

# THE HISTORY OF THE UCLAW MUSICAL

KENNETH GRAHAM\*

The UCLA law school has a long history of doing musical comedy parodies. Originally, students performed these during the law school's annual variety show, "The Law Revue." For example, one year Ralph Shapiro wrote a parody of "Fiddler on the Roof" that brought down the house when students sang "If I Were A Lawyer" to the tune of "If I Were A Rich Man."

The history of the show as a separate entity began in 1981 when Bill Peters and Bryan Hull wrote "My Fair Law Student" for their classmates to perform as part of The Law Revue, then invited Professor Graham, their Procedure teacher, to fill that role in their show. At one rehearsal, when the lines they wrote did not fit the music, Graham (who had no previous experience with lyric writing) sketched out a better set of lyrics, which they readily adopted.

That might have ended it, but later that year Graham broke his elbow playing basketball. On visiting him in the hospital, the students urged Graham to try his hand at another parody for the next Law Revue. Graham agreed and, using the tunes from Rodgers and Hammerstein's

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\* Professor Emeritus, UCLA School of Law. For further information, see the Editor-in-Chief's introduction on page 1 of this volume: 11 CAL. LEGAL HIST. 1 (2016).

“Oklahoma!” came up with “Carcinoma.” Because of its length, the directors of The Law Revue would only schedule it if it were performed as the last number. The remaining audience applauded the performance of “Carcinoma” even though it did not end until well after midnight. And so the tradition began.

Here is a complete list of the shows and the originals from which they were taken:

- 1982 Carcinoma (“Oklahoma!”)
- 1983 Obfuscate (“Kiss Me, Kate”)
- 1984 Soporific (“South Pacific”)
- 1985 Songs Without Heart (The Rodgers & Hart Songbook, the first show not based on a single musical but an entire body of work)
- 1986 Damp Hankies (“Damn Yankees”)
- 1987 My Fair Lawyer (“My Fair Lady”)
- 1988 Exam-a-Game (“The Pajama Game”)
- 1989 Coleslaw (The Cole Porter Songbook)
- 1990 S.O.U.L.S. (“A Funny Thing Happened on The Way to the Forum”)
- 1991 West Side Glory (“West Side Story”)
- 1992 Guise Enthralls (“Guys and Dolls”)
- 1993 The Wizard of Laws (“The Wizard of Oz,” the only show based on a movie)
- 1994 The Good Lawyer Svejk (The Beatles Songbook)
- 1995 Muzak Man (“The Music Man”)
- 1996 Justice Mall (the only musical based on classical music, “Pictures at An Exhibition”)
- 1997 Anti-Kids’n’Fun (“Annie Get Your Gun”)
- 1998 I.R.A.C., By George (The George and Ira Gershwin Songbook)
- 1999 Thinking An I (“The King and I”)
- 2000 Kernal Knowledge (The Jerome Kern Songbook)
- 2001 Care or \$ell? (“Carousel”)
- 2002 No Diploma (“Oklahoma!”)
- 2003 Fogey Barcicle (The Hoagie Carmichael Songbook)
- 2003 We’re Singing It Again (the first Alumni Musical — selections from the above shows)

The careful reader of this list will note that while many of the shows took music from a single Broadway musical, a significant number drew from a composer's complete body of work; for example, "Songs Without Heart" rested on the many songs written by Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart.<sup>1</sup>

## WRITING THE SHOWS

Once the musical became an annual affair, immediately after one year's show Graham began writing the musical for the following year. Usually it took around six months to complete the script. But we should note two exceptions.

"S.O.U.L.S." (the acronym stood for "Some Other University Law School") began life as a project for the annual meeting of the Association of American Law Schools. When the AALS decided to come to Los Angeles, UCLAW Professor Jesse Dukeminier (a member of the local program committee) suggested they recruit Graham to write something for evening entertainment. However, when the Committee saw a first draft of a parody of "A Funny Thing Happened on The Way to The Forum," they promptly rejected it as "too controversial."<sup>2</sup> Graham later recycled the script for local use.

The second case of rapid writing began when at the cast party in 1990, Graham casually mentioned that he had thought of using "West Side Story" to recount the battles over affirmative action at UCLAW but decided this would not work as the original required more choreography than usual. The students urged Graham to give it a shot. He did — and completed the script in six weeks. "West Side Glory" proved quite successful, particularly in stirring student discussion of the complexity of the issues.

Graham usually altered the original script during rehearsals — sometimes because he found a better line or lyric, but often as a result of suggestions from cast members. Hence, in addition to the original script, the show archives contain an "As Performed" version prepared after the

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<sup>1</sup> Readers who would like to see more, including programs and photographs of the shows should visit our Facebook page, "The UCLAW Musical." The complete show archive with scripts, CDs and DVDs of performances, photos, T-shirts, and other memorabilia was deposited in the UCLA Law Library's historical collections.

<sup>2</sup> The premise of the show involved the then-current attempt by some right-wing groups to hire students to spy on their teachers and report any attempts to indoctrinate students with some leftist ideology.



THE STAFF SCENE FROM THE “WIZARD OF LAWS,” 1993.  
 L.-R.: STUDENTS TIFFANY WAGNER AND MEGAN SATTERLEE,  
 UCLA LAW LIBRARIAN FRED SMITH, STUDENT MARCUS  
 DELGADO (SEATED), AND (IN CENTER WITH LONG DRESS) LINDA  
 KRESSH OF THE LAW SCHOOL PLACEMENT OFFICE.

*Courtesy Kenneth Graham*

show. Because students, faculty, and staff contributed to the final product, we attributed authorship to “The Aesopian Collective.”<sup>3</sup>

Though we advertised the shows as “musical comedy” (and they had a lot of jokes poking fun at student and faculty foibles), as the example of “West Side Glory” shows, they also dealt with serious issues. Many shows had something to say about feminism and the status of women (including sexual harassment). Other shows looked at climate change and CIA spying on domestic dissidents (“Care or \$ell?”), the culture of corporate law firms (“Anti-Kids’n’Fun”), jury trial (“Kernal Knowledge”), and nostalgia for the 1960s (“Fogey Barcicle”). While one faculty supporter thought the show took a Manichean view of the world, another quoted a line from

<sup>3</sup> For those too young to remember the McCarthy era, members of the Communist Party were accused of using “Aesopian” language that had one meaning for initiates while outsiders assumed the words had their normal meaning.

the show during a faculty meeting. In perhaps the most remarkable tale of influence, in “Soporific” one of the characters called another “a rebel without a pause.” Someone in the audience used that line in an article in a national publication to refer to members of The National Lawyers Guild. From there someone picked it up to use as a label for a local talk-show host.

## MUSIC AND MUSICIANS

Over the years, many talented musicians provided accompaniment for the singers and dancers, beginning with Mark Swanson who played piano for the first three shows. Mark had performed a similar role for undergraduate performances at Stanford.<sup>4</sup> In some later shows it took two or more pianists to fill Mark’s shoes. Notable exceptions include Cathy Paul<sup>5</sup> and Darron Flagg.<sup>6</sup> So that the pianists did not have to play at all the rehearsals, they recorded the music on tape cassettes (remember those?) that were played on a boom-box at rehearsals. The cast and the pianists usually assembled at the Graham manse on the Thursday night before the dress rehearsal to run through the music.

The show had other musicians. Beginning with “Obfuscate,” the show usually had a faculty band that played an overture and an entr’acte. At their first appearance, the band included Professors Reggie Alleyne (flute), Michael Asimow (piano), Ken Graham (trombone), Henry McGee (violin), and Patrick Patterson (winds and arrangements). Students sometimes joined the faculty band, but eventually students formed their own bands. Jason Axe, who, as an undergraduate, had been an arranger for the UCLA marching band, played a key role in this development. The student band originally accompanied the big production

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<sup>4</sup> After a brief period practicing law, Mark went to music school at Indiana University and when last heard from had joined the music faculty at Dartmouth, where he served as director of university choruses.

<sup>5</sup> Cathy joined us for “Coleslaw,” the musical that had more songs than most.

<sup>6</sup> Darron had classical training; his skill led Graham to the ill-fated venture into classical music, “Justice Mall,” based on “Pictures at an Exhibition” by Moussorgski. But neither Darron nor his collaborators (Peggy Chen and Jason Axe) bear any responsibility for that disaster.



PROFESSOR CLYDE  
SPILLENGER (RIGHT)  
AND ADAM KAUFMAN, A  
MEMBER OF THE STUDENT  
BAND, IN “THE GOOD  
LAWYER SVEJK,” 1994.

*Courtesy Kenneth Graham*

numbers, but they reached their zenith in “The Good Lawyer Svejck” when they accompanied most of the Beatles’ songs in that show.<sup>7</sup>

In a couple of shows we used recorded music. For example, in “Damp Hankies” the second act began with the cast singing Don McLean’s “American Pie.” And in “The Wizard of Laws,” the opening scene featured the music from “2001: A Space Odyssey.” And later the cast closed Act I by singing lyrics written to accompany “The Star Wars Theme” by John Williams.

## THE CAST: RECRUITMENT AND REHEARSALS

We began recruiting students for the musical soon after the start of the fall semester.<sup>8</sup> We posted flyers around the law school and hung envelopes with sign-up sheets on bulletin boards. The sign-up sheets asked students to indicate their talents and interests. Once we had these, we printed up scripts and held an informational meeting where students could pick up scripts, ask questions, and get a sign-up sheet for auditions.

After the students had enough time to read the script and decide what roles they wanted, we held auditions. In the early years, the student directors in consultation with Graham cast the show.<sup>9</sup> At the auditions, students had to read a bit of dialog and sing one of their character’s songs. The student directors usually found the casting easy, but when he took over the director’s role, Graham found it quite difficult, except in those years where

<sup>7</sup> The faculty band did a couple of numbers.

<sup>8</sup> In some years, student groups like ours got a table at law school orientation to provide information about and recruit members for their organizations. When available, we took advantage of this.

<sup>9</sup> The consultation requirement was added after several students who had been in the show the previous year quit after the student director passed them over for lead roles. Graham thought prior service in the show should count for something but most student directors rejected this.

few students auditioned. The shows were usually double-cast; that is, one student played the role in the 7:00 PM show and a different student took over the role in the late show.

The number of students in the shows varied widely and without apparent reason. For example, only twelve students appeared in “Coleslaw,” which ironically had more songs than most shows.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, “The Good Lawyer Svejek” had more than twenty-five cast members along with more musicians than any other show.

Similarly, the student skills spanned the range from Karen Ragland and Susan Keller, who had been professionals before coming to law school, to those who had never set foot on a stage before. Seeing some of the latter blossom over the course of their work provided a real delight. Though you might not expect this, the professionals took direction better than some of the students who thought they had been stars in high school.

We rehearsed for a month. During the first three weeks, rehearsals were held Monday through Thursday from 6:00 to 8:00 PM. However, not every cast member was called for every rehearsal; we typically called the chorus members only twice a week. But many cast members rehearsed on their own outside of the scheduled rehearsals.

Cast members were busiest the week of the show. Typically, everyone was called for every rehearsal. On Thursday night the cast assembled at the Graham home to run through the music for the first time with the pianists. The dress rehearsal took place on Friday night and sometimes the students wanted an additional rehearsal on Saturday afternoon prior to the evening’s performance.<sup>11</sup> Then after the show, cast members helped strike the set and move props back to the law school before heading off for the cast party.

We held rehearsals in the student lounge but moved into the law school lobby to choreograph the dance numbers. The week of the show, we moved into the lobby twice to run through the show with each cast, a move that occasionally brought complaints from students trying to study in empty classrooms along the main hall. When Keith Endo took over as our sound

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<sup>10</sup> Because of the small numbers, leads in one show had to appear in the chorus in the other, putting further strain on their vocal cords.

<sup>11</sup> At the extra Saturday rehearsals, cast members usually stayed in the theater after the rehearsal, ordering takeout rather than trudging home to eat.

technician, he came to these rehearsals to see how he needed to set up the sound system — for example, which performers might need body microphones to be heard. Dress rehearsals took place, of course, in the performance venue.

## FACULTY AND STAFF: RECRUITMENT AND REHEARSALS

We worked hard to get faculty to participate in the show because we drew an audience that wanted to see their professors on stage as much or more than their classmates. During Susan Prager's deanship, she encouraged faculty to take part as she did and allowed Graham to make his pitch at faculty meetings. Some faculty participated regularly, including those mentioned above who joined the faculty band.

Though most faculty did not want to do more than join the faulty chorus, Ken Karst, Dan Lowenstein, and Gary Schwartz agreed to sing solos. Once this became clear, Graham began to write songs for them to sing. When writing "The Good Lawyer Svejek," Graham asked Professor Schwartz to name his favorite Beatles tune; then "Let It Be" became "Let Tort Be." This dirge against tort reform included the memorable line, "My class notes would be obsolete." When Gary sang this in the show, not long before his untimely death, it brought the house down.

Staff participation began early, with most of the regulars drawn from the Law Library and the Placement Office but occasionally we got administrative assistants to join us — most memorably in "Songs Without Heart," where the hero (then a paralegal), went to law school at the urging of his co-workers. Perhaps the most memorable staff work came in "Anti-Kids'n'Fun" where they played The WackyNuts, a group of escapees from a lunatic asylum who flitted through many of the scenes.

On a few occasions, faculty and staff offspring appeared on stage. The dean's daughter, Casey Prager, appeared as "Dean Vaguer" in "Guise Enthralls." And Nancy Berkowitz's daughter Andrea played violin in "I.R.A.C., By George" during the song "Bummertime," based on "Summertime." Our L.L.M. candidates rarely appeared in the show, but when they did, they enjoyed it.

Originally the student director tried to do faculty and staff rehearsals, but this proved too onerous. So Kris Knaplund and Ken Graham shared

this task. (In later years, Kris also recruited faculty members). Faculty put up some resistance when we began to choreograph their production number in “West Side Glory,” but our student choreographer, Julie Van Wert, finally convinced them they could do it. When they did so, the audience expressed great appreciation for their efforts — even when faculty feet would not do what their brains told them needed doing.

We made one concession to the demands on faculty time. Since faculty meetings usually took place on Friday, during dress rehearsal we usually put on the faculty out of order whenever they were able to arrive. The students did not mind since this was the first time they had seen the faculty number. Though we offered staff members a similar dispensation, many of them were willing to stick around in order to see the rest of the show. During the performance, rather than wait back stage, faculty and staff sat in seats reserved for them and came backstage shortly before they were scheduled to come on.

## PRODUCTION

Putting on the show required a lot of advance work that most cast members knew little about. When the show left The Law Revue to become a separate entity, the Public Interest Law Foundation (or PILF) under the leadership of Alan Garfield agreed to produce the show in return for adding any profits to their coffers.<sup>12</sup> So each year, PILF provided one person (sometimes two) to serve as the producer. The producers enlisted other PILF members for specific tasks. For example, each year someone with artistic skills would draw the show logo that was used for publicity, program covers, and T-shirts.

The producer’s most important task was to arrange for lighting and the sound system, as well as people with the ability to work each. During the early years, we rented lights from Angstrom Lighting in Hollywood. Richard Graham (no relation) gave us a reduced rate because PILF was a non-profit. Ditto for Jim Ash of Ash Audio. One year when our student operator had trouble working the soundboard, Jim drove all the way up from Torrance to show him how.

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<sup>12</sup> The amounts raised varied, but even when production costs ate up most of the profits, PILF still had the advantage of telling outside funders that none of their money went to administrative costs as profits from the show defrayed these expenses.



THE CAST OF "KERNAL KNOWLEDGE," 2000,  
ACKNOWLEDGING THE BACKSTAGE STAFF.

*Courtesy Kenneth Graham*

The producer not only had to rent this equipment but also arrange to pick it up before the show and return it afterwards. Usually at least one PILF member had a pick-up truck we used for this purpose, as well as moving props to and from the law school. Most years the only such props were tables and chairs, though in a couple of shows PILF members created scenery that also had to be moved.

The producer also had to arrange for a piano. After a couple of fiascos in moving the piano from the student lounge, we turned to renting a piano from the School of Music, which greatly simplified things. The School of Music would move the piano to the venue and tune it just before the dress rehearsal. In most years, the producer also found us a pianist (or pianists).

The producer helped promote the show and provide people to man the ticket table. Most years, the promotion consisted of putting up posters and making announcements in classes. In the early years, the cast helped promote the show by giving a preview of the show songs at noon in the law school lobby. We had to drop this after some faculty complained that the crowd made it hard for them to get to the Faculty Center for lunch.

The producer also had to recruit PILF members to work the night of the show. They performed such tasks as taking tickets and handing out programs.<sup>13</sup> They also recorded the shows, first on Graham's boom-box, then later on his video camera. Other students worked backstage as prompters, stage managers, and prop managers.<sup>14</sup> After the show, PILF members helped the cast strike the set and move stuff back to the law school.<sup>15</sup>

We referred to the entire crew it took to put on the show as “403 N.W.2d 143” — the citation for a Michigan case: “People v. Music.”

## THE END OF THE PILF CONNECTION

For the most part, the relationship with PILF worked well — with a couple of exceptions. The first problem arose over the artwork for “My Fair Lawyer II.” The artist, Kat Kozic, originally based the show logo on the artwork for “My Fair Lady,” which showed George Bernard Shaw pulling the strings on a female figure (presumably Eliza) in a semi-recumbent position. However, several PILF members objected to this artwork as “sexist,” and Kat tried several alternatives, but the only one that satisfied them showed the female figure standing upright and using a pair of scissors to cut the strings. Kat was so unhappy with this ugly version that she asked not to have it credited to her in the program.<sup>16</sup>

The second controversy erupted over “The Muzak Man.” In one scene, an elderly spinster (impliedly lesbian) remarked that Hershey's chocolate kisses “looked a little like nipples.” A PILF member wrote an angry letter to the dean, completely misrepresenting the dialog, and asking how the dean could permit the law school name to become besmirched by such an

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<sup>13</sup> The show used what came to be known as “festival seating”; that is, first-come, first-served seating. The sole exception: we reserved seats for faculty and staff members in front so they could easily reach the stage to perform.

<sup>14</sup> This job took on greater importance after “Damp Hankies,” when the first person who played the Devil walked off with a flash producer that allowed the Devil to make fire appear to emerge from his hand — a device that Graham had bought at a magic shop at the suggestion of the student director.

<sup>15</sup> Since the lighting and sound equipment could not be returned until the following Monday, we had to find a secure place to store it — usually Graham's office.

<sup>16</sup> Graham then reached an agreement with the PILF leadership that PILF members were not to meddle with the artistic side of the show.

obscene production. The dean, who had been present and found nothing offensive, suggested that he take up the problem with the PILF leadership. When Graham saw this exchange of correspondence, he feared this might lead PILF to ask for control over the content of the show.<sup>17</sup>

By this time, the enthusiasm of PILF members to aid in the production of the show began to wane. In one year, the producer could not get enough people to staff the show and cast members had to enlist friends to fill in. Moreover, PILF now had a more lucrative way to make money — an annual auction of items donated by faculty and alumni. The last straw (at least for Graham) was when he was in the lobby selling tickets for the show while PILF members were in the lounge selling tickets for the auction.

In 1996, the PILF leadership agreed with Graham that it was time for us to go our separate ways.

## THE POST-PILF ERA

The most immediate consequence of cutting the PILF connection was that Graham had to formally become the producer of the show — a role he had pretty much filled in the last few PILF years. The second (and more momentous consequence) was that since we were no longer raising money for PILF, we did not have to use the cheapest venue. As a result, the first show under the new regime, “Anti-Kids’n’Fun,” moved to the Northwest Campus Auditorium. Unlike the classrooms in which previous shows had been performed, this was a genuine theater with most of the usual facilities, such as curtains, dressing rooms, and the like.

Fortuitously, the year before, when PILF could not provide a sound man, we asked the Theater Arts Department to suggest someone we could hire — and that’s how we met Keith Endo. When Keith learned we were going off on our own, he told us that he had his own sound equipment and a couple of follow spots. He suggested a package deal; his services and his equipment for not much more than we had paid for his services.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> It never did.

<sup>18</sup> We later learned that in addition to his freelancing at UCLA, Keith was also a prize-winning lighting designer for legitimate theater productions.

For the rest of the shows, Kieth was more than a sound man, though he did a very good job of that.<sup>19</sup> During dress rehearsals, he shouted out stage directions: “Don’t turn your back to the audience,” or “Come downstage to deliver that line.” He also made audio recordings of the shows. Finally, during dress rehearsals, Keith took photographs — lots of them.<sup>20</sup>

## AFTER THE CURTAIN CAME DOWN

The cast first took their bows, as orchestrated by the director.<sup>21</sup> Once that was completed, most of the cast helped to strike the set — an onerous task for just two people, particularly after all of Keith Endo’s sound equipment had to be removed from the auditorium. Once the set was struck, his equipment loaded into Keith’s car, and any props moved back to the law school, it was time to head off for the cast party.

The first cast parties took place in the law school, but the venue gradually shifted to local restaurants with a few held at the home of cast members.<sup>22</sup> In addition to reprising their performance, sometimes the cast members presented the director with what became the customary souvenir — an enlarged copy of the show logo signed by cast members and others (faculty members or the production staff). Ken Graham had these framed and hung in his office until his retirement forced him into a smaller office, when some of them had to be moved to his home.<sup>23</sup>

## THE END OF THE UCLAW MUSICAL

Several developments contributed to the demise of the show. First, the university tried to make up for budget cuts by increasing the fees for use of

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<sup>19</sup> For example, in addition to the usual stage microphones, Keith also used body mics where appropriate, and a backstage speaker so those waiting to go on stage did not have to peer through the curtain to see when it was time for their entrance.

<sup>20</sup> Several hundred of these appear on the show’s Facebook page.

<sup>21</sup> Following a custom begun by our first director, Patty Mayer, the directors did not take bows. Ken Graham did come on stage after “No Diploma” to accept a plaque presented by Dean Jonathan Varat to commemorate the show’s twentieth anniversary. He did the same after the Alumni Show.

<sup>22</sup> One early party was held at Patty Mayer’s home.

<sup>23</sup> A few of these are in the law school archives, and the rest will eventually end up there as well.

an auditorium, making the show financially precarious.<sup>24</sup> Second, younger faculty from Ivy League schools found the show too undignified to participate in, and some older faculty stopped participating once PILF ceased its sponsorship.<sup>25</sup> Finally, the author's muse seemed to have deserted him.

The show left an interesting legacy. It raised thousands of dollars for the UCLA Public Interest Law Foundation. It brought students, faculty, and staff together in a common effort that enriched their interactions elsewhere. It led to several marriages between cast members that endure to this day, including the marriage of a faculty member (Evan Caminker) who went on to become the dean of the University of Michigan Law School. But most importantly, as many students wrote when they signed the show posters and repeated at alumni reunions, "It was the most fun I had in law school."

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<sup>24</sup> Dean Susan Prager covered the shortfall during her deanship and later Ken Graham subsidized the excess costs of the show over the money from ticket sales.

<sup>25</sup> Faculty participation not only helped bring out an audience but also validated student participation in the show.