

Lawyer behind Gotta Sing! Gotta Dance! 'schleps' into 14th year

# Making a case for musical theatre

THE HARDEST WORKING lawyer in showbiz? Quite possibly. Perry Ehrlich has been "schlepping," as he puts it, from his law office in Richmond to the Jewish Community Centre for the past 14 years. That's where he runs the Gotta Sing! Gotta Dance! musical theatre summer program for aspiring performers ages nine to 18. This summer's edition culminates with the end-of-season production *Camp Shakespeare*, which features an original script co-written by Ehrlich and more than 30 songs from Broadway and movie musicals performed by 70 unnervingly enthusiastic kids, reminding you how aimless and empty your own youth was. Maybe that's just me. Ehrlich, who without fail phones every summer, talked to the *Courier* about singing, dancing and how his daughters won't let him sign up for Facebook.

**1. In the briefest way possible, could you describe what you do at Gotta Sing! Gotta Dance!?**

A lot. I write the script, choose the music, hire the faculty, audition the kids, publicize the program, plan the curriculum, prepare budgets, buy cookies and donuts for the kids, etc., etc.

**2. What do you get out of the experience?**

I am so lucky to work with an incredible faculty and hundreds of talented and energetic young musical theatre performers, who inspire my creativity and impress me with their commitment.

**3. Law and musical theatre seem like an odd combination. Is there any overlap?**

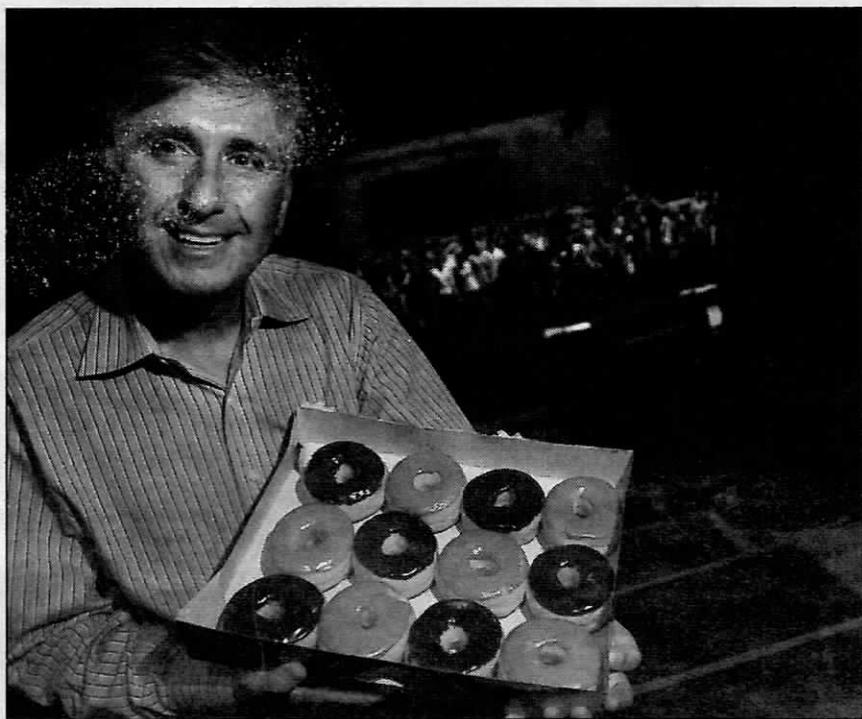
I know of many great lawyers who are also great actors, but no great actors who are great lawyers. My grandfather used to say that to be a good public speaker one should "stand up, speak up, and shut up!" That applies to both lawyers and actors.

**4. As a lawyer, have you ever yelled "I want to know the truth!" or "I'm out of order? This whole court is out of order"?**

I am a business lawyer, but went to court often in my early career. In my first trial, the opposing lawyer asked many leading questions of a witness. When I finally objected, the judge said, "It's about time!"

**5. Do you personally gotta sing, gotta dance?**

If you asked my wife this question, she would say, "Perry shouldn't sing,



Lawyer Perry Ehrlich brings donuts and a whole lot of heart to his Gotta Sing! Gotta Dance! musical theater summer program. *photo Dan Toulgoet*

shouldn't dance." As a student, I sung as a soloist and in choirs, competed in music festivals, appeared in musicals, took Royal Conservatory exams, etc., but never danced. I much prefer being behind the scenes.

**6. How would describe your singing and dancing skills?**

Forgettable.

**7. Do you get any royalties when someone who's participated in Gotta Sing! Gotta Dance! goes on to fame and fortune?**

I do get royalties, but not of a financial nature. Former participants in Gotta Sing! Gotta Dance! have included Meghan Anderssen, star of *Annie Get Your Gun* at TUTS; Jayme Armstrong, finalist in *How Do You Solve A Problem Like Maria?*; and Natalie Hall, appearing in the U.S. national tour of *A Chorus Line*. The royalty I get is the enormous pride and satisfaction from knowing that I was part of their musical theatre training. Other participants have gone on to careers in medicine, law, etc., and I enjoy sharing memories when I see them. I understand that there is even a Gotta Sing! Gotta Dance! site on Facebook, but my daughters have forbidden me to log on.

**8. What is your favourite musical?**  
*Big, The Musical*. It's about a boy who

lives in an adult's body.

**9. Once when you were publicizing one of your shows, I believe you described yourself to me as "a pain in the ass." Is there a fine line between persistence and being a pain?**

While I think that I am being persistent, you may have a different perspective. For example, I asked my wife to marry me several times before she finally said yes—a decision that I hope she has not regretted over our past 31 years together. I would hate to think she thought that I was being a pain in the ass. When I speak to other lawyers and my clients, I often refer to myself as "Perry the Pest"—in particular, when trying to collect accounts receivable!

**10. Who plays you in the musical theatre production of your life and what would it be called?**

George Clooney because I have been told we look so much alike... well, we do have the same hair colour! I could be cute and suggest No Noose Is Good Noose or See You Later, Litigator, but I think Trying To Make A Difference would be a better title.

*Camp Shakespeare* runs Aug. 27 and 28 at the Norman Rothstein Theatre. Call 604-257-5111 for tickets and info.

—Michael Kissinger