

R A I N M A K E R S

JODY



GERSON

SHE WENT
FOR THE
BIG JOB
(AND
MADE
HISTORY)

In 2014, Jody Gerson made what was perhaps the boldest move of her career—despite some initial trepidation—and saw her years of hard work, superb instincts and creative passion rewarded with one of the most powerful posts in the business.

Her contract was up for renewal at **Sony/ATV Music Publishing** and she wanted a promotion. She had been Co-President (with **Danny Strick**) for six years and wanted a top

post of her own. “I had a great situation until I realized I wanted more,” she recalled in a 2017 *HITS* interview, “and I wasn’t going to get more.” She made her case to her boss, **Martin Bandier**, who wouldn’t go along with it. So, she reports, she picked up the phone and called a competitor, **Lucian Grainge**, who offered her an even bigger job—Global Chairman and CEO of **Universal Music Publishing Group**.

And with that, history was made. On Jan. 1, 2015, Gerson officially became the first woman CEO of a major music-publishing company.

She’s emerged as one of the most important music execs in the world in what seems like a short time—but she’s had years of training to get where she is today.

Part of what makes Gerson so successful is balance: She’s a tough negotiator but scrupulously fair-minded; fiercely outspoken but a good listener; and she can relate to creators and businesspeople with equal focus and understanding. She’s a peer-group leader with superb optics and appears on the shortlist for all manner of community endeavors.

Irving Azoff asserts, “Jody believes what is best for her writers is best for Universal. She’s an artists’ rights pioneer. We need more like her.”

“Jody’s an incredible executive,” says Republic boss Monte Lipman. “Her passion, her drive, her determination and her competitive edge make her one of the most impressive executives in our business, without question. She has such tremendous instincts, and she’s in the streets. She doesn’t operate from some lofty space as Chairman; she’s in it. Usually when I run into her it’s backstage—it’s sweaty and the floor is sticky and people are running back and forth. She gets out there.”

Gerson first spoke publicly about her dramatic ascent to the Chairmanship in June 2017 in a speech at the United

Jewish Appeal’s luncheon in which she introduced the honoree, Universal Music Group EVP Michele Anthony. She revealed more a few months later in a *HITS* interview.

“I think I just hit a wall,” Gerson told *HITS*, by way of explaining why she chose to leave Sony/ATV, and Bandier, for whom she had worked for most of her career. (They first worked together at EMI Music Publishing.)

“My career was really with one person for over 20 years. It was amazing, but I think it was time for me to really go for it...I knew I could run a com-

pany; I just didn’t know it was OK for me to *want* to run a company. I’ve been thinking a lot about that. Why didn’t I do it before?

“...As ambitious as I was, I was so caught up in the loyalty. And there was nothing wrong (at Sony/ATV). I had a great situation until I realized I wanted more, and I wasn’t going to get more.”

And having taken the leap, how did having the top job feel? “It feels amazing,” Gerson said in the September 2017 interview. “Better than I ever thought it would. Looking back on my first two and a half years; signing an abundance of

SET A SPELL: Gerson with Big Sean



incredible artists, having hits, changing the culture, increasing the revenue, working for Lucian, loving my staff and the company. I couldn't imagine being happier and more accomplished.

"Empowerment...is really a two-way street. First, we need to empower women. And then, at that point, we as women need to say, 'Wait, why not me?' I had to come to that myself. And I want other women to be prepared and confident to do the same thing when we give them the opportunities they deserve. That's the bottom line."

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At *Glamour's* Women of the Year Live Summit at the Brooklyn Museum in New York last November, Gerson said that she bore the responsibility for not "owning her power" sooner.

"I spent my career being the loyal good girl, on every level. And I just hit a wall and I decided, you know what? I'm going to take my power and I called a competitor, Lucian Grainge, and he said 'Are you ready to be the global Chairman of Universal Music Publishing? And I said yes.

"...Until I finally decided to take this job, I didn't go for the big jobs. I really did think it was my job to make men look good...

"It was me not going for the big jobs and me thinking that by being the good girl I was going to get the reward—without having to take it. And one day somebody said to me, 'Uh-uh—it's time for you to step into your own power and think about you; don't worry about him.' I thought I couldn't leave my boss of all those years because I thought I would hurt his feelings and he would be upset. Honestly. It's like, I had to change. So I think that was me getting in my own way.

"It's not enough that there's only one [female] global Chairman of a music company. There should be more than one. But we're not going to get there unless we support each other, and we put each other in that position."



TOWERING: With Capitol chief Steve Barnett, COO Michelle Jubelirer and UMG topper Sir Lucian Grainge



POST TIME: With Post Malone

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YOUR SONG(S): With Grainge, Sir Elton John and Bernie Taupin



PRODUCING RESULTS: With Jeff Bhasker

“Jody’s a pioneer, visionary and always willing to take a risk for what she believes in,” adds TDE boss **Top Dawg**. “The thing I love most about her is that she empowers women. It’s been a great experience working alongside her.”

Gerson grew up in Philadelphia, surrounded by performers. Her father and grandfather owned a nightclub in nearby Cherry Hill, N.J., which booked such stars as **Frank Sinatra**, **The Supremes**, **the Temptations** and **Richard Pryor**. “My mom took my brother and me every Sunday for the matinee,” Gerson recalled in an online interview. “I think what I got from that was a real understanding of artists and how to connect with them.”

Gerson was still in high school when she started working in the entertainment field. “I worked at *The Mike Douglas Show* for two summers, when I was 16 and 17,” she said. “I worked at a radio station. I was so ambitious, in a nice way, but I knew I wanted this.”

When Gerson graduated from **Northwestern** in 1983, she wanted a job at **MTV**. Unfortunately, so did everyone else at that time. There were no openings. So Gerson took a job at **Chappell Music**.

“I went in and got the job Xeroxing lead sheets. I had no idea what Chappell Music was. I had no idea what music publishing was.”

Gerson worked as an archivist for Chappell starting in 1983, working for then-President **Irwin Robinson**. It gave her a solid foundation in publishing. “I got to listen to songs all day—I had to splice them into reel-to-reels,” she told **Bloomberg**. “It gave me knowledge of the catalog.” She then moved into **A&R**. When Chappell was purchased by **Warner**, she was overseen by the legendary **Chuck Kaye** and **Les Bider**.

Gerson has superb networking and people skills, which helped her in her advancement. “Every time I met someone, the next morning they would get a note from me,” she remembered. “‘Dear **Mr. Davis**, It was so nice to meet you at the **T.J. Martell** dinner. We had a conversation about so-and-so.’ Every single person got a note from me.”

In 1988, she moved on to **EMI Music Publishing**, under **Bandier** and **Charles Koppelman**. She ran the company’s East

Coast office, and later, the West Coast office. She stayed with EMI for 17 years, signing such talents as **Norah Jones, Enrique Iglesias, Jermaine Dupri, Dallas Austin, Arrested Development** and a 14-year old prodigy named **Alicia Keys**.

Gerson signed Keys in 1996. “For years, she was making records that never came out,” Gerson said. “I remember the chairman of the company saying, ‘You know, she may be talented, but it doesn’t mean she’ll ever have success.’”

Gerson’s belief paid off in 2001, when Keys’ debut album *Songs in A Minor* and its lead single, “Fallin’,” both reached #1. In February 2002, Keys won five **Grammy Awards**, including Song of the Year.

In 2008, Gerson followed Bandier to Sony/ATV Music Publishing, where she served as Co-President. Her first signing was **Lady Gaga**, long before anyone had heard of Lady Gaga.

“Everybody else at Sony had passed on her,” Gerson said. “She told me she was going to be the biggest artist in the world, and that it wouldn’t be about money, it would be about fame and art. I believed her, I supported her—and I paid her a lot of money.”

During Gerson’s tenure, the EMI catalog was brought under Sony/ATV’s roof. “This is a transformative moment for Sony/ATV,” Gerson said at the time. “We went from being a small yet mighty global company to the world’s largest music publisher.”

Gerson also played an integral role in the careers of **Iglesias, Mac Miller, Pharrell Williams, Pitbull, RedOne** and many others.

A week into her new job at the Universal Music Publishing Group, Gerson gathered her staff for a town hall meeting. She began her speech by listing all the things she’s *not*:

“I’m not an attorney or an accountant; I’m not a copyright expert or a royalty expert; I’m not a songwriter or a musician. What I am is somebody who is passionate about music.”

At UMPG, Gerson has led the signings and contract extensions of such stars as **Adele, Coldplay, Justin Bieber, Harry Styles, The Bee Gees, Bruce Springsteen, R.E.M., Jack White, Pearl Jam, Linkin Park, Miley Cyrus, Mumford & Sons, Romeo Santos and Zedd**, as well as such newer talents as **Post Malone, SZA, Travis Scott, Quavo, Metro Boomin, Lil Yachty, Sam Hunt and Kane Brown**.

“Jody is the present and the future of music publishing,” says mega-attorney **John Branca**. “She covers all the bases—relationships with artists and writers, business acumen, people skills and charisma.”

In the *HITS* interview, Gerson spoke warmly about several of her writers. “There’s a thing some people have that other people don’t, and he had that thing,” she noted of Harry Styles, whose post-**One Direction** solo bow for **Columbia** earned major critical kudos and featured the hit “Sign of the Times.” Crediting manager **Jeffrey Azoff** for canily handling her introduction to the Brit star, she added that pairing Styles with producer **Jeff Bhasker** “was really exciting. It came together the way that you used to put together a band.”

Of **SZA**, whose TDE/RCA debut, *Ctrl*, was a smash and who subsequently earned a brace of Grammy nods, she noted, “I signed her as she was finishing her record... I had a great meeting with her and that was it. What I love, personally, is to sign artists we think can make a difference. That’s why I think **SZA** can be an important voice.”

Gerson described streaming giant **Post Malone** as



THEY ARE... THEY SAID: With Neil Diamond



UNDISCLOSED LOCATION: With Michelle Jubelirer



UNIVERSAL ACCLAIM: With Grainge, Michele Anthony and Boyd Muir

“another [developing artist] I’m super-proud of. Nobody knows the talent that he is as a songwriter yet, and he will continue to surprise people.”

Of *Migos* star Quavo, she declared, “I think he’s going to do way more than anyone expects him to. I think he’s brilliant and he could do anything”).

Gerson also said that she takes pride in the diversity of her staff. “In our industry, there is not enough diversity. There aren’t enough women leaders; there aren’t enough minorities. I look at my company and we’re increasingly diverse. I have many women CFOs across the globe.”

And she said she wants her people to be ambitious. “Again, it’s about empowering people. I want everyone who works for me to want my job, and I want them to have my job one day when I’m ready to give it up.”

“I learned how to hire people, how to support them and how to put together

a team,” she noted to *The New York Times*. “My management style is different from a lot of others because I don’t pit people against each other. I don’t think the point of management is to make people insecure.”

That team includes such accomplished execs as COO Marc Cimino, President North America Evan Lamberg, A&R heads David Gray and Jessica Rivera, VP Creative Walter Jones, Director of Creative Sterling Simms, Worldwide CFO JW Beekman, Chief Counsel, Biz Affairs/Digital Rights Management head David Kokakis, U.K. chief Mike McCormack, Latin America head Alexandra Lioutikoff and Production Music Prez Michael Sammis.

“Jody was the first person I introduced to Lady Gaga when I signed her [for management],” recalls Troy Carter. “It was the week Jody started her role at Sony/ATV. She’s tough as nails, but as genuine as they come. It’s been incredible

to watch her grow the once-sleepy UMPG into a real player in publishing.”

Gerson was a producer of the 2002 film *Drumline* and the 2006 film *ATL* (with Dallas Austin also serving as a producer) and exec producer for VH1’s *Drumline: A New Beat*. and She sits on the Board of Directors of ASCAP, MusiCares and the National Music Publishers Association.

Gerson’s advocacy on behalf of women goes well beyond the immediate platform of her Chairman post. She serves on the advisory board for USC’s **Annenberg Inclusion Initiative**, as well as on the Board of Trustees for **The Archer School for Girls**, a college preparatory school located in West Los Angeles,

and industry-focused nonprofit **She Is the Music**. In 2018, she helped shine more light on the latter organization by presenting SZA with the first-ever She Is the Music Award at City of Hope's Songs of Hope gala.

She was featured prominently in *Variety's* Power of Women L.A. and was Executive of the Year in *Billboard's* 2015 Women in Music issue; in 2018 she became the highest-ranking woman in the history of *Billboard's* Power 100 (she got the #8 spot).

Gerson has three children, **Julian** (now in A&R at **Republic Records**), **Luke** and **Daisy**. That experience has informed her management style. "My leadership style comes from being a mother," she told **Adam Bryant** of *The New York Times* last September. "I want the best out of people. When it doesn't work, I find the kindest way to have the conversation: What's right for them? What's right for me? What's right for the company? I want people to grow. The big thing for me about leadership is being in a position to empower people who deserve to be empowered, and to set the right example for how they can empower others."

Gerson told Bryant she quickly grew "comfortable" in this, her first job as CEO.

"I was worried at first that I had to know everything. I was worried that I had to be able to read a balance sheet. I was worried that I would have to know what the royalties were in Russia. I was worried that I had to understand the litigations in Germany. But I quickly grew comfortable because I recognized that I have experts in every area of the company. I don't have to solve every problem. They have to come to me and tell me what the issues are, and I have to surround myself with people I trust and who know what they're doing in those areas.

"I like being a CEO," Gerson concluded. "I'm good at it, because I'm very secure about making decisions. And I like making the final decision."•



RHYMES AND REASON: With YG, Hit-Boy, Tink and Sage the Gemini



KEYS TO THE KINGDOM: With Mary J. Blige

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