

A LAWYER'S LOVE OF MUSIC

Angela Jacobsen speaks to family lawyer Sonja Palinich about how her love of music has taken her around the world.

I love to hear about the interesting ventures that lawyers get up to when they are not drafting contracts, filing submissions, and demonstrating some of the finest lawyering imaginable. So, I was delighted when I got talking to Sonja Palinich, an Associate specialising in family law at Auckland firm Haign Lyon, at a particularly festive FIFA World Cup celebration and she told me that she plays the accordion.

It is not an instrument you hear of many playing, especially in New Zealand, but it was Sonja's stories of where accordion playing has taken her around the world which piqued my interest.

Sonja's parents emigrated to New Zealand from the former Yugoslavia, now Croatia, in the 1960s to explore job opportunities. The accordion is a more popular instrument in Eastern European countries, however it is not so much the continuation of a cultural tradition that has kept her playing, but more so the opportunities it has presented to her.

"My mother first took me to accordion lessons when I was seven-years old, but apparently I ran away," says Sonja. But a couple of years later during a family trip back to Croatia, it was seeing her three-year-old cousin playing the accordion that ignited an interest for her.

The accordion dates back to the early 19th century and was thought to be invented in Berlin (according to the font of all knowledge Wikipedia). There are three parts to the accordion. The right hand plays the keys for the melody either on a piano keyboard or a button board. The left hand plays rhythm on a button board, operates the air button, and moves the bellows which

is the middle part of the instrument. There is much to learn and Sonja took lessons for 15 years, 20 exams, and completed five music papers at university. She has always been involved with the accordion in some way, she says. Sonja has played in bands, orchestras, was involved with the Dalmatian Cultural Society, and taught the accordion for ten years (holding an Accordion Teachers' Diploma and is an associate of the institute of registered music teachers.

Today, the accordion is still a big part of Sonja's life. Once a week she plays with the Auckland Accordion Symphonietta who host concerts twice a year and play at various other concerts. She is also the President of the New Zealand Accordion Association (NZAA) and it is in this capacity that Sonja has travelled to Shanghai, China, Spoleto, Italy, Victoria, Canada, and will at the end of October see her in Salzburg, Austria to attend the Coupe Mondiale – the World Accordion Championships.

Now in its 67th year, the Coupe Mondiale takes place in a different country each year, having been hosted in New Zealand by the NZAA in 1980, and again in 2009.

While Sonja attends the Coupe Mondiale as a delegate and does not compete (the competition typically sees competitors aged in their teens and twenties), she does play in the orchestra and loves attending to meet other musicians, hear accordion music at the top level, and generally revel in the experience that visiting a new country brings.

The NZAA is affiliated with the Confédération Internationale des Accordeonistes who are a member of the International Music Council



(IMC UNESCO) and it is through this affiliation, and the efforts of the NZAA, that New Zealand is a popular destination for accordionists to travel to and compete.

"New Zealand has been very good at promoting itself to attract international players, which is a great thing as it raises the standards for musicians playing the accordion here," says Sonja.

A commitment to the accordion seems to be on the cards for Sonja for a long time to come, she is considering some further university study next year and is looking forward to attending the Coupe Mondiale in Finland

in 2015, and Russia in 2016.

"Music has always been an important part of my life since childhood and the accordion is the instrument I happened to focus on. Being involved in music has provided me with some fantastic opportunities and continues to do so. Every Coupe Mondiale presents something different that is unique to the host country and its culture. I think this year's event will be particularly special given that it is being hosted in Mozart's town."

For more information on accordion playing in New Zealand visit: www.accordion.co.nz 