

Sound waves

Greenberg Glusker 'in-house band' makes the grade at Law Rocks L.A. event

By Brian Cox

It's a Saturday night and the famed Whisky a Go Go is packed.

The legendary club on the Sunset Strip in West Hollywood is the venue for the 13th Annual Law Rocks Los Angeles, a charity event featuring 14 law firm bands over two nights.

The crowd stands shoulder-to-shoulder and is in high spirits around the stage as the event's emcee announces, "So now, your final band of the night – The Gee Gees!"

The audience screams and hollers and the in-house band from the law firm Greenberg Glusker hits the opening chords of "The Chain" by Fleetwood Mac. At the front of the stage, lead guitarist and entertainment attorney Ricardo Cestero overhears someone in the audience say, "Are they really going to pull this off?"

From the confident, smooth harmonies struck in the first lyrics by Graham Fenton, Ryan Webb, and Linda DeBella, it is immediately evident that yes, The Gee Gees are going to "pull this off."

Despite it being their inaugural appearance at Law Rocks, the band, in fact, won the Judge's Choice Award for best overall performance of the two-night event.

"Our hope was that we were going to be the best band," says Cestero, the band's de facto leader who has performed in cover bands around Los Angeles for decades. "That was the goal. To just go out there and put on the best show."

The band members describe the experience as a "real thrill" and a "bucket list item."

"To get a chance to play at the Whisky in front of that crowd was nothing short of surreal," says drummer Pete Nyquist, who is chair of the firm's Environmental Practice Group and a founding member of the band. "What greater dream is there than to be a rocker, get up on stage, and perform?"

The comments were echoed by Cestero, a 1999 UCLA School of Law grad who earned his bachelor's degree from Oberlin College.

"We made the show when we played that gig," says Cestero. "We knew we needed to highlight what makes us different and what makes us a unique band. One of the things we have is Graham and Ryan, who are excellent singers."

It helps when you have two lawyers who have professional backgrounds in music.

The Gee Gees boast the versatile vocals of lead singers Graham Fenton and Ryan Webb, as well as the deft bass playing of Ira Steinberg. Fenton and Webb have professional backgrounds in music and performance.





Greenberg Glusker's in-house band The Gee Gees celebrates winning the Judge's Choice Award for Best Overall Performance at the 13th Annual Law Rocks Los Angeles. The band consists of (l-r) Jim Hill, Ryan Webb, Ricardo Cestero, Linda Debella, Graham Fenton, Ira Steinberg, Peter Nyquist, and Noah Perch-Ahern.

Prior to graduating from law school and joining the firm four years ago, Graham Fenton spent nearly 10 years starring as rock icon Frankie Valli in the Broadway musical "Jersey Boys," with more than 1,300 performances in Las Vegas, New York, a U.S. National Tour, and Australia. When the show closed at the Paris Las Vegas in 2016, Fenton decided to launch a new career as an entertainment lawyer.

"I'm so glad I made the change," Fenton says. "Now I get to rock out with the wonderful Gee Gees."

Ryan Webb grew up around music. His father, Doug Webb, is an accomplished jazz saxophonist who has been featured on more than 150 jazz recordings and has recorded music for movies and television programs. Ryan spent many a weekend in his dad's basement playing the drums.

"Despite his valiant attempts to have me follow in his footsteps and play saxophone, I gravitated to the drums," says Webb. "My dad always joked, 'what do you call a guy who hangs out with musicians? A drummer.' Ultimately, much to my father's chagrin, I decided to become a lawyer."

A partner in the firm's Entertainment Group, Webb specializes in negotiating and structuring sophisticated rights and service deals for multihyphenate creators. He still makes time for music, though.

"I've always got gigs happening somewhere," he says.

His father, Doug, joined The Gee Gees on stage at the Whisky for the set's final three songs and "blew the roof off the joint" with his saxophone solo in "Money" by Pink Floyd.

Most of the bands that performed for Law Rocks are hybrid, bringing together lawyers from different national firms. The Gee Gees are unique in that its members are all from the same firm.

The Gee Gees formed in 2015 when David Cranston, the founder of the firm's Environmental Group, went to see Cestero play with his longtime cover band Everyday Housewives. Cestero started playing guitar when he was 12 and has been performing in one band or another since he was a freshman in high school. Cranston encouraged Cestero to start a firm band that could play at the firm's annual retreat. Cestero recruited Nyquist to play drums and business litigator Ira Steinberg to play bass. He pulled in another lawyer who played guitar, one who played keyboards, and – surprisingly – one who was a world-class bagpipe player.

At the firm retreat at Ojai Valley Inn that year, the band made its debut appearance, marching in to the serenade of Scottish bagpiping before ripping into "It's a Long Way to the Top (If You Wanna Rock 'N' Roll)" by AC/DC.

The band rehearsed weekly in a full-fledged music studio Cestero built above his garage.

"We were able to get together and do our practice jams," recalls Nyquist. "All the band members would have been more than happy to do that as often as we could. That's always been a really great part of the process."

In its current form, The Gee Gees consists of original members Cestero, Steinberg, and Nyquist, as well as fellow attorneys Fenton, Webb, Noah Perch-Ahern, and Jim Hill. Perch-Ahern, who practices in the firm's Environmental Group, plays guitar and business litigator Hill sits at the keyboards.

Singer-songwriter Linda Debella, who is also Cestero's longtime girlfriend, rounds out the group.

"We all bring a little something," says Nyquist of the band's makeup.

"It's pretty incredible that we have this collection of really talented musicians," says Webb, "because we're not that large of a firm."

"I think we do a good job of picking stuff that is going to highlight what we do well," says Cestero. "At Law Rocks, we wanted to play songs that would utilize the vocal abilities of Graham, Ryan, and Linda."


After opening with "The Chain," The Gee Gees went on to perform over the next 30 minutes, entertaining the crowd with covers of "867-5309/Jenny" by Tommy Tutone, "Harder to Breathe" by Maroon 5, "Money," "Ain't No Mountain High Enough" by Marvin Gaye and Tammi Terrell, and "Jet Airliner" by Steve Miller Band.

A key to The Gee Gees' sound and success is the warm familiarity of the band of lawyer-musicians.

"If you like the people you play with, you're going to have more fun and you're going to put more passion into it," says Cestero.

"The firm successfully raised over \$19,000 for both Law Rocks charities and in support of its chosen charity, Alliance for Children's Rights," according to a Greenberg Glusker press release. Overall, Law Rocks pulled in more than \$416,000 at the Los Angeles weekend, breaking the previous all-time Law Rocks record for a single event.

The Gee Gees plan to return to Law Rocks Los Angeles next year for their sophomore performance.

After all, they have a title to defend. 



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