

DAILY REPORT

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2019 GEORGIA LEGAL AWARDS

Lifetime Achievement



JOEL KATZ Greenberg Traurig

JOEL KATZ HAS a remarkable story from his days in law school, long before he was a counselor to some of the biggest music stars in the business.

He told the *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* in 2015 that his contracts professor, considered the toughest in the school, would fail anyone who was late three times to class. Katz was working

the night shift at a hotel and was late twice—and on the third tardy incident, the professor said he could leave because he was going to fail.

“I told him that he can give me the F, but I was going to stay. I paid for this course and I was going to learn,” Katz said.

When the professor privately pressed Katz about his late night job, he told Katz he wouldn’t fail because, “You want to be a lawyer more than anyone in the class.”

Katz eventually moved to Atlanta and opened up a practice. He got into the music business in 1971 when he negotiated a contract for James Brown, leading to a client list that has included B.B. King, Willie Nelson, Gregg Allman, Kix Brooks, Jimmy Buffett, Kenny Chesney, Ronnie Dunn, Jamie Foxx, Sammy Hagar, Steve Harvey, Faith Hill, the estate of Whitney Houston, Julio Iglesias, Alan Jackson, Kris Kristofferson, Little Big Town, Chris “Ludacris” Bridges, Tim McGraw, Brad Paisley, George Strait, James Taylor, Justin Timberlake and others.

When *Billboard* named Katz its 2017 Lawyer of the Year, it reported that Katz spends 10 hours a day on the phone and about half his time on the road. In 2016, that included trips to China, Russia and Gabon, in addition to the more obvious music hot spots of New York, Los Angeles and Nashville. He advised the Gabonese Republic on the African Music Institute it is building with Boston’s Berklee College of Music.

In addition to numerous new contracts for artists and executives, Katz negotiated a \$600 million pact for the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences, a longtime client, to keep the Grammy Awards and other shows on CBS, according to *Billboard*.

In 2017, Katz negotiated and closed on behalf of Faith Hill and Tim McGraw six recording agreements with Sony Music.

You told the *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* in 2015 that your lack of experience in entertainment law helped in your first representation of James Brown because no experienced lawyer would have felt comfortable communicating Brown’s “loony” requests to a record company. The company agreed to many of Brown’s requests during negotiations, but now that you are a veteran entertainment lawyer, how do you handle “loony” expectations clients ask of their record companies?

When I negotiated the infamous James Brown contract with Polydor, I had no entertainment industry experience. There was no way for me to know if Mr. Brown’s requests were possible. I believe this was the primary reason Mr. Brown hired me. After 50 years of experience in this business, I know that managing expectations honestly is a crucial component of building a relationship with a client. We set achievable and measurable expectations that are proven to work when we negotiate on behalf of our clients.

What is a common misconception people have about the music business?

People believe the music business doesn’t follow standard business practices. Since the music industry consists of creative individuals who earn money by creating and performing songs, people forget that there are professionals who assist these creative artists with their music careers (talent managers, business managers, entertainment lawyers, etc.). These professionals operate their businesses with tried-and-true and tested platforms.

You’ve represented musicians through the eras of vinyl, 8-track tapes, cassettes, compact discs, Napster, iTunes and streaming services. What are some of your clients’ biggest concerns as the technology enabling their work to be distributed changes?

While the model for music consumption changes, the client’s concern is always the same. How do I get paid, who is paying me, and how do I ensure that I am not being cheated out of my fair share of the revenue?

Your representation of music producer Dallas Austin veered far out of entertainment law when he was arrested in Dubai on drug charges. What did you learn in your successful efforts to secure a pardon and his release?

I learned that compassion and forgiveness have no boundaries—spanning cities and continents. Multiple ambassadors, a prime minister, a prince, a senator, religious leaders, entertainment figures and prominent private citizens all stepped out on a limb to help secure the release of Mr. Austin from a Dubai jail. The ruler of Dubai even pardoned him.

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