

# Chapter 8 Humor

By J. SCOTT BOVITZ

## 40 Years of Electronic Music: An Interview with Judge Barreca

The Chapter 8 Humor column has a soundtrack. Punch up iTunes or your favorite music streaming site. Type in “**Marc Barreca**” for the artist. Play his 1983 album *Music Works for Industry* at a soft level. Start with my favorite song, “Community Life.”<sup>1</sup> Go ahead, I’ll wait.<sup>2</sup>

Once the ambient electronic music is playing in the background, read the rest of this article.

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In the 1970s, your author learned a lot of useful stuff in college. For example, Mayan traditions are still alive in Mexico and Central America.<sup>3</sup> According to Mayan folklore, there is only a fixed amount of sadness in the world. Thus, in the Mayan tradition, your own suffering will ease someone else’s burden.<sup>4</sup>

More than once, I used this important fact to break the ice on a date with a pretty co-ed. I would offer to take on a small part of the young woman’s sadness, to make her a little happier. “It is in the Mayan tradition,” I would say sincerely.

The concept of a “fixed amount of sadness” has ensured the continuing employment of professional criers at funerals.<sup>5</sup> In Taiwan, the occupation of professional mourner is a well-paying and respected job.<sup>6</sup> Back in the U.S., the best known professional criers have always been musicians. Every great song is tied to lyrics about lost love. “You loved me. You left me. You broke my heart and left town on my motorcycle.” You get the idea. You can also determine why very few songs on *bovitz.com* have lyrics; I am a terrible poet/crier.<sup>7</sup>

In the 1970s and early 1980s, everyone listened to the same radio stations. We listened to AM radio — heard over hundreds of miles at night, in



Hon. Marc Barreca

low quality, with charismatic disc jockeys (DJs) like Wolfman Jack. We also listened to FM radio — with album rock, soft spoken DJs and picket-fence reception from your car as you drove along. Everyone knew the words to the current top 40 hits. Every song was a polished production number and was about three minutes long, except for “Stairway to Heaven.” A DJ working the night shift at a campus radio station would use “Stairway to Heaven” for a quick break.<sup>8</sup>

The youthful Barreca found the radio formula to be limiting or boring. So, he learned to make and record his own electronic music on tape in real time. This was hard because he was only able to record a few tracks at a time on tape.

Author Dave Segal described Barreca’s musical history. “Back in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Barreca was one of a handful of Seattle/Olympia musicians making distinctive electronic recordings and performing live improvisations, most of which had gone largely ignored until this decade, when small labels like New York’s RVNG Intl. and Germany’s VOD began reissuing the works of K. Leimer, Savant, Young Scientist (Seattle’s first live electronic band, featuring Barreca, James Husted, and the Blackouts’ Roland Barker; Barreca describes them as sounding like Zeit-era Tangerine Dream), and the good judge himself.”<sup>9</sup> Judge Barreca was kind enough to grant his own telephonic interview to Chapter 8 Humor.

How did Judge Barreca get his musical start? In first grade, he was given a tiny accordion by his father and stuck with accordion lessons for “eight or nine years.”<sup>10</sup> In high school, he must have discovered girls. Why else would he abandon his deep accordion roots to take on a gig as the organist in a rock band?<sup>11</sup>

8 See “Stairway to Heaven,” Wikipedia, available at [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stairway\\_to\\_Heaven](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stairway_to_Heaven) (“‘Stairway to Heaven’ is a song by the English rock band Led Zeppelin, released in late 1971. It was composed by guitarist Jimmy Page and vocalist Robert Plant.... It is often referred to as one of the greatest rock songs of all time.”). The song is eight minutes and two seconds long. See also [rock-songs.com/led-zeppelin/stairway-to-heaven](http://rock-songs.com/led-zeppelin/stairway-to-heaven).

9 Dave Segal, “Bankruptcy Judge Marc Barreca’s Rich Catalog of Experimental-Electronic Music Turns on a New Generation,” *The Stranger* (Aug. 23, 2017), available at [thestranger.com/music/2017/08/23/25366645/bankruptcy-judge-marc-barreca-rich-catalog-of-experimental-electronic-music-turns-on-a-new-generation](http://thestranger.com/music/2017/08/23/25366645/bankruptcy-judge-marc-barreca-rich-catalog-of-experimental-electronic-music-turns-on-a-new-generation).

10 See “Accordion,” Wikipedia, available at [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Accordion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Accordion) (“Accordions ... are a family of box-shaped musical instruments of the bellows-driven free-reed aerophone type, colloquially referred to as a squeezebox.”).

11 Chapter 8 Humor requests judicial notice that groupies are rarely attracted to accordion players.



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1 Spoiler alert: The rebellious musician is now Hon. **Marc Barreca** of the U.S. Bankruptcy Court for the Western District of Washington.

2 One example is Spotify, which is available at [spotify.com](http://spotify.com) (unless otherwise specified, all links in this article were last visited on Dec. 27, 2017).

3 Sheryl Eleazar, “The Mayan People of Today: How They Are Faring in These Modern Times,” *Lifetickler* (March 15, 2013), available at [lifetickler.com/the-mayan-people-of-today](http://lifetickler.com/the-mayan-people-of-today) (“The ancient Mayan civilization may now be long gone but this does not mean that the society has also ceased to exist ... there are ... more than six million Maya people still thriving, living and surviving amidst the harshness of these contemporary days. They are found in Belize, Mexico and Guatemala.”).

4 I looked everywhere for my notes from Anthropology 101, but I cannot find them. The *ABI Journal* team is just going to have to rely on my memory for this one.

5 “Professional mourning or paid mourning is a mostly historical occupation practiced in Mediterranean and Near Eastern cultures.... Professional mourners, also called *moirologists*, are compensated to lament or deliver a eulogy.” See “Professional Mourning,” Wikipedia, available at [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Professional\\_mourning](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Professional_mourning).

6 Allie Jaynes, “Taiwan’s Most Famous Professional Mourner,” *BBC* (Feb. 26, 2013), available at [bbc.com/news/magazine-21479399](http://bbc.com/news/magazine-21479399) (“Crying on command isn’t easy, but Liu Jun-Lin is hired to do it every day, at funerals for people she never knew. She’s Taiwan’s best-known professional mourner — a time-honored tradition in her country.”).

7 In the bankruptcy world, the professional mourner is usually counsel to the chapter 11 creditors’ committee.

Judge Barreca acquired a Hammond M-3 and a wooden, spinning Leslie speaker. This was a truly weighty combination. There were no roadies for high school bands, so Judge Barreca blames the Hammond/Leslie combination for ruining his back.<sup>12</sup>

I explained to Judge Barreca how my personal Hammond M-3 came with a smelly dead rat in the rotating metal tonewheel. He responded that one of his synthesizers (the famous Oberheim Four Voice) became the happy home to an entire family of mice, concluding that “[t]he critters must like the heat.”<sup>13</sup>

He also acquired an electric piano and an early ARP synthesizer. Oddly, this was his introduction to bankruptcy.<sup>14</sup> Late in high school, Judge Barreca acquired a taste for electronic music. He formed a band, Young Scientist, to play electronic music. Then, college student Barreca learned to solder.<sup>15</sup>

With his soldering skills, Judge Barreca rewired his Hammond organ and built a modular Aries synthesizer.<sup>16</sup> He remembers that hardware (synthesizers) and recording gear were expensive and hard to maintain, but he built up an inventory over time. He believes that he eventually “could have started a museum” of instruments.<sup>17</sup>

Judge Barreca still appreciates his Prophet-5 synthesizer. Hundreds of popular artists have used the Prophet-5. I love my Prophet 2008 hardware emulation of the original Prophet-5, and my unit is signed by Dave Smith (the original designer of the Prophet-5).<sup>18</sup>

Judge Barreca also loved the Mellotron. This instrument was popularized by the Beatles, the Moody Blues, King Crimson and Genesis. He still uses a software version of the Mellotron in his electronic music compositions.<sup>19</sup> He comments that many synthesizers from his youth have been cloned by software emulations. Today, anyone can acquire a rare (software) synthesizer, often at little to no cost. Today, musicians only need a good computer, sound card, amplifier, speakers and talent.<sup>20</sup>

Music still runs in the family. Judge Barreca’s daughter played the cello through high school, and his son still plays guitar.<sup>21</sup> Does Judge Barreca share a common interest

in accordion music with his children? “No, but my son Nick and I sometimes go see electronic musicians like Morton Sobotnick and Robert Henke.”

Today, Judge Barreca’s music is in demand. His earlier works are being remixed and reissued. While he has no expectation that he will ever earn a living from his music, seven albums are available on iTunes. To his surprise, his music has even been issued (for this first time) on vinyl.<sup>22</sup>

Judge Barreca is aware that modern musicians earn most of their income from touring, not from “record” sales. However, he does not intend to give up his day job to go touring.

How did musician Barreca end up in the law? After high school, he thought about starting a studio and wanted to compose soundtracks for video and films. After college, he thought about becoming a psychiatrist, but jobs were rare.

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Judge Barreca’s father (the accordion master) was a bankruptcy lawyer and chapter 13 trustee. He calculated that he could work part time as a lawyer and still make music. So he went to law school and was admitted to the bar in 1983.

Baby lawyer Barreca started working for the Washington State Office of the Attorney General in Olympia. Next, he moved to his father’s bankruptcy law firm. Eventually, associate Barreca found himself doing chapter 11 work for a law firm that was absorbed into K&L Gates LLP. He also joined ABI in May 1992.

Apparently, attorney Barreca decided that a bankruptcy judgeship would allow him to be his own boss. In 2010, he was appointed to the U.S. Bankruptcy Court for the Western District of Washington.<sup>23</sup> Today, he holds court in Seattle and Marysville, Wash. Judge Barreca finds that almost every bankruptcy calendar is interesting. He is never bored.

Given the booming economy, Judge Barreca is still able to compose and record music. A few times each year, he plays local gigs (including a local nonprofit fundraiser). In June 2017, he played his trusty accordion on stage at a brewery. Using a modern interface and a computer on stage, he triggered loops and sounds. (These were not the traditional sounds from an accordion that you might imagine in a gypsy campground.)

12 The M-3 is essentially equivalent to the famous B-3 organ. See [hammondorgano.com/products/leslie](http://hammondorgano.com/products/leslie) (including a short video of the Leslie).

13 The Oberheim Four Voice was used by Depeche Mode, Styx, Pink Floyd and many others (see also [vintagesynth.com/oberheim/4voice.php](http://vintagesynth.com/oberheim/4voice.php)). Judge Barreca recently sold his Hammond M-3 and Leslie, but the buyer did not properly measure the exit route. The Hammond organ became wedged in the stairwell; the organ had to be sawed and removed in pieces. No mice were found in the wreckage.

14 See “ARP Instruments,” Wikipedia, available at [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ARP\\_Instruments](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ARP_Instruments) (“ARP Instruments Inc. was an American manufacturer of electronic musical instruments, founded by Alan Robert Pearlman.... ARP closed its doors in 1981 due to financial difficulties.”).

15 I thank my father for teaching me to solder and build electronic kits. See [n6mi.com](http://n6mi.com) for the story of some recent exploits in ham radio.

16 See “Aries 300 Music System,” Vintage Synth Explorer, available at [vintagesynth.com/misc/aries300.php](http://vintagesynth.com/misc/aries300.php) (“The Aries 300 is a classic modular system that competed against the Moog, Arp, Buchla, E-mu and Roland modular systems of the time.”).

17 I share this musical gear lust. At one time, the author of this article owned more than 40 synthesizers.

18 See “Sequential Circuits Prophet-5,” Wikipedia, available at [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sequential\\_Circuits\\_Prophet-5](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sequential_Circuits_Prophet-5) (“The Prophet-5 is an analog synthesizer that was designed and manufactured by Sequential Circuits between 1978 and 1984.... About 6,000 units were produced ... by Dave Smith.”).

19 See “Mellotron,” Wikipedia, available at [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mellotron](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mellotron) (“The Mellotron is an electro-mechanical, polyphonic tape replay keyboard originally developed and built in Birmingham, England, in 1963.... The instrument works by pulling a section of magnetic tape across a head. Different portions of the tape can be played to access different sounds.”).

20 For a small sample of available synthesizers, see [lesitedeburniee.free.fr/lalistedeburniee1-en.html](http://lesitedeburniee.free.fr/lalistedeburniee1-en.html) (download at your own risk).

21 I use a guitar pick as my business card. I am sending a representative set of [bovitz.com](http://bovitz.com) guitar picks to Judge Barreca to pass along to his son. I am declaring the total value of this set to be \$1.35. See *Guide to Judicial Policy*, Vol. 2C, Ch. 6, § 620.35(b)(8), “Acceptance of Gifts by a Judicial Officer or Employee,” available at [uscourts.gov/sites/default/files/vol02c-ch06.pdf](http://uscourts.gov/sites/default/files/vol02c-ch06.pdf) (“[T]he gift ... is to a judicial officer or employee other than a judge or a member of a judge’s personal staff and has an aggregate market value of \$50 or less per occasion, provided that the aggregate market value of individual gifts accepted from any one person ... shall not exceed \$100 in a calendar year.”).

22 Vinyl could be making a comeback. See Allen Kozinn, “Weaned on CDs, They’re Reaching for Vinyl,” *New York Times* (June 9, 2013), available at [nytimes.com/2013/06/10/arts/music/vinyl-records-are-making-a-comeback.html](http://nytimes.com/2013/06/10/arts/music/vinyl-records-are-making-a-comeback.html) (“We never expected the vinyl resurgence to become as crazy as it is,” [Josh Bizar] said. “But it’s come full circle. We get kids calling us up and telling us why they listen to vinyl, and when we ask them why they don’t listen to CDs, they say, CDs? My dad listens to CDs — why would I do that?”).

23 It seems that the Federal Bureau of Investigation entirely missed the suspicious electronic music angle when conducting their background check on judicial nominee Barreca.

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## Chapter 8 Humor: An Interview with Judge Barreca

from page 39

Judge Barreca has been on the same record label since 1980. The catalog on iTunes includes these albums: *Twilight*, *Aberrant Lens*, *Subterrane*, *Music Works for Industry* (this column's favorite), *Tremble*, *Beneath the Mirrored Surface* and *Big Dahomey Funeral*.<sup>24</sup>

Judge Barreca still works with other musicians, including K. Leimer (who is now a retired graphic artist). When he began recording music, Judge Barreca lusted after a TEAC tape recorder. Now, with modern computers and digital audio workstations (DAWs), he simply exchanges pieces of a composition (WAV files) with Leimer over the internet.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> See "Dahomey," Wikipedia, available at [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dahomey](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dahomey) ("The Kingdom of Dahomey ... was an African kingdom (located in ... the present-day country of Benin) that existed from about 1600 until 1894, when the last king, Béhanzin, was defeated by the French, and the country was annexed into the French colonial empire.")

<sup>25</sup> For a history of DAWs, see "Digital Audio Workstation," Wikipedia, available at [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digital\\_audio\\_workstation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digital_audio_workstation).

Judge Barreca and Leimer have released three albums: *Premap*, *Field Characteristics* and *Dual Mono*. Hear individual songs from the collaborative CD, *Dual Mono*, on the internet. Judge Barreca describes his pieces as "minimal ambient ... subliminal, background-y, but good."<sup>26</sup>

Judge Barreca and I share a respect for English magazines about music and music technology. He is particularly fond of *Computer Music*. I subscribe to (and swear by) its sister publication, *Sound on Sound*.<sup>27</sup>

As I hung up the telephone, I smiled. The future of music is (once again) found in home studios. I like this type of anarchy, particularly in the ambient electronic music space. Thank you, Judge Barreca, for leading the way. **abi**

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<sup>26</sup> The Dual Mono songs are posted at [midheaven.com/item/field-characteristics-by-barreca-leimer](http://midheaven.com/item/field-characteristics-by-barreca-leimer). See Segal, *supra* n.9.

<sup>27</sup> For Sound on Sound, visit [soundonsound.com](http://soundonsound.com). For Computer Music, visit [myfavouritemagazines.co.uk/music/computer-music-magazine-subscription](http://myfavouritemagazines.co.uk/music/computer-music-magazine-subscription).

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