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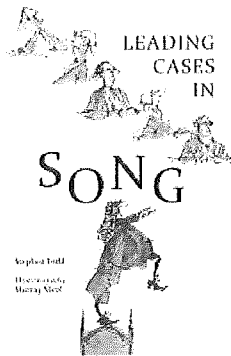
Book review: Leading Cases in Song

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"Many of the jokes are laugh-out-loud funny & the language stylish"

Author: Stephen Todd
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A whirlwind of ingenuity, wit and humour, Stephen Todd's *Leading Cases in Song* is less a novelty book than a surreal journey into a parallel world teeming with a life of its own and peopled by a weird and wonderful cast of celebrities, eccentrics and other characters whose brushes with the law have become judicial landmarks.



Circus animals, bumble bees, sex and drugs—it's all there, but this is opera, not rock and roll.

The material can be appreciated on several levels, for its legal knowledge, for the language, for the music or for sheer fun and is best enjoyed by the reader who can sing along with the music at full volume in the privacy of his or her own home (preferably not on your train to work).

Surprisingly perhaps, you don't have to be a Gilbert and Sullivan buff, a lawyer or even musical to appreciate the rhythm, comedy and sheer know-how bursting out of the 29 songs crafted by the author, an authority on common-law, in the Victorian pair's inimitable style. If you can't sing or don't know the music, simply reading the words or reciting them aloud is enough to capture the spirit of the book.

Contract capers

The content is based on cases from the fields of contract, crime and tort and includes three operas—one about liability in contract under *Carlill v Carbolic Smokeball*—to the tunes of numbers from *The Pirates of Penzance*, *Trial by Jury*, and *The Mikado*; a second on *Donaghue v Stevenson* duty of care, using music from *HMS Pinafore* and *Iolanthe*, and a third on the law of privacy, featuring Naomi Campbell, Max Mosley and other celebrities.

In some cases, the resourceful Professor weaves in a phrase or two of the original lyrics and echoes the mood of the old song—for example *Never mind the why and wherefore* in *The Baronet and the Garage Man* but more often than not the G&S material is merely the frame on which Todd can hang his ingenious blend of legal points and devilish humour.

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Lyrical miracles

No mean feat, the lyrics manage to fit comfortably into the framework of the libretti without too many painful twists or stomach-churning rhymes while retaining the factual integrity of the case in point, but the tour de force is Professor Todd's ability to inform, educate, and explain while treating his readers to an entertaining frolic through the courts.

There is the odd transposition that grates a little: check out *Behold the Smokeball Flu Preventioner* (the *Carlill* case of course), to the tune of *Behold the Lord High Executioner*, for example. But you have to admire his chutzpah.

Witty wordplay

Many of the jokes are laugh-out-loud funny and the language stylish:

"She'd told porky pies, not so much as a blush
And she failed to advise without even a flush
She belonged to Narcotics anonymous"

(from *Privacy Getting Safeguarding*, based on *Campbell v MGN Ltd*)

Despite the work's title, the criteria for selecting his cases were that they should be "entertaining/interesting/odd/bizarre" rather than "boring/offensive/tragic" and in this he succeeds admirably. The tone may be light-hearted but the behind-the-scenes legal authority is sound. Professor Todd's work should be required reading for all law students, as long as they have a pinch of salt handy.

Particular favourites are *Those Supersized Big Macs*, (to *The Gondoliers* song *Rising Early in the Morning*) about the infamous McDonald's suit and the unforgettable *Is God a Person?*, inspired by a little-known Canadian criminal case (*R v Davie*) in which a prison cell plea by the defendant to the Almighty to "get him off" raised the question of admissibility of evidence. As the chorus points out;

"The question's rather tricky for
A court applying earthly law"

Beautifully and quirkily illustrated by Murray Nichol, the material is presented complete with stage directions and a full musical score by John Pattinson. It would be perfect for performing by legal or other choir to any audience, the only shame is that it did not come with a CD to save scrabbling around online for midi files of the songs used.

Sally Thomas, editor, *Halsbury's Statutes* & solicitor (non-practising)

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Author: Sally Thomas

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