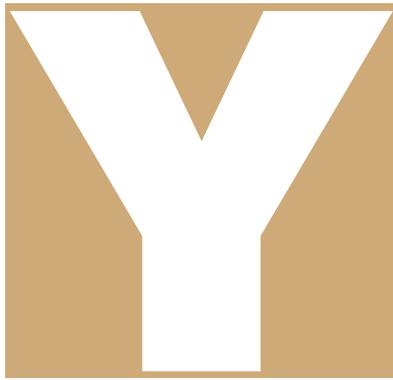




JULIE SWIDLER

**TAKING CARE OF
BUSINESS-AND LEGAL**



ou can't always tell a book by its cover. Take **Julie Swidler**, **Sony Music Entertainment's** top lawyer, dealmaker and policy formulator, whose name and lofty title—EVP of Business Affairs and General Counsel—are

frequently invoked, with all due formality, in high-profile trade stories. Swidler is seen across the industry as a formidable presence—a tough but fair negotiator who fiercely advances her company's interests as one of **Rob Stringer's** most trusted negotiators. You don't want to go against her if you're not fully prepared; otherwise, you won't know what hit you.

As the chief adviser to Sony Music's labels and divisions worldwide on all legal issues and policy initiatives—including contracts, litigation, transactions, global government affairs and joint-venture ops—Swidler, along with her team, oversaw more than 100 deals for SME during Sony's most recent fiscal year.

Swidler is indeed a powerhouse, with an unassailable reputation among her peers. Perhaps less well known is how personally engaged she is in the world in which she works. The native New Yorker is a lifelong music lover who took great pleasure in her extracurricular activities as a singer, radio DJ and talent booker as a college undergrad. She got a close-up view of **Woodstock '94** as the fest's lead counsel from her trailer office just behind one of the two stages, and she was onstage for **Crosby, Stills & Nash's** set. She looks back on solving the myriad logistical puzzles of that event as a great career accomplishment.

When her former boss, **Clive Davis**, presented her with the **Grammy Foundation's** Entertainment Law Initiative Service Award in 2016—she was the first woman (and label executive) to be so honored—Swidler playfully but fittingly quoted lines from **Joni Mitchell's David Geffen-**inspired “Free Man in Paris” in her speech. She referenced “the work I've taken on/Stoking the star-maker machinery/

Behind the popular song,” and noted, accurately, “I deal in dreamers/And telephone screamers.”

She also has great empathy for artists, particularly those whose interests she champions and protects. To cite a recent example, Swidler played a central role in upgrading Sony Music's artist-royalty portal, which brings newfound transparency, enabling artists to view their earnings and get paid promptly. “It affects tens of thousands of artists,” she explained in the midst of the reboot.

In 2018, she was one of 16 industry luminaries tapped for the **Recording Academy's Tina Tchen-led Task Force on Diversity and Inclusion**, where she helped bring about sorely needed changes within the beleaguered organization.

The role perfectly suited Swidler, whose philanthropic efforts include her role as Vice Chair of the **T.J. Martell Foundation**—she was the recipient of the 2017 Lifetime Music Industry Award at the nonprofit's 42nd annual Honors Gala—and her work with the **UJA-Federation of New York's Music for Youth initiative**. She is a dedicated mentor and serves on the Board of Trustees of her alma mater, **Union College**; she also served on the search committee that led to the hiring of **David R. Harris**, the school's first African American President, and supported the **Agahozo Shalom Youth Village**, a residential school in Rwanda that aids orphaned and vulnerable youth.

She further demonstrated her considerable people skills when, in 2015, she spent three months in Music City. At **Doug Morris'** behest, she assisted in the CEO search for **Sony Music Nashville** that led to the hiring of **Randy Goodman**. “I got to exercise muscles I hadn't used in a while,” she acknowledged on her return to NYC. It was time well spent, according to **Sandbox Entertainment** chief **Jason Owen**: “Julie had every meal with an artist, manager or publisher, and people here were blown away that a visiting top-level executive would spend so much time [with them],” he said. “That went a long way.”

When he took the job, Goodman expressed his thanks “to Julie Swidler for her dedication and commitment to me and Nashville during this transition.”

Thanks to Swidler's magnanimous presence, company morale had risen exponentially by the time Goodman took the reins, and he did the rest, exemplified by SMN's first #1 album in 18 months and a string





PHOTO: ALAN POIZNER

At Leadership Music event in Nashville (l-r): Sony Music Nashville's Angie Magill, Clint Higham of Morris Higham Management, SMN chief Randy Goodman, Tri Star Sports and Entertainment CEO Lou Taylor, RCA Inspiration's Phil Thornton, Clive Davis, Big Machine Label Group topper Scott Borchetta, Swidler, Fitzgerald Hartley Management's Bill Simmons, The Davis Firm's Doug Davis, Fitzgerald Hartley's Larry Fitzgerald and Tim DuBois Music's Tim DuBois.

of new-artist breakouts.

Alongside the industry's growth in streaming revenue thanks, in part, to Sony Music's new agreements with key digital service providers, Swidler and President, Global Digital Business & U.S. Sales **Dennis Kooker** embarked on a year of intensive education of roster artists and their teams. Swidler and **Kooker** served as instructors. In 2016, they took around 50 meetings to ensure that creators and their reps "understand how they get paid on all digital services; how we, as Sony, have been paying our artists for almost a decade; and how we see the future," she explained. "When everyone has the same information, it makes a more even playing field."

Long Island native Swidler—born **Julie Greifer**—has been passionate about music for as long as she can remember, dating back to the time her dad returned from an overseas business trip with a U.K. pressing of **The Beatles'** just-released *Rubber Soul*, which she treasured throughout her childhood. While studying political science at Union College, she was a DJ for the school's radio station, **WRUC**, hosting what she described as "a pretty eclectic show. I played everything from **Hot Tuna** to **Bruce Springsteen** to old rock 'n' roll,

and some jazz that was popular at the time, like **Chuck Mangione**. And then I'd throw in **The Supremes**."

Swidler also ran the campus coffeehouse, for which she booked live entertainment. She toyed with the idea of singing professionally after college but soon realized that wasn't a realistic option. "Unless you have a voice like **Whitney Houston** or **Vanessa Williams**, you have to write your own songs," she noted, "and I'm not a songwriter." Her ample skills could—and would—be put to far better use.

After earning her law degree from **Yeshiva University's Cardozo Law School** in 1982, Swidler spent six years litigating for two of New York's most powerful firms. While working 80-hour weeks at **Shea & Gould**, she was approached to host a nationally syndicated radio show. "I wanted to continue my show from **WRUC**," she recalled, "but I realized I had no time."

She did a stint on Madison Ave. as operations counsel for **J. Walter Thompson**, where she recalled frequently having to hit the brakes on the agency's creative department, quipping, "They'd call me into the meeting and ask me just how far over the edge they were going."

Her talent-contract work at **JWT** introduced Swidler to the world of entertainment law, and following a hostile takeover at the agency, she plunged into the deep end at **PolyGram**, where she spent 11 years, rising

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from Senior Attorney in 1988 to VP/Assistant General Counsel in 1992. Three years later—after getting back to the garden, as Joni would put it, with Woodstock ’94—Swidler became SVP of Business & Legal Affairs for relaunched Mercury in 1995. That situation required her to build the label’s business and legal affairs department from the ground up, integrating it into the company’s operations, which deepened her understanding of the nuances of label infrastructure.

In 1999, Swidler became Clive Davis’ Head of Business and Legal Affairs at Arista. The following year, she was one of several key Arista execs who joined Davis in launching J Records, where she grew first-year company revenues in excess of \$60m. She negotiated new-artist contracts, leading to J Records’ first major release: Alicia Keys’ multiplatinum, Grammy-winning debut album, as well as multimillion-selling albums from Luther Vandross and O Town. J and RCA merged in 2002, forming the Davis-led RCA Music Group.

The ascendant exec then managed a committee within the Business and Legal Affairs and A&R-admin departments for BMG North America, which led to the centralization of key functions and yielded over \$3m in annual savings.

When Sony Music and BMG merged in 2004, she became EVP of Business and Legal Affairs for the combined company, holding that job until 2008, when Bertelsmann sold BMG to Sony, resulting in the formation of Sony Music Entertainment.

“Her business and legal acumen place her among the top executives working in her field, and her fiscally responsible approach to business has helped us to implement significant cost-saving measures,” then-SME Chairman Rolf Schmidt-Holtz said of his enlightened co-pilot. “She is passionate about both music and the music business, and she is a skilled leader as well as a true team player. In short, she is perfect for this pivotal role.”



With Alicia Keys and Samantha Kirby Yoh

At various points during her more than three decades in the music business, Swidler has been described as a natural leader, team builder, a collaborator and an empowering presence who presides over an inclusive, efficient working environment in which accountability goes both ways. She’s also been an inspiration to female professionals in both the music and legal sectors.

When she received the Music Biz 2020 Presidential Award for Outstanding Executive Achievement, the trade organization’s president, Portia Sabin, was effusive in her praise, saying, “Julie Swidler has been a personal inspiration for me as an executive,” and citing “the countless contributions she’s made to our industry—especially the ways she’s worked for women and underrepresented groups—in her three decades of service. She makes all this hard work look easy.”

It was a noteworthy moment in the spotlight for an executive who generally avoids it—because she’s too busy getting results. ■