

Being A Singer Makes Me A Better Lawyer

By **Jessica Caterina** (July 23, 2026)

In this Expert Analysis series, attorneys discuss how their unusual extracurricular activities enhance professional development, providing insights and pointers that translate to the office, courtroom and beyond. If you have a hobby you would like to write about, email expertanalysis@law360.com.

One of the things I enjoy about working in the legal industry is that many lawyers seem to have interesting hobbies that offer a welcome escape from the demands of practice.

I love hearing about the different and often creative ways my colleagues find respite from the everyday rigors of cite-checking, negotiating deals, preparing for oral argument and occasionally being yelled at by opposing counsel.

As for me, I have been a singer my entire life.

Long before I ever set foot in a law school classroom, I spent seven years trying to make it as a professional singer in Los Angeles, recording and performing music at various venues across the city. It was one of the most formative chapters of my life.

Alas, my East Coast roots eventually pulled me back. And the next thing I knew, I had returned to New York City to study for the LSAT. But nearly everything I learned, both onstage and in the recording studio, has followed me into my second career.

Preparation Is Key

There is no hiding on a stage. When the lights come up and the music starts, it's just you and the audience. You either deliver or you don't, and the result truly comes down to preparation.

The more rehearsed you are and the more you know your lyrics, the more confident you will be onstage. That experience forged in me a confidence that I carry into every courtroom appearance, every oral argument and every deposition — because it's no different when practicing law.

Standing before a judge or a jury can be an intimidating experience, but it is far less daunting when you've spent years standing under a spotlight with nothing but your voice to rely on. Dealing with an overly aggressive adversary during a deposition can throw you off your game, but if you know the points you need to make and the key documents you need to show your witness, you can stay focused.

The stage taught me how to control the room as best I can, and I think that lesson translates quite well into the legal profession.



Jessica Caterina

Humility That Comes With Rejection

For every ounce of confidence I have earned as a singer, the music industry gave me an equal ounce of humility. The entertainment world is not kind, and rejection is relentless.

You audition and you don't get the part. You record a song you love and no one picks it up. You pour your heart into a performance and the room is half empty. You learn, over time, that talent alone is not enough, that outcomes are not always within your control, and that the only real option is to get up the next morning and try again.

Litigation is remarkably similar. There are exhilarating wins and crushing losses, and they do not always correlate with the quality of your preparation or the strength of your argument.

The music industry taught me the importance of absorbing a loss without letting it define you, to celebrate a win without letting it inflate you, and to show up the next day ready to work regardless of what happened the day before. That resilience is, I think, one of the most underrated qualities a litigator can possess.

Memorize, Memorize, Memorize

At any given performance, I had to have roughly 45 minutes of song lyrics committed to memory. Over the course of seven years, that kind of mental discipline reshaped the way my brain processes and retains information. It may have given me something close to a photographic memory. And even though what I've memorized tends to expire as soon as I move on to the next task, the skill is extremely helpful in the moment during oral argument.

In litigation, the skill of memory is invaluable. When I deliver an opening statement, present an oral argument or take a deposition, I try to do so without reading from a script. I am not always the most credentialed or seasoned lawyer in the room, but I always try to make sure I have memorized the key facts of the case better than anyone else.

There is a persuasiveness that comes from a lawyer who can look you in the eye and speak without glancing down at their notes. And I also think it shows real dedication to a case. Judges notice the difference, and so do your clients. I owe that ability to years of stepping up to a microphone with nothing written in front of me.

Counting Beats

Every singer understands the discipline of silence — the counted beats before your entrance, the restraint of waiting for precisely the right moment to begin. That instinct has translated quite well into my practice.

I often find myself pausing a beat before I speak, whether I am responding to a question from the bench, examining a witness or facing a difficult adversary who is doing their best to provoke a reaction from me. That brief pause allows me to gather my thoughts, take a quiet breath and respond with intention rather than impulse. It is a remarkably effective tool, particularly in heated exchanges.

When opposing counsel is trying to rile me up, I take a beat and try to stay composed. I try not to lose my cool. I'm only human, so this does not work 100% of the time, but remaining calm is a highly underrated tool when dealing with an unnecessarily spirited adversary. That is something I learned as a singer: Sometimes the pause before the note matters just as

much as the note itself.

Part of a Community

Singing has not only made me a better lawyer, but it has also brought me closer to many wonderful members of the legal community.

There are countless other singers and musicians in the profession, and I regularly perform alongside lawyers and judges in what I can only describe as gloriously nerdy legal musical productions. I have also performed for numerous notable members of the community, including the late U.S. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

And, in what is hands down one of my favorite things to do, I regularly sing the national anthem at official events, including naturalization ceremonies at the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York.

Standing before a room full of people who are about to become American citizens and lending my voice to that moment is one of the most heartwarming and humbling experiences I have ever had. It is a privilege that has nothing to do with billable hours or case strategy, and it reminds me that this career is about more than advocacy — it is about the community of people I get to share it with.

Something shifts when you've shared a stage with someone. The profession feels smaller, more human. Opposing counsel is not just a name on a motion. U.S. District Judge Jed S. Rakoff is less scary once you have performed in a musical honoring his life and legacy.

These performances do not compromise professionalism; I believe they deepen it. They remind all of us that behind the briefs and the robes, we are people first.

The Only Woman in the Room

There is one more lesson from my years in Los Angeles that I carry with me, and it is perhaps the most personal.

In the early 2000s, the music industry looked very different than it does today. As a female singer, I was routinely the only woman in the recording studio, rehearsal space or meeting. I learned to walk into male-dominated rooms and hold my ground.

I didn't realize at the time how much that experience was shaping me, but I recognize it now every time I find myself, still, as the only woman at counsel's table or in a conference room full of opposing attorneys.

Being the only woman is not a limitation. If there is a through line between my two careers, it is this: Whether you are performing a song or presenting an argument, walk into the room like you own it.

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