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Stages of Opera Passion

By **JONATHAN DIAMOND**

Friday, December 2, 2016



Richard B. Jones fell in love with opera in a place where he wasn't allowed to listen to jazz: the former Soviet Union.

Jones, managing director and private wealth adviser at Merrill Lynch, was studying in St. Petersburg in 1977 (then known as Leningrad) when he went to the Kirov Theater and watched productions in Russian.

"From a cultural point of view, it woke me up," said Jones, 59. "I hadn't been exposed to much ballet, classical music, or theater. Ironically, it was an extremely closed society. They would confiscate books and records we brought over, like James Joyce and Miles Davis."

The love of opera led Jones to join the board of directors of the LA Opera seven years ago. It was a passion that also led him to Maria Altmann, who came into a fortune in 2006 after her family won back paintings by Gustav Klimt seized by the Nazis, as depicted in the film "Woman in Gold."

The family interviewed multiple wealth managers, but ultimately chose Jones after he and Altmann discovered their shared love of the art form and helping young singers in their careers.

"I think at the end of the day, the family felt my wealth management skills were obviously, hopefully, pretty good," said Jones. "The other side of it was that Maria and I shared a love of opera that had a lot to do with it as well."

Tuned Up

Growing up, Spertus Landes & Umhofer partner Matthew Umhofer was a performance junkie.

"My high school career was like a late-'80s version of 'Glee,'" said the West L.A.-based white-collar criminal defense attorney.

But after playing music and singing throughout high school and college, the opportunities for Umhofer to get on stage waned as the demands of law school turned into a high-profile law firm job and a stint as a federal prosecutor. Then, in 2012, he unwittingly stumbled into what will soon be a six-year performance tradition.

"I had run out of places to perform, so when I heard there was this battle of the bands for lawyers I jumped at the opportunity," Umhofer said.

This battle of the bands for lawyers was put on by Law Rocks USA, a fundraiser started by lawyers Ted Scott and Brandt Mori in Los Angeles based on a similar event in London.

Umhofer, who has performed at every L.A. concert as a one-man guitar and vocals act, said it's been rewarding to perform while also helping fund groups like Planned Parenthood and downtown's Inner City Law Center.

Staff reporters Caroline Anderson and Henry Meier contributed to this column. Page 3 is compiled by Editor Jonathan Diamond. He can be reached at jdiamond@labusinessjournal.com.

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