

Interview: Dan Rosen

Ashleigh Fehrenbach, co-editor, interviews **Dan Rosen** to talk about his career, law and the music industry. Dan is the President of Warner Music Australasia. Prior to coming to that role, he has worn many seriously impressive hats: media tech lawyer, award winning musician, government advisor, Fulbright scholar, CEO of ARIA and PPCA. As a passionate advocate for the rights of artists and labels, Dan is on the board of Creative Partnerships Australia which is dedicated to fostering the country's creative culture and also works with the Creative Economy Taskforce to help the rebuild the music industry since the pandemic. It's impossible to think of someone better placed to share their insights on how the Australian music legal industry has changed and what the biggest challenge is for musicians today.



Obviously now, peering behind the Wizard of Oz curtain and seeing how the thing runs I know more, but from working on the industry side both at ARIA and at Warner, the pleasant surprise is that most of the industry is made of passionate music people. The vast majority of people are in the industry for the right reasons. They love music, want to support artists and help artists with their careers.

lot of M&A and IPOs for technology companies which was exciting. Through that, I met the Minister for Communications and IT at the time, Richard Alston, who asked me to come and be an advisor. I took a one-year leave of absence from Minters. I'm not sure whether I ever officially resigned...

It was when I was working for the Minister that I won Triple J's Unearthed. That was a funny period because Richard was the Minister in charge of the ABC, and I'd won an ABC radio contest. That was an interesting morning at the office.

After Canberra, I did a Masters of Law at NYU in New York then joined a Nasdaq listed tech company. I then started work with ARIA and now Warner, so my working life has been a combination of law, policy and technology combined with a passion for being an artist and playing music. All of those threads came together with ARIA and now even more so with Warner.

FEHRENBACH: Can you tell me more about your time as an advisor to the Minister of Communications and IT and one key skill you learnt during your time there?

ROSEN: It was an incredible role for a young person to be able to sit in the Minister's office and be a fly on the wall. There are so many big decisions that are being made. It was an incredible opportunity to be sitting there at the birth of the internet and broadband in Australia. It was a really interesting period where big media companies like Telstra were being privatised. I got to understand how the "machine" of government works.

ASHLEIGH FEHRENBACH: Hi Dan - on behalf of our readers, thank you so much for chatting to us for our special music edition of the Communications Law Bulletin. I'm delighted to be speaking with you.

DAN ROSEN: My pleasure.

FEHRENBACH: Before we come to your current role as President of Warner Music Australasia, I'd like to explore your music background. You were in a band called 'Second Dan' that won Triple J's Unearthed competition. Can you tell us a bit about your impressions of the music industry back then compared to now?

ROSEN: It's a good question. Back then, it was okay if you only knew the music industry from the point of view of an artist trying to "make it". You want people to be interested in your music, to get it on the radio. Each thing that you do is a little victory. I was such a fan of Triple J, so hearing your song on Triple J for the first time, getting to play in front of an audience who knew some of your music and few of the bigger festivals - it's just a childhood dream that kind of came true. I didn't think too much about the business side.

It's very different being on the other side but still great to be around music and be around passionate music people.

FEHRENBACH: It sounds like music was an early passion that you've successfully followed throughout your career?

ROSEN: There's a Steve Jobs commencement speech where he talks about "you can only connect the dots in reverse". I think that's kind of how I feel when I was working at MinterEllison or working for the government. Suit by day and changing in my car to play gigs at night. It all felt a bit random. Looking back now, it all makes sense. There's some method in the madness.

FEHRENBACH: You've touched on my next question already in mentioning ARIA and MinterEllison. Could we get a whistle-stop tour of where you had worked before Warner?

ROSEN: I studied law and commerce at Monash University and I joined MinterEllison as an articled clerk. It was the first tech boom in the late 90s, early 2000s so I was doing a

I think the biggest skill I learnt during that time was listening. Another great bit of advice that the Minister gave me was to remember that people are talking to you because of your role, not because of you and who you are, and not to lose perspective when you are in a position of influence or power.

FEHRENBACH: Coming back to Australia after your time in the States, what did you see as the biggest legal challenge out there for artists?

ROSEN: Piracy and copyright was, and still is, a massive challenge. The industry was being ravaged by piracy. When I first started at ARIA and would go back down to Canberra, I would tell anyone that would listen - you've got to hold the tech giants to account and they need to take responsibility for what's happening on their platforms. If we can't protect intellectual property online as the world moves online, then there's going to be no business. Music is first but we are just a canary in the coal mine. Next will be film and sport and government secrets.

It wasn't like I came up with that theory, but over time it proved to be true. We were gradually able to convince the various members of government, Attorney Generals, Ministers of Communications and Prime Ministers that they needed to protect copyright. We needed to make it easier for people to do the right thing by investing in new business models - but the government also needed to make it harder for people to do the wrong thing by cracking down on illegal sites and file sharing that were decimating the industry.

FEHRENBACH: It sounds like it was a case of the law not keeping up with the pace of technology?

ROSEN: Yes. That's why it's so important for the law to be principles based. If someone claims that you should protect your property offline, why should that be any different online? We would have arguments with policy makers who would say that intellectual property should be free, it should be given away. We would say, well, why should artists and creatives give their intellectual

property away for nothing just because it's an intangible asset rather than a tangible one? Would you tell a real estate person to give their property away for free?

It was a big learning curve but I'm happy to say that we have been able to come out the other side. I think everybody now recognises that the tech platforms do need to take responsibility for what happens online.

FEHRENBACH: During your time as CEO of ARIA and the PCCA what was the biggest change you saw in the music legal landscape?

ROSEN: Digital transformation! In the ten years I was there we went from an industry that was 85% physical - selling CDs - to 85% streaming. The way that people consumed music had completely transformed the industry.

FEHRENBACH: It was announced just over a year ago that you would be stepping into the role of President of Warner Music Australasia effective from February this year. With over half a year behind you now, can you share what a typical day looks like for you?

ROSEN: It is quite varied which is great. There's time spent on artist development whether it is trying to sign new artists, work with existing talents, or promoting new artists. I'm absolutely loving it, it's very exciting.

At ARIA I was able to get close to the industry, but in this job I'm able to be closer to the creative process and to the artists. It's a massive privilege.

FEHRENBACH: How has the pandemic shifted the focus of your role, and perhaps the type of work that you are doing?

ROSEN: It was definitely challenging. I was new to the role, so trying to build a new culture and team virtually was difficult. There was enormous mental strain on employees and our artists from the pandemic. Particularly for our artists because of not being able to perform, not being able to even get into studios with other people or write with other people. On top of that, there was huge financial hardship for artists.

It's been a really challenging period for the music industry, as well as the whole community. A lot of time is spent checking in on the wellbeing of your staff and your artists and giving them as much support as you possibly can. But hopefully gigs will start happening soon and we can get some joy back into our hearts.

FEHRENBACH: Couldn't agree more! I think it is fair to say that you have executed on the whole 'dream job' thing quite well - do you have one piece of advice that you would share with your younger self in the beginning stages of your career?

ROSEN: I've got to say I feel very, very privileged that I could continue to indulge my passions when I could have easily not. There are definitely challenging times when you're not sure if you're on the right path. I think the only advice is to do things that you are interested in. Try to hone your inner voice and instinct. The more you do that the easier it is, and each leap becomes a little bit easier. That, and have a few people around you whose advice you trust and who can help you if you get to a fork in the road.

FEHRENBACH: Lastly, what song would you like played whenever you enter a room?

ROSEN: 'It's a Long Way to the Top'

FEHRENBACH: Dan, thanks so much for your time. We're very grateful for your insights.



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