

Power Trio: Three Savannah-Based Attorneys Balance Passion and Practice

By: Freddy Villano, Making Music Happen Magazine, November – December 2013 Issue

Bouhan Falligant is a full-service law firm based in Savannah, Georgia. The firm attracts exceptional attorneys and supports their achievements in, as well as outside of, their profession. For example, Bouhan Falligant attorney Andrew Dekle serves on the Savannah Philharmonic's board of directors. This year, the firm will host the Philharmonic's 5th Anniversary gala. "I rarely take the stage these days," admits Dekle, an accomplished violinist. "But being a member of the board of directors for the Savannah Philharmonic allows me to continue promoting and supporting classical music." In addition to Dekle, Bouhan Falligant is home to two other well-educated musicians: Stephen Brown and Benjamin Karpf. Never before has the term *power-trio* seemed more appropriate than for these three attorneys—their dedication to practice resonates in both their professional and personal lives.

Andrew Dekle, 28, specializes in the areas of civil litigation, corporate law, and bankruptcy. He has been honored for his appellate work in *Georgia Trend Magazine's* 2012 Legal Elite feature, a listing of the state's top lawyers.

He began playing the violin in the third grade at Savannah Country Day School. When his parents received an instrument-selection form from the school's string program, they asked him whether he wanted to play the violin, viola, or cello. "I made the mistake of saying that I wanted to play the loudest instrument, assuming that the biggest instrument, the cello, would be the loudest," he recalls. "My parents countered with, 'Do you mean the highest?' Too young to appreciate the distinction between the 'highest' and the 'loudest' instrument, I said, 'yes, the highest.' You can imagine my surprise when I ended up in the violin section on the first day of class. Looking back now, it was a fortuitous accident."

Dekle went on to perform with the Emory University Symphony Orchestra as an undergraduate and served as concert master with the non-majors orchestra while a third-year law student at the University of Georgia. Recently, he began working on the Brahms Sonata for Violin and Piano No. 1 with colleague Stephen Brown.

A strong believer in the benefits of studying music, he co-chairs the Savannah Philharmonic's education committee and helps organize field trips and master classes for local students. "Seeing over 1,000 fifth graders energetically humming 'O Fortuna' from Carmina Burana as they stream out of our educational programs reassures me that classical music still

resonates with young people,” he attests. “The difficulty lies in getting them in the door.”

In law school, Dekle says, he began to appreciate that the lessons learned from studying a musical instrument could apply to other subjects. “When my contracts professor, the late Anne Proffitt Dupree, explained to our class that the purpose of briefing cases was to teach us how to interpret judicial opinions for ourselves, she sounded just like my violin instructor in college, Shawn Pagliarini, who always said that her goal was to teach students the skills they needed to learn any piece of music, not a particular etude or concerto,” he says. “Mastering a case, just like a score, does not come simply from rereading it over and over at a cursory level. To truly understand it, you must break it down into its component parts and focus on the challenging and important passages.”

Attorney Stephen Brown, 29, is a pianist whose legal specialties encompass a broad range of civil litigation matters. A graduate of the Cornell Law School, Brown served as managing editor of the Cornell Journal of Law and Public Policy and received a CALI Award for Excellence in Cornell's Land Use and Natural Resources Clinic.

He admits that, as a kid, the easiest way to make a lot of noise, with the least amount of effort, was to repeatedly bang on the piano keys with the right pedal down. “It could be very cathartic,” he chuckles. “I started improvising and playing by ear when I was around four-years-old, mostly just imitating my older sister.” He eventually took group lessons from a “rather eccentric, but brilliant,” individual for three years who had developed a notation system based on the layout of the keyboard that emphasized ear training over technique.

He went on to study at music festivals every summer from the time he was 14 until he was 22. “It allowed me to play regularly in competitions, and play in master classes with some top-notch artists including Arie Vardi, Emmanuel Ax, and Ruth Laredo,” he recalls. “I then studied piano performance at the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music, where I received Bachelor of Music and Master of Music degrees. I also studied privately with Frank Weinstock, as well as Eugene and Elisabeth Pridonoff.”

Currently, Brown plays in services for the Unitarian Universalist Church of Savannah and in small community concerts. He's playing in a chamber music concert with the Savannah Philharmonic in November. He also performs with his wife Hannah, who plays viola with the Hilton Head Symphony Orchestra.

Though his career as an attorney at Bouhan Falligant takes first priority, Brown says that the focus and discipline required of him at the firm transfers to maintaining his piano playing skills. “I play regularly during the evenings and weekends, working on just a few difficult pieces at a time,” he says. “Playing piano provides a much needed change of gears after a long day at the office. I put significant efforts into my music during my youth and think it would be a shame to lose it.”

Attorney Benjamin Karpf, 38, is a guitarist with expertise in intellectual property issues and technology matters. Considered one of Georgia's “Legal Elite” in the field of intellectual property law, he was just sworn in as a judge pro-tem in Magistrate Court.

“I remember starting piano lessons as a child,” he says. “In middle school I switched to saxophone and played in the jazz band. In high school I switched to guitar because I wanted to be in a band with my friends.”

Karpf is quick to admit he ended up playing guitar by default. “My friends were learning rock instruments and no one had claimed the guitar yet,” he says. It also helped that his next door neighbor was a professional musician who taught bass and guitar and had produced a series of instructional videos. “He was an excellent teacher and living next door to him made it easier to learn and stick with it,” he says. Karpf’s school band director encouraged him to play in the jazz band as well as the pep band. “We did not march, but even so, a guitar player in the pep band was pretty much unheard of. Having that kind of support and encouragement helped me stick with the guitar.”

Before starting a family, Karpf says he played a lot in Washington, D.C., where he graduated from Georgetown Law. He’s been back in Savannah for two years now. “I have played out a little bit, but not with any consistency,” he confesses. “But that is more a function of my family life than my job.” Karpf has two young sons, and being with them and his wife are priorities now. “I do, however, play guitar with, and for, them a lot,” he adds. “We sing songs together. I let them strum and poke at the guitar. It’s a lot of ‘Old MacDonald’ and the ‘Wheels on the Bus,’ rather than the rock and jazz that I used to play. My older son especially loves it when I plug the guitar in.”

Though Karpf views his passion for music as a much-needed creative outlet, he admits there’s another reason to keep playing: “It is a way to interact with other people—a unique way to communicate and express yourself. You can’t get that any other way.”

Practice Areas

- Bankruptcy & Creditors Rights
- Business & Corporate Law
- Intellectual Property & Technology

Attorneys

- Andrew H. Dekle