

Chapter 8 Humor

By J. SCOTT BOVITZ

Lawyers and Judges Rocking Out!

ABI members are well aware that experienced lawyers and judges can still rock. Since 2004, the Indubitable Equivalents¹ have performed at ABI events, and some of its members include **Mitch Ryan** (Donlin, Recano & Company, Inc.; Orange, Calif.) belting out his gravelly lead vocals, **Tom Salerno** (Stinson Leonard Street LLP; Phoenix) on drums, former ABI President **Andy Caine** (Pachulski Stang Ziehl & Jones LLP; Los Angeles) on alto sax, **Michael P. Richman** (Hunton & Williams LLP; New York) on piano and many others. Perhaps you have heard Mr. Ryan call out, “Now, put ... *your ... hands ... together* for the black-robed captain of the Detroit reorganization, on rhythm guitar, the Hon. **Steven Rhodes!**”

Hon. **Sheri Bluebond** (U.S. Bankruptcy Court (C.D. Cal.); Los Angeles) is famous for livening up bar and judicial meetings with her musical talents. She is particularly adept at modifying lyrics from well-known Broadway musicals (adding a bankruptcy twist and a double entendre or two).²

Admit it: When most of you were younger, your top career choice was “rock star.” A few of you even had serious musical talent and opportunities.

Former California State Bar President Patrick M. Kelly played with Jan and Dean, the Beach Boys, the Carpenters, Captain Beefheart, The Surfaris (“Wipe Out”) and B.B. King. It is surprising that Kelly could ever sit still long enough to pass the bar exam.³

Los Angeles collection lawyer Natalia Minassian of Hatkoff & Minassian attended the prestigious Juilliard School. She can still make adults cry with her violin (I have personal knowledge and can testify on this point).⁴ In addition, I recently met yet another lawyer/musician at the meeting of the “Monday Night Lawyer Movie Club Unless It’s on Tuesday.”⁵

Lawyer/musicians often stay involved in music throughout their lives. Music remains the source of personal adventures and great stories. The good news is that law and music mix quite well.

Kenton Hambrick, senior associate general counsel of Litigation, Bankruptcy and Distressed Real Estate at Freddie Mac, has had more than his fair share of musical adventures. He is in his early 60s, but he is trim and appears a decade younger. Hambrick looks back on his band days with affection:

My high school music teacher started getting me gigs in the Washington, D.C., area before I could even drive a car. My mom would drive me to the gig in her enormous Olds ’98 with the neck of my double bass sticking out the window. At the University of Virginia, I co-founded the [University of Virginia] Jazz Ensemble, led a Joe Cocker tribute band called “Thanatos Band and Show” (winner of the 1971 Charlottesville Battle of the Bands), was principal bass in the university symphony, and gigged around town enough to graduate with money in the bank.⁶

At a Washington Nationals baseball game during the ABI Annual Spring Meeting last April, Hambrick elaborated on his time in London as a professional musician:

Through a series of fortunate events (or unfortunate, depending on your point of view), I wound up in London in 1975, playing in a Soho nightclub with a guy called Basil Green, a jazz-obsessed Australian piano player who had recently fled Saigon. Part of the job was introducing the exotic dancers and spinning their records.... Most of the dancers were housewives or school teachers who just needed some extra income. Heart of gold and all that.

Though the joint was run by Italian mobsters. I wanted more details about the dancers, but Hambrick just smiled and went on with his story: Basil hated rainy old England and soon left for Hong Kong. In need of a piano player, I went to a phone box and started calling names on a list provided by a friend. The first was Vince Crane, a lanky guy with [scraggly] shoulder-length hair and a droopy mustache who showed up at the club obsessively running a 50-pence coin back and forth between the fingers of his left hand. I didn’t know him from Adam,

⁶ Hambrick thanks music lovers for the fact that he was never required to seek a “hardship discharge” of his student loans.



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¹ Learn more about ABI’s house band at abiband.com (unless otherwise noted, all links in this article were last visited on Oct. 20, 2015).

² Judge Bluebond (cacb.uscourts.gov/judges/honorable-sheri-bluebond) is also the creator of “The Bankruptcy Dating Game.” This spoof was used at the 2015 California Bankruptcy Conference to educate 450 bankruptcy professionals about recent developments in appellate case law and find a date for one of our eligible bankruptcy judges. You can sign up for the 2016 California Bankruptcy Conference, set for May 20-22 in Indian Wells, Calif., at www.calbf.org/2016confschedule.htm.

³ Jackie Fuchs, “California’s State Bar President Is a Rocker and a Gentleman,” *Metropolitan News-Enterprise*, Jan. 14, 2013, available at www.metnews.com/articles/2013/poy2012_kelly.htm.

⁴ For several years, Minassian was the first violin for the Los Angeles Lawyers Philharmonic (learn more at lalawyersphil.org). After three years of rehearsals and dozens of concerts, Minassian traded in “concertmaster” for a spot on the local executive committee of the Commercial Law League of America. Go figure.

⁵ **Gregory M. Salvato** (Salvato Law Offices; Los Angeles) and the author of this article are the co-founders of a beer, burger and movie club for Los Angeles-area lawyers and bankruptcy professionals. Dubbed “MNLMOUOT” for short, the group meets at LA Live near the Staples Center (where the Lakers, Clippers, and Los Angeles Kings share home court/ice). For details of all Los Angeles bankruptcy educational programs and the next movie night, visit bankruptcydog.com. Visitors are welcome. We usually select movies with guns and loud soundtracks.

but it turned out that apart from a talent for sleight of hand, he was a fairly famous psychedelic rock musician, the leader and founder of the “Atomic Rooster,” as well as a songwriter who co-wrote the 1968 hit “Fire” for The Crazy World of Arthur Brown, a big hit on the U.S. charts in the late 1960s. Carl Palmer of Emerson, Lake and Palmer fame, Ginger Baker, and Dave Gilmour all played in Atomic Rooster at one time or another.⁷

The Hambrick story took another twist:

Trying to play jazz in the club inspired Vince to revive the dormant Rooster and ... create a giant fusion band that would have rock and jazz players doubling parts along with singers and actors from the cast of a West End rock musical called “Teeth ’n Smiles,” including a pretty young actress named Helen Mirren.... We went off to rehearse in a vast empty warehouse owned by Rick Wakeman. Unfortunately, the rehearsal space was too much for our deeply agoraphobic drummer, who quickly began gasping for breath and had to leave.... Sadly, Vince’s health failed as well and he had to be hospitalized soon thereafter. The Rooster Road Show project died. I never realized jazz fusion could be so dangerous.⁸

Hambrick reluctantly returned to the U.S., attended law school and sought a more traditional life — albeit one with plenty of musical gigs in the Washington, D.C., area. I asked him about local performances. Hambrick laughed and said, “the strangest gig I ever played was a dinner-dance ... for a trade association of pet cemetery operators. They had a display of miniature dog and cat coffins at the back of the room.”⁹ Like the members of ABI’s Indubitable Equivalents, Kelly and Minassian, Hambrick continues to play music today:

No more rock, though. I’ve been active in the D.C. area for the last 40 years playing in dance bands, combos, big bands, society gigs, club dates, shows, weddings, [and] even a couple presidential inaugural balls. I worked with union contractors and moonlighting musicians from the U.S. Army Blues, the Army’s premier jazz ensemble, for many years and had my own four-piece jazz group called “Hal Sigerton Jazz” for about a decade. In the last 12 years, I’ve concentrated mostly on classical music and enjoy playing bass with the Loudoun Symphony and the Pro Arte Chamber Orchestra of Greater Washington.

Hambrick then related his musical talents to bankruptcy law. “Little-known fact: ‘Crazy World’ Arthur Brown started out as a law student and became a psychedelic musician. I took the opposite trajectory. Today, I believe Brown lives in a yurt in Sussex, after a stint in Texas as a mental health therapist. Seriously though, making music is a fundamentally creative act and the best bankruptcy lawyers are exceptionally creative — especially on the debtor side. I like to think that staying active in music keeps your mind

in top shape, provided you steer clear of Purple Haze ... and jazz fusion.” I thanked Hambrick for his backhanded compliment of the debtor’s bar.¹⁰

Contrast Hambrick’s untraditional lineage with the traditional musical career of trial lawyer Gary S. Greene.¹¹ He is a Los Angeles state court litigator with classical musical training and a father who was a conductor. Greene is the founder of the renowned Los Angeles Lawyers Philharmonic, its 100-person chorus (Legal Voices), and an 18-piece big band (Gary S. Greene’s Big Band of Barristers).¹²

The piano player in the big band is the talented Hon. Arthur Gilbert (Presiding Justice, California Court of Appeals, Second District Division). He also writes a regular column in the *Los Angeles Daily Journal* called “Under Submission.” Every humor columnist wants to grow up to be just like the witty Justice Gilbert.¹³

According to Greene, the Los Angeles Lawyers Philharmonic (and Legal Voices) include lawyers from every major field of law — including collection and bankruptcy.¹⁴ Interesting tidbit: Greene’s Big Band of Barristers competed for and was selected as the top lawyer band in the country in 2012.¹⁵

Does music help with trial practice? Greene told me about an appearance at a settlement conference in state court. The judge complimented Greene on a recent performance of the Big Band of Barristers. Greene said, “At first, I thought that the judge’s compliment couldn’t hurt.” But, at recess, the opposing lawyer rushed up to Greene in the hallway. Greene said, “I figured that opposing counsel was going to ask for recusal of the judge. But instead, counsel told me [that] he played guitar and wanted to join my band.” Phew!

Greene drives his musicians to excel and often talks about an important concert — at the local law library — where the lead trumpet player fell off a four-foot riser during a solo. After confirming that his trumpet player was still breathing, Greene yelled out, “Now once more — *with feeling!*” The band finished the concert.¹⁶

For almost 50 years, attorney Michael Evans (Law Office of Michael G. Evans; Valencia, Calif.) has played the upright double bass. Recently, he refinished and rebuilt one of his instruments from top to bottom. By hand. This is evidence of devotion to his craft and music.

10 “In the 1980s, [Arthur] Brown moved to Austin, Texas, and obtained a master’s degree in counseling....

[H]e also became a painter and carpenter for some years.... In 1992, Brown and fellow counselor Jim Maxwell founded Healing Songs Therapy, a service that culminated in Brown creating a song for each client about their emotional issues.” See [content.wow.com/wiki/Arthur_Brown_\(musician\)#Later_career](http://content.wow.com/wiki/Arthur_Brown_(musician)#Later_career).

11 Learn more at jrphil.org/garygreene.html.

12 On Feb. 19, 2010, Los Angeles’s mayor and city council proclaimed the Los Angeles Lawyers Philharmonic as “LA’s Only Legal Orchestra.” See www.lalawyersphil.org/news/accolades. While the orchestra is very talented, it probably helps that there was (and is) no other orchestra of lawyers and judges in Los Angeles County.

13 Learn more about Justice Gilbert at www.courts.ca.gov/2414.htm. You can purchase *Under Submission: The Columns of Arthur Gilbert: The First 20 Years (1988-2008)* from your friendly local bookseller.

14 Bovitz is an officer of the American Board of Certification, as well as the recording engineer for the Los Angeles Lawyers Philharmonic, Legal Voices and Gary S. Greene’s Big Band of Barristers. ABI members are encouraged to become certified legal specialists in consumer bankruptcy, business bankruptcy or creditors’ rights law (learn more at abcworld.org or prepare for the next ABC exam at abi.org/abcprep), but you do not need to be certified or certifiable to try out for Gary Greene’s orchestra, chorus or band.

15 See “Attorney Gary S. Greene’s ‘Big Band of Barristers’ Wins ABA Competition,” *Metropolitan News-Enterprise*, Aug. 7, 2012, available at www.metnews.com/articles/2012/chicago080712.htm. You can purchase Big Band of Barristers’ first CD, “Chicago,” for \$20 at lalawyersphil.org/bigbandcd. Recording engineer Bovitz spent two years tracking and mixing this album, but make sure you still own a CD player before you buy the album.

16 Gary Greene does not remember this quote. But I was there.

7 You may recall the memorable words of ‘Fire,’ ‘I am the god of hell fire, and I bring you fire, I’ll take you to burn.’ For a list of the more famous members in Atomic Rooster, see www.angelfire.com/ar2/vincent-crane/index.htm.

8 A picture of the short-lived Rooster Road Show may be found at www.atomic-rooster.net/biography.htm under the heading “The Missing Years.”

9 I asked Hambrick about the set list of songs played for the cemetery operators. “‘Dead Man’s Party,’ ‘There Will Never Be Another You,’ ‘Killer Joe,’ ‘Nice Work If You Can Get It.’” I’m sure Hambrick was making up this set list just to make me laugh.

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My own musical talents are far more limited than the musicians described herein, but I have written or produced, recorded, mixed and mastered 350 songs (with the help of talented guest artists at Bovitz Studios).¹⁷ According to my Internet service provider, fans download more than 7,500 songs per year from my site. My mother passed on a few years ago, so I'm not quite sure how to explain the popularity of my songs. Maybe it's the song titles?¹⁸

Since I am a part-time musician, I pass out multi-colored guitar picks as an alternative to traditional business cards. The picks say "bovitz.com" on the side, and the American

Bar Association selected it as one of the most creative lawyer business cards in the nation.¹⁹

Of course, you can open the door to music anytime. *Super Lawyer* and former Orange County Bankruptcy Forum president **Kyra E. Andrassy** (Smiley Wang-Ekval, LLP; Costa Mesa, Calif.) is taking guitar lessons with her 12-year-old son. What a great experience to share with your kid! I gave Andrassy a handful of picks at a recent state bar convention.²⁰

If you start a lawyer band after reading this article, drop me a note at bovitz@bovitz-spitzer.com. But please keep the volume down. I have work to do. **abi**

¹⁷ Bovitz's songs are free and posted on bovitz.biz.

¹⁸ The 12 most popular songs on bovitz.biz are "Jury Duty! What Else Could Go Wrong?," "All the Good Titles Are Gone," "Insufficient Zebras," "No Eyebrow People," "You Make Coffee Nervous," "Fins on That Girl," "This Title Intentionally Left Blank," "Dog Who Could Kill with the Wag of Its Tail," "Throbby Alien Thingie," "Partial Female Skeleton Dance," "Fried Chicken and Assault Rifle Choir," and "I Don't Need a Boyfriend; I Need a Restraining Order."

¹⁹ The ABA has a Pinterest page on interesting lawyer business cards at www.pinterest.com/abajournal/lawyer-business-cards. The daughter of Hon. **Catherine E. Bauer** (U.S. Bankruptcy Court (C.D. Cal.); Santa Ana) has incorporated bovitz.com guitar picks in her custom-made jewelry.

²⁰ Andrassy's biography can be found at swelawfirm.com/professionals/kyra-e-andrassy.

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