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Attorneys Who Rock: These South Florida Lawyers Moonlight as Musicians

By **Raychel Lean** | December 27, 2019 at 03:40 PM

These South Florida attorneys aren't quitting their day jobs, but they are bringing the house down. Here's a look at seven musically inclined lawyers with bands, orchestras and music companies.



1. Joseph M. Hernandez chairs Weiss Serota Helfman Cole & Bierman’s real estate practice group in Coral Gables. He’s also lead guitarist of **The Click Band**, which plays classic rock at clubs, parties and events, including the South Beach Seafood Festival. Hernandez’s fascination with music began when he received a drum set at 10—much to his mother’s horror.

“One day she basically said, ‘The drums have got to go,’ so I worked out an arrangement with a friend of mine where he allowed me to put my drums in his garage and I would sneak over there and play,” Hernandez said.

After borrowing a guitar, Hernandez fell in love with it and even started playing gigs in junior high. Now, his bandmates consist of two IT professionals and an Americans With Disabilities Act compliance coordinator. As a transactional attorney for municipal and private clients, Hernandez said he’d be “much more nervous” arguing at court than playing for an audience.

“We look out in the crowd and we see people like us that have worked all week and have got all kinds of problems going on in their life,” Hernandez said. “But for those brief moments while they’re sitting there, drunk and happy, jumping up and down and singing a song, they’re really having a great time.”

2. Ellen Patterson handles real estate litigation as partner at Levine Kellogg Lehman Schneider + Grossman in Miami and sings lead vocals for **The Other Guys**, which plays a mix of classic rock, R&B and pop. Patterson also sings ballads by artists like Adele and Whitney Houston at piano bars and attends the annual Fund Assembly for Florida real estate attorneys, where she reunites with her other band, The Subrogators, for their yearly performance.

Patterson began singing at weddings and parties after joining chorus in high school, and met her current band singing karaoke. She says performing does wonders for her mental health: “It’s a huge stress relief to be able to leave all the work at work and get up on stage and scream your heart out, and just let it all out.”



3. Managing partner and chair of Shutts & Bowen’s insurance practice group John E. Meagher began college as a trombone major, before realizing, “No way am I going to make a living doing this.” He played in the Greater Miami Symphonic Band and in a brass quintet called Miami’s Top Brass, until in 2015 a colleague mentioned a Battle of the Bands contest in Fort Lauderdale. Meagher thought about the electric guitar he’d just bought and remembered his law partner Frank Zacherl played guitar in college.

“To tell you the truth, I didn’t want to be a bad band,” Meagher said. “So I just asked him, ‘How good are you?’ And he looked at me and said, ‘You don’t have to worry about me.’ “

After dragging Meagher's wife, a classical singer, "kicking and screaming" into their classic rock band LLP, they won second place and decided to keep going. The band later went on to win the contest, and though three out of five members are lawyers, Meagher said they keep their work life separate: "No one wants to really remind themselves that they're not rock and roll stars, that instead they're just lawyers."



4. Investment-based immigration attorney Jose E. Latour of LatourLaw is also a **recording artist** with three solo albums. Latour began songwriting in junior high and was regularly singing in bands by college. He started releasing music after representing a producer in the 1990s, when he wrote a "cheesy" song for a charity compilation album of traditional Cuban artists. Much of Latour's music is in Spanglish with a tropical island vibe: "A friend of mine says, 'Think Jimmy Buffet in Cuban.'"

With offices in Vietnam and Miami, Latour said his constant challenge is finding time to make music.

"It's really sad to come home and look at my piano, look at my guitars and be too tired and jetlagged to get on them," Latour said. "When you have multiple areas of interest, striking a balance between the things you have to do and the things that really fill your heart with joy is critical."

5. Miami litigator Court E. Keeley focuses on civil rights class action lawsuits while running a **small international record company** he started during law school in 2002. Keeley began creating music and networks of international artists in the '90s, when he worked in finance and international business. Through Somia Music, Keeley works with artists in Russia, Thailand, Japan, Scotland, France, Belgium and other countries to release albums, negotiate deals and handle music rights and copyright issues.

"We'll release any type of music as long as we believe there's something special about it," Keeley said.

Keeley also creates and produces music independently, and said after "letting law take over my life" for about 10 years, he's back in the game: "Lawyers need to be careful not to give up on their aspirations. Practicing law tends to overcome your entire life and you need to be cognizant of that and be careful not to give up on things that you love and believe in. It's OK to love the law, but that is not the entirety of what I want to do with my life."



6. Richard H. Levenstein focuses on complex commercial and health care litigation as shareholder at Nason, Yeager, Gerson, Harris & Fumero in Palm Beach Gardens. He's also been playing the cello since he was 10, inspired by the New York Philharmonic Young People's Concerts. He plays with the **Treasure Coast Symphony Orchestra**, which began its holiday concerts Dec. 8. When playing solo, the Bach Suites are Levenstein's go-to

pieces, while he loves to play Beethoven, Brahms, Tchaikovsky and Mozart as part of an orchestra.

“It’s a wonderful release and a wonderful way to enter into a world that’s completely and totally different and far away from the one I inhabit as a lawyer,” Levenstein said.

7. Co-founder of Miami firm Meland, Russin & Budwick, Mark Meland has represented some of the country’s top developers in complex, high-stakes transactions. But by night, he takes to the stage with his band, **The Urge**, playing ’90s-style rock in local bars about once a month. Before law school, Meland toured Southeast America with his then-band, Swift Kick, which would set up in one town to play at a bar for a week, before moving on to the next place. And they opened for some heavy hitters, including Cheap Trick, Pat Travers, Honeymoon Suite, Pure Prairie League and Iron Butterfly.

“I was young, I had a lot of energy, and they were really just incredible years,” Meland said.

His current band members include Miami attorney Frederick Fein, an IT professional and another in the construction business. They’ve twice won Dade Legal Aid’s annual Battle of the Bands, otherwise known as, “one of the most fun parties of the year for lawyers,” according to Meland: “Because some of the parties are buttoned up, right? They’re guys in suits and it’s a little stodgier. But when you go to a bar and people are drinking and there’s bands, people loosen up a little bit. You see who’s got tats and who doesn’t. It’s like the party where you can just let your hair down, if you have it.”