

[My Brush With The Late Great Roy Orbison](#)

A decade ago, I was one year into my London's Times Cartoon project. I was still living, working, and trying to survive in an abandoned rural Mississippi warehouse. Nobody would rent to me as they, I am certain, felt this former upwardly-mobile yuppie had lost his mind for starting a comic strip at my age. It was about one year into the project. Not much was happening, and I could clearly see it was turning into yet another hobby, and I would eventually need to take some kind of job in marketing or management, but for now, I was obsessed with seeing the London's Times project happen. Suddenly an "idea lightbulb" hit me and, at the time, I thought was brilliant. I would launch yet another comic project titled "Panel Hollywood" which would showcase real celeb caricatures and then mail signed copies to them. Out of the several hundred we mailed out, only about a dozen or so famous persons responded. Some gave reviews, which was my strategy. Their reviews of the work remain on my main cartoon website, and those reviews put us "on the map".

I remember doing some writing on a steaming, muggy summer afternoon, and my computer alerted me that "you've got mail". It was from the estate of Roy Orbison. It was from his widow Barbara, written by her secretary, who asked if the estate could purchase the rights to a Roy Orbison cartoon on my website. Ms. Orbison loved the cartoon so much, she wanted to make custom greeting cards for her friends and Roy Orbison followers. That's a lot of cards! She had found the cartoon on my website. I had not mailed a copy of it to them yet, as I'd not located the estate, or its representatives. Of course I gave her the rights free, letting her know that he (Roy) had brought me so much pleasure throughout the years, and so many others, I need to sleep at night, and there would be no charge. She thanked me profusely, and used the card which was later revealed to be a wonderful success. She was very grateful.

As time has passed, and I've churned out more work, I have received threatening letters from attorneys of some celebrities of which I have used their likeness in parody. At first this frightened me, so I consulted with major cartoonists way above my league, who assured me most of the best cartoonists receive at least one per month, and many of them frame them. I talked to an attorney who taught me about "The Fair Use Act" in the Constitution, and how it protects such parody. My lawyer told me that those greedy attorneys, simply spend all day cruising the Internet, in hopes of finding someone who was clueless to the law, and would "settle with them". And I was told this works quite often (even though the attorneys do not have case). So I started framing the threatening letters like my colleagues, and they became a new hobby; threatening frivolous legal letters. Even the late Charles "Sparky" Schulz, whom I highly respected and admired, gave me excellent advice as I was starting, told me had gotten many and tossed them away.

About five years after this pleasant experience with Ms. Orbison, I received a letter from a large Houston law firm representing the Orbison estate demanding cease and desist with the Roy Orbison parody cartoon panel and, not only to take down all the images, but to provide an accounting of what had been sold, and "they would probably settle rather than take this to court". Not that this makes me an authority by any means, but my maternal direct ancestry includes former Supreme Court Judge Benjamin Cardozo. His name might not mean much to many, but his words about law were powerful. His books, his writings, until this day, are generally the "final word" in interpretation of Constitutional Law. New York Law School is named after him. I say this not to brag, but that, I do have a great many (good) attorneys in my family who strengthen the Constitution, rather than weaken it, and Benjamin was one of them.

As I said, this does not make me an expert on law (or anything else for that matter) but, more than Disney movies and tonight's homework were discussed at our dinner table. Human rights was often the "topic du jour", and rights of expression were instilled before I was even a teen. Before I was 18, I knew the difference between parody and copyright infringement. Parody is protected by the Fair Use Act. Infringement is not. Our work is total parody. We make it very clear in both the artwork and text. It is that simple. I then remembered that attorney I had spoken with, and it all made sense. A lot of these celebrity lawyers claim to be working on their client's behalf, but sadly, the celebrity (or estate executor...in this case Ms. Orbison) was not aware they were coming after me, someone with whom they'd already had an enjoyable business relationship regarding the image in question. I was being threatened for something she already had in her possession, and grateful to have worked with me (and vice versa).

Then I remembered a story Charles Schulz told me. Mad Magazine ran a hilarious parody of Peanuts. The day it hit the stands, Schulz's attorneys shot out a gruesome letter of what would happen to "Mad" if they did not remove all copies and pay their client for damages. What the lawyers did not know was that Mr. Schulz had also seen that Mad issue, and loved the parody so much, he sent them a congratulatory note telling them how brilliant it was. His book he penned on his life story before he died mentions this experience.

For people who produce artwork, and creates images of real celebrities in parody form, it is prudent to Google and learn about "The Fair Use Act". This is important, not only because it educational hence powerful to know one's rights, but the crooked lawyers from eroding our precious Constitution and this great country, to an even greater degree. They do it out of greed, and simply do not care. Freedom of speech (and expression) is one of the major differences in our Constitution, and say the one of the former Soviet Union, Sudan, or take your choice. When attorneys do their job well, and many do, that is, finding infringement criminals and making them pay, they are doing a great thing. When they go after humor producers of parody,

especially without even contacting their own client first, they are showing a real sense of irresponsibility and inability to understand the real spirit of the law, the part our Constitution-signers had in mind.

About the Author

[To See These Rare Roy Orbison by Rick London Gifts & Collectibles From Rick London Collection CLICK HERE](#)

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