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Rockin' lawyer offers free service

BY CAM FULLER, THE STARPHOENIX APRIL 1, 2015



Kurt Dahl offers pro bono legal advice through SaskMusic.

Are you a musician with an iffy contract?

Better call Kurt. Through the law firm Murphy and Company, members of Sask-Music now have access to free legal advice and services.

Saskatoon lawyer Kurt Dahl, the drummer of rock band One Bad Son, says there's a definite need for legal advice in the industry.

"Contracts get drawn up that would never stand in the corporate world but in the music biz they're somehow okay," Dahl said between tour stops.

"Any time you've got someone's dreams at stake, you can kind of dangle a carrot and offer them a really bad deal and a lot of bands will take it because it's their dreams and they think they're going to be on a massive stage in L.A. in a few months, and it doesn't happen."

Starting April 1 - and, no, it's not an April Fool's Day joke - Dahl is donating 50 hours of legal work per year. He knows it won't go far, but it's a start.

Dahl has helped his own band avoid some pitfalls, he says.

"There's been, like, a handful of times when we've had a deal thrown our way and we dodged a bullet because of my background."

Not everybody in the industry is out to get you, but that doesn't preclude the need for due diligence, Dahl says.

"You see a lot of bands break up because they can't make any money because they signed really bad contracts."

One typical case is a Saskatchewan band being offered a deal by a German record label, Dahl says.

"It's more so just seeing the contract and realizing there are so many red flags or grey areas where it's like, if we don't properly define this it's going to be an accounting nightmare."

With local music artists making an impression internationally, this is an important time for the industry, Dahl added.

"Right now in the province, something special is happening. It's unlike any other scene in North America. I've heard people call it Seattle North and that's not far off. The number of hugely talented and successful musicians per capita here is unparalleled in the country."

Since he's in the biz himself, Dahl says he has a feel for the demands of entertainment law.

"There's a certain urgency in the music business. You get a film or TV placement and you've got to turn that around in three days or it's gone. "Balancing two careers has required some flexibility for Dahl.

One Bad Son recently pushed its fourth single, Black Buffalo, into the Canadian Top 10 and just finished a six-week headlining tour, recording sellouts for the first time in Ontario.

"My office for a good chunk of the year is our tour van. I joke that my hours are nine to five - but p.m. to a.m.," Dahl says.

"If I didn't love both jobs, I'd burn out. But it doesn't usually feel like work. It's hard to burn out on your passion."

A SaskMusic membership costs \$50 for an individual and \$75 for a band at www.saskmusic.org.

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