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Rocking On: Local Lawyers Find Success as Musicians

BY STEPHEN B. SCHOTT

Special to the Legal

Jumping split-legged, Matt Maguire kicks his acoustic guitar across the stage. Maguire's strong voice and bobbing head keep the audience's focus, and only a momentary eyebrow raise to amused lead guitarist Keith Marlowe gives away that this was an unscripted moment for The Miners.

"As hard as it might be, just try to make us look cool," demanded Marlowe. Unsure what he meant, I asked what made The Miners different from your typical corporate/lawyer-infused band.

"First, [bassist] Jeff Smith and [drummer] Andy Shahan aren't lawyers." More importantly, "We play our own music. We're not a cover band." With the exception of a few covers with their own twist thrown in, The Miners write their own music. Maguire says it's easier playing originals.

"When you play covers, the audience knows when you screw up. When I screw up something I wrote, it's not as apparent."

The Miners capture a nostalgic rock country vibe that invites a sing-along, something I saw in the band's dedicated fans. "We have drawn 75 to 125 people per show," said



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Marlowe.

At least some of this usually better-heeled fan base are lawyers like Marlowe and Maguire. Marlowe, when he's not nimbly navigating his electric guitar, is chief operating officer and general counsel for a hedge fund, Rock Hill Partners. Maguire is a labor and employment attorney at Pepper Hamilton.

Despite their careers and the demands of their families — Marlowe and Maguire have two children each — they find time for band practice and recording. Recording and post-production, however, can take some time, as Marlowe admitted, "It took us about six months to record and mix four songs from the time we laid the base tracks to completion. If we didn't have to work, it would have taken about a week."

"WTA," "Arkansas" and "Gimme Back

My Heart" are three songs available at the band's MySpace page (www.myspace.com/theminerspa) and will be included on "The Miners," their upcoming CD, which they hope to release by year-end.

"Arkansas" was inspired by a Pepper Hamilton summer associate's near-death experience on an icy Arkansas highway. Maguire heard the story and felt inspired to write the song. "This associate spun on an icy highway and an 18-wheeler pushed his car for a few hundred yards along the ice.

"Some songs are based on other people's experiences," while others are fictional story songs, says Maguire. Another song, "Room 17," is about a wife who gets revenge on a cheating husband by having an affair in the same hotel room where he previously met with his mistress.

Marlowe contrasts Maguire's songwriting with his own: "I usually write about my own experiences." One of Marlowe's songs, "Norton's Pond," is about a spot in Maine where his family used to have a vacation cottage. Another song, "Cold Steel," relays the time Marlowe was robbed at gunpoint while working in a record store.

Marlowe and Maguire both grew up in suburban Philadelphia (Elkins Park and Wyncote, respectively). They both took their

suburban roots to Philadelphia bands in the 1980s. Maguire was lead singer and guitarist for The Bensons, a refrain-chorus-refrain pop band with '60s harmonies. Marlowe was a member of Tornado 5, an alternative rock band whose sound mixed intertwining guitar and bass lines with an overlay of poetry from a female art school student. Life, bills and kids derailed those bands for a while before The Miners formed.

"We didn't sit down and decide to start a band this time," said Marlowe. "We had our first gig booked and we didn't even have Jeff and Andy yet."

In early 2007, when Maguire played a solo acoustic show — his first public appearance as a musician in 16 years — a friend asked if he'd like to do a little bigger show. He called Marlowe, and they were kicking around the idea of a two-guitar acoustic set when they decided to skip that and form a band.

"Jeff and Andy joined us and we had the band," said Marlowe. "But that first gig got canceled when the venue closed three weeks before our scheduled show, so we were suddenly a band with a following but nowhere to play." Drawing on contacts from the early nineties, they quickly got a show at the now-closed Grape Street Pub in Manayunk.

in Center City.

"Our goal is to get the CD released by the end of the year, which may be optimistic based on our typical rehearsal schedule," said Marlowe. "From there, we're not likely to start a tour," he joked. "Not that we'd say no to the right offer!"

There's a certain *schadenfreude* watching people hang on to something too long. Maguire said, "We used to joke about guys we knew who were still playing in bands in their 30s and 40s, and yet here we are doing it."

But there's something special about the

artists who improve over time, or mount the unlikely comeback. Clint Eastwood comes to mind: From spaghetti Westerns through unfortunate monkey movies ("Right Turn Clyde"), Eastwood's now a near-octogenarian making some of the best movies in Hollywood.

Although far from octogenarians, The Miners are a band in the Clint Eastwood vein, its members having improved with time.

Catch them at their next show Saturday, Oct. 18 at NXNW (or as some call it, North By Northwest) in Mt. Airy at 8:30 p.m. •

After their debut show far exceeded their expectations (from both a musical and crowd reaction standpoint), "We had to decide: Were we just happy with one show," Maguire quipped, "Or would we keep doing it?"

They decided to keep playing, fitting in practices and shows between everyone's busy lives, while drawing an increasing fan-base playing Grape Street and the Tin Angel