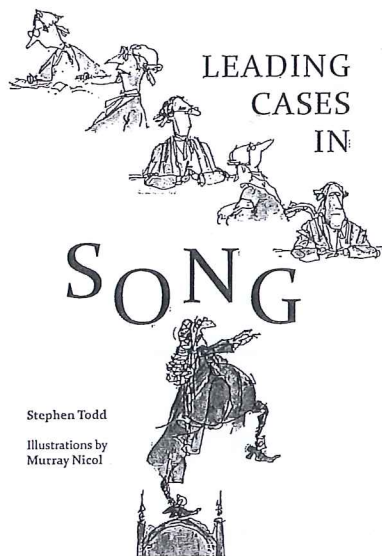


The Singing Teacher – Leading Cases in Song

by Susan Dugdale



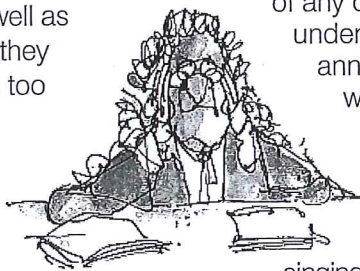
In late 2013 an extraordinary book slipped onto the shelves just in time for Christmas. This atypical offering is a beautifully illustrated song book. The brainchild of Professor Stephen Todd, (Professor of Law University of Canterbury and Professor of Common Law, University of Nottingham, UK), the book features, as its title says, leading cases set to music.

The story behind the songs

The initial idea to sing the cases was sparked by the call to produce an item for the Canterbury Law Revue some twenty years ago. That first song was a hit. Over time more were written and then entire operas, albeit short ones. Now legions of Todd's students on both sides of the world have been sung to, an experience they rate as A+: "awesome" and "amazing".

Professor Todd says he applied certain criteria in choosing suitable cases for treatment. They needed to be interesting, amusing, bizarre or important as well as appropriately fitting the light verse make-over they were going to receive. That ruled out anything too nasty, tragic or the ultimate crime; too boring.

A long-time aficionado of the famous Victorian duo Gilbert and Sullivan (G & S) comic operas, he recognised they provided a perfect template to carry his message. In doing so he joins a long line of people lampooning the original works which is fitting in itself as they began as parodies of grand opera: a flummery of political satire and deadpan absurdity. Through him the legacy lives on.



Cases & topics

In all 42 cases spanning the years 1893 (*Carlill v Carbolic Smoke Ball Co* [1893] 1 QB 256) to 2011 (*British Chiropractic Association v Singh* [2011] 1 WLR 133) get the Todd channelling G & S patter treatment. The topic range is extensive including negligence, privacy, trespassing, harassment, branding, food quality, defamation, and the question of whether God is a person. Well-known companies and personages make appearances: McDonalds, Pepsico, News of the World, the Mirror, Naomi Campbell, Max Mosley, Lord Atkin, and of course numerous singing Judges.

*"Though we're intellectuelle
We can sing and dance as well
And caper a jig or four
And we're never known to cower
At the words of any lawyer
And we're never, never wrong at law"*

From "We are the Judges of the Court of Law" *Donoghue v Stevenson – an opera in two acts. Based on Donoghue v Stevenson* [1932] AC 562

Music & illustrations

In true 'not only but also' fashion the book includes music (adapted from Sullivan's score by John Pattinson) to accompany the songs and a whimsical series of quirky illustrations reminiscent of the work of Quentin Blake for Roald Dahl by Murray Nicol.

At present there is not a professional quality recording of any of the works. Negotiations are tentatively underway to fill this need but it is too early to announce who is going to do the honours and when the recordings will be ready.

In the meantime showing real Kiwi spirit Professor Todd recommends a DIY approach. As he says in the preface: "The songs work better when they are actually sung and including the score makes singing them possible or at least a good deal easier." He even gives a karaoke option for those who cannot play their own accompaniment. ♪IΔ

(*Leading Cases in Song*, Thomson Reuters, December 2013, 228 pages, hardback)