug dealer to distribute inside the club, in return for a share of the payments.

It said Mr. Coffiel and another bouncer at the club, who was not charged, were paid about \$200 a night by another of the defendants, Ronnie Iannefello, 25, of Manhattan, for permission to use two or three dealers to sell drugs inside the club.

Mr. Iannefello, in turn, was a major customer of Scott Siegel, 23, of Tuckahoe, N.Y., the complaint said, describing Mr. Siegel, who was also charged, as "the hub of a network of individuals" selling the drugs around the metropolitan area, including street sales.

Mr. Siegel's lawyer, Neil B. Checkman, said he was still investigating the case and had no comment. Others defendants' lawyers had no comment yesterday or were not reached for comment.

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