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Primerus Attorney Uses Love of Music and the Law to Write Acclaimed Opera

When Derrick Wang was a first-year law student taking Constitutional Law and reading a thick textbook of Supreme Court cases, there were three “magic” words that always caught his attention: “Scalia, J., dissenting.”

“Every time I saw those three words, everything that came after was astounding,” said Wang, an attorney at Primerus firm Thomas & Libowitz, P.A. in Baltimore, Maryland. “It leapt off the page. You could say it was operatic.”

Then came the counterpoint to opinions from Justice Antonin Scalia – those of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

“There was this great synergy that happened. The idea occurred to me that this would be so interesting on stage,” Wang said. “Then I learned the two of them in real life are very good friends and bonded over a love for opera. So I decided: clearly, there’s an opera here.”

So Wang wrote a comic opera called *Scalia/Ginsburg*, inspired by the opinions of the U.S. Supreme Court justices.

In June 2013, the two justices invited Wang and opera singers from the Peabody Institute of Johns Hopkins University to perform sections of *Scalia/Ginsburg* for them in the East Conference Room at the Supreme Court of the United States. Nina Totenberg from NPR (National Public Radio) was also there to report about the event for “All Things Considered.” The opera then had its world premiere at the Castleton Festival in Virginia in July 2015, followed by a sold-out second production in 2017 at The Glimmerglass Festival in Cooperstown, New York.

The critically-acclaimed opera brought world-wide publicity and dramatically changed life for Wang, who joined Thomas & Libowitz in November 2016.

“It was very heartening to know that people were interested in the idea of this opera,” Wang said. “The funny thing is that the NPR story, including interviews with the justices, came out about three weeks before the bar exam. The resulting attention was very flattering, but I didn’t have all the time in the world to respond right away.”

A Maryland native, Wang’s interest in music came before his interest in the law. He graduated from a private preparatory high school in Baltimore while studying piano at the Peabody Institute. He went on to earn his bachelor’s degree in music from Harvard University and his master’s degree in music composition from the Yale School of Music.

It was his interest in intellectual property – based on his experience as a musician – that drew him to attend law school at the University of Maryland Carey School of Law, where he was inspired to write the opera.

“All the words the singers are singing to each other are rooted in something they [the justices] said,” Wang said. “The music harks back to landmark moments in operatic history in the same way the lyrics hark back to constitutional law.”

Wang finds the friendship between the justices – one a liberal and one a conservative – inspiring. (Justice Scalia died in February 2016.)

“It is an example to us all of bringing people together over political divides,” Wang said. “We are different, and we are one.”

After graduating from law school in 2013, Wang took time to pursue publicizing the opera. He also spent time in Silicon Valley at a startup accelerator called Y Combinator, where he shadowed a group of over 100 startups while researching the creativity of tech entrepreneurship. Now, at Thomas & Libowitz, he focuses on intellectual property and business law, advising creative clients in all industries as they launch new businesses. “As a composer of a high-profile interdisciplinary musical work, Derrick Wang possesses a unique understanding of the relationship between proprietary intellectual property and the law, and this insight is of tremendous value to growing companies,” said Steven Thomas, co-founder and CEO of Thomas & Libowitz.

Wang also designs and teaches interdisciplinary courses on law and music at the Peabody Conservatory.

Wang looks for every opportunity to break down barriers and bring people together through law and music – whether by writing an opera based on the law, helping lawyers appreciate opera and helping opera fans appreciate the law, or making the law accessible to the public by showing how it intersects with other fields.

Wang is writing other musical and operatic works as well. Meanwhile, you’ll find him practicing law in the offices of Thomas & Libowitz every day.

He urges others to also embrace their creativity and never let anyone put them in a box saying “this is who you are and this is what you do.”

For more information about *Scalia/Ginsburg*, visit derrickwang.com. 



Derrick Wang, writer of *Scalia/Ginsburg*

