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Feldman pursues artistic endeavor, joins nonprofit



'An angel to the arts'

Longtime attorney now devotes himself to looking out for those who bring music, visual media to life

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The office is small. An open space with desks for an administrator and an intern, a copy room, a break room, a bathroom, a conference room and two individual offices.

Take two steps in the front door and the entire space is visible.

It is in this space, though — at 213 W. Institute Place on the Near North Side — where every year, about 1,000 Chicago artists and art organizations receive legal services.

This is Lawyers for the Creative Arts, a nonprofit founded in 1972 and, since May, the full-time office of Jan D. Feldman, the organization's new executive director.

"I am a classical music nut," said Feldman, 62. "And opera. I am a big collector of records. I go to a lot of concerts. So that's part of my interest (in the job). I'm a pretty consistent consumer of the arts."

Feldman's interest in the arts began with boyhood lessons on the piano and violin. He was influenced by his piano-playing mother and a music teacher whose Steinway grand piano opened his imagination to the power of the keys.

"The Steinway always has this really hard action," he said. "It's like playing a truck. And yet you could really do stuff on that piano that you couldn't do on our little Baldwin upright."

His interest in classical music grew from there. While other kids were enthralled with the Beatles and Rolling Stones, Feldman was soaking in the string arrangements of Johann Sebastian Bach, his favorite composer.

In classical music, Feldman found a wellspring of sound. As an

undergraduate student at Indiana University, he scoured record stores in Bloomington, Ind., searching for something new.

"You'd leaf through the bins and find something you'd never heard of," he said. "You'd buy one record, and it's fantastic, and all of a sudden it opens up this whole new area of classical music. And you keep opening those doors."

Later, Feldman started bringing music to his home, launching a private piano series in which he invited professional pianists to play his 1907 Steinway. He also volunteered at People's Music School in Uptown and Mostly Music Chicago in the Loop.

Meanwhile, his commercial litigation practice was growing.

After earning his J.D. in 1981 at Northwestern University School of Law, Feldman spent two years at Altheimer & Gray, then worked at Phelan, Pope & John Ltd. until its dissolution in 1996. He moved to Holleb & Coff, whose partners held a similar interest in the arts.

"One of the things I liked about Holleb & Coff is that if you would open a program book in a play, they would be in there as one of the sponsors, or someone from Holleb & Coff would be on the board," Feldman said.

When that firm split up in 2000, Feldman formed a small firm with some of his former partners from Phelan, Pope & John, a group that was absorbed by Perkins, Coie LLP in 2003.

It was around that time that he became a board member at Lawyers for the Creative Arts.

"I'm sort of an odd person, in that I like fundraising," he said. "So I immediately became the head of fundraising"

The group needed his talents.



Jan D. Feldman

According to founding member Scott Hodes of Bryan, Cave LLP, the LCA was floundering. Hodes led a movement for new leadership, hiring sole practitioner William E. Rattner as executive director and later bringing Feldman to the board as lead fundraiser.

"I sensed that if (Feldman) became involved in Lawyers for the Creative Arts, he would really roll up his sleeves and work alongside us to rebuild the organization, which he did," Hodes said.

Upon Rattner's retirement in May, Feldman was hired to take his place.

His fundraising efforts had allowed the LCA to continue assisting Chicago artists with matters directly tied to their art — such as contracts and intellectual property disputes — to those that help facilitate art creation — such as issues in immigration status or landlord-tenant relationships.

For the cases that Feldman or legal director Marcia A. Rolnik Walker can't handle, LCA refers cases to more than 80 firms. The most active firms take 20 to 35 cases per year, all pro bono. LCA fields approximately 2,000 calls per year. In 2013, that translated into 479 files.

The only matters LCA doesn't handle are criminal defense or divorce proceedings. Everything else is fair game.

Drummer Kerman Frazier knows the scope of LCA's operation. He's been performing since 1969 and linked up with LCA around 1990 when he realized that he wasn't receiving royalty checks

from Chess Records.

"It's a whole different world when you're doing things with promoters," said Frazier, who now recommends the organization to friends. "There's so many hands in the cookie jar, and they leave the artists the crumbs. So it's good to have an organization that can fight for you."

The group is currently helping Frazier with a renter's insurance matter which arose when equipment that Frazier values at \$25,000 was stolen from his van. Frazier spoke with Rolnik, who connected him with Feldman.

"He's very meticulous," Frazier said about Feldman. "He's not a pushover. I've dealt with lawyers before (and) he's a go-getter. ... He's very tenacious about getting work done."

Visual pop artist Peter Mars is equally satisfied.

"It's surprising how much legal work artists need," Mars said. "I didn't understand it when I entered this profession 30 years ago. I thought, 'Paint 'em, sell 'em and life will go on.'"

Mars learned quickly that an artist's life is not so simple.

"I'm a very active artist, and if I didn't have LCA, I think I might be bankrupt," he said. "LCA is making it possible for art to be made. They're keeping artists in business and protected."

Over the past decade, LCA has written contracts for Mars to obtain image rights for Muhammad Ali and Elvis Presley, negotiated consignment deals with galleries and worked with him over a fair-use matter with Louis Vuitton.

"LCA is like an angel to the arts," Mars said. "They are indispensable. ... Just by them protecting artists and the arts, they're actually responsible for a lot of modern art being made here in Chicago, whether it's on the stage in drama or (for) musicians."

The work is paying off for Feldman, too.

"I'm not an artist," he said. "But I love the arts. ... I didn't leave the practice of law because I disliked it. I enjoyed my work. I had great clients. I had great cases. I left because I'm 62 years old and I've always had a strong interest in the arts. This gave me the opportunity to say, 'I'm going to do this full time.'"

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