

Tim DeJong Punk Rock Lawyer

That Tim DeJong spends his free time studying may not surprise you. It's the subject matter of his studies that may come as a surprise: punk rock. For the last year, DeJong has spent a lot of free time memorizing lyrics to punk rock songs as a member of the band *PDX Punk Rock Collective*. "If you see me driving in my car and I look like I'm singing, I'm practicing for our next show," DeJong says.



Tim DeJong (right) rocks

DeJong is not an obvious choice to be in a punk rock band. For one thing, he's 46 years old and works hard at practicing law. He is a shareholder in the Stoll Berne law firm with more than 20 years' experience litigating complex business, securities and intellectual property cases.

For another, his musician's resume is, he volunteers, not impressive. "My punk rock resume is pretty limited. I put a band together to add a little spice to the parents' weekend talent show at my college in 1984. That band lasted one night. I tried to form other bands, but we never got further than playing a house party." DeJong sold his electric guitar for law school spending money in 1988. He didn't own a guitar again until he was 40.

And there is the matter of a closet full of suits. "I know - I'm not exactly punk rock on the outside, right," jokes DeJong. "But I think most people who took the music seriously when they were kids will tell you that it never leaves you."

DeJong's extensive punk rock record collection is proof of that. He says he has not counted his vinyl records. "My wife will tell you I've got way too many and that I should stop collecting records immediately. Almost all of them are original pressings from the late 1970s and early 1980s. I care for them like the important historical artifacts they are. And I play them regularly."

The English band *The Clash* was the first punk band to catch his attention, and he still has that first record. "Who knows why I identified with English kids singing songs like, 'I'm So Bored With the USA.' I remember thinking, 'If I was them I'd be bored with the USA, too. I mean, we're everywhere, telling everyone what to do and taking over their televisions.'

When I was a kid, it was part of establishing my independence. Only years later did I really appreciate how impressive it is that inexperienced kids with no resources made extremely creative music. A lot of it has really stood the test of time."

PDX Punk Rock Collective is proof positive. They play only cover songs from what DeJong describes as the "golden era" of punk rock, from 1977 to the early 1980s. Bands they cover include, of course, *The Clash*, and other well-known punk bands such as *Stiff Little Fingers*, *Black Flag* and the *Sex Pistols*. They also cover lesser-known Portland bands *The Wipers* and *Poison Idea*. They have an extensive song list,

and have played several three-hour sets. The band typically plays one or two shows per month and has played most of the small and medium sized clubs in town, such as Dante's, Plan B, Backspace and East End.

Whereas most bands have three or four members, *PDX Punk Rock Collective* currently has six. "The idea of the collective is to share the stage," DeJong says. The composition of the band changes depending on the song. Most of the members have multiple talents. Three can play the drums, four play bass and five play guitar. They range in age from mid-30s to early 50s.

DeJong, the only lawyer in the band, mostly sings but also plays some guitar. "I played guitar on stage for the first time at age 46. I only played guitar on one song, and I'm sure I put in as much time practicing that one song as I would spend preparing for an important court hearing."

The reaction from his peers in the legal profession has been positive. "After people get over the surprise, I can usually sense what I like to think is a new respect on some level. It takes more guts at my age, and with my limited experience, to get on stage and belt out a song than to make a closing argument to a jury. Some lawyers go to Toastmasters to improve their public speaking skills. Playing punk rock to a live audience is a lot more fun to me."

A connection DeJong sees between the band and his law firm is a commitment to charitable causes. "Obviously, we're not doing this for the money - and that's a good thing because the pay is lousy," DeJong says. "But if we can have fun and raise money for a good cause, that is

an evening well spent." They have played fundraisers for JOIN (a Portland nonprofit connecting the homeless to a home), Meadowood Springs Speech & Hearing Camp, Portland Radio Authority and the Timbers Army. The band donates the proceeds of T-shirt sales to the Rock'n'Roll Camp for Girls.

"I've seen a few lawyers enjoying themselves in the audience and I hope to see more. But if any judges plan to come, I hope they'll give me advance written notice of their intent to appear," DeJong says. "Seriously, I really don't have much talent, but I do love the music, and being in a band exposes me to people I would never get to meet as an attorney."



Words can't describe how it feels losing to a better argument. There's just not a lot to say. "Better luck next time?" No, next time make sure you have the better argument.

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