

In Tune: For Skadden Partner, Singing Runs Parallel to Litigation

“The feeling you get from a successful argument, whether you win or lose, is totally different than the feeling of singing for an audience, singing well and touching people,” says litigator and mezzo-soprano Jenness Parker.

BY ELLEN BARDASH

Jenness Parker says while being a litigation partner at Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom is her career, singing is integral to who she is. But those two sides have had significantly more overlap in Delaware than you might expect.

“Doing an argument is amazing, and I love it. I love practicing law,” said Parker, a mezzo-soprano. “But the feeling you get from a successful argument, whether you win or lose, is totally different than the feeling of singing for an audience, singing well and touching people.”

Parker has been singing since she was four, and her singing and legal careers dovetailed in Delaware in 2004 during her clerkship with Supreme Court Justice Randy Holland, who first came to see her perform as Emma in a Georgetown theater company’s production of “Jekyll & Hyde.”

She again sang for Holland at his memorial service on April 30, noting she thought of her performance of “Here I Am Lord,” a song Holland’s wife Iona asked her to sing as he had loved when it was sung in their church, as singing for Holland and his family.

“It was one of the greatest honors of my life, to do that for them and to celebrate him in that way, in a special way that I could contribute to the memorial,” she said.

Her first year at Skadden, she appeared in one of the law-adjacent parody musicals written by Superior Court Judge Robert Young and James McGiffin, now a Family Court judge, after Holland recommended her.

“Judge Young said, ‘of course you never say no to Justice Holland, and so I thought, crap. I have to put this person in my show and she’s probably no good,’” Parker said.

That changed at a rehearsal when Young heard Parker sing, and he went on to write musicals with roles for her until her workload at Skadden became too heavy to allow for the time preparing for a full-length show takes. But those shows have led to her being invited to sing at a number of events for members of the bench and bar since, including at a gathering of every chief justice in the country and singing the national anthem around twice a year at naturalization ceremonies in the federal court.

“The bar here is small. The corporate bar is even smaller. I think a lot of people who aren’t from here are often-times in town for corporate cases, but



Photo credit: Ben Weidon

Jenness Parker, with Skadden.

they forget that it’s a legal community like any other,” Parker said. “My music and my singing has been a huge part of really integrating into the community and meeting people that I wouldn’t have met otherwise, either just working at Skadden and going home or just knowing people and judges within the corporate law community here.”

Parker, who grew up in Iowa, studied international business and vocal music performance before attending law school. She’s gone on to sing for OperaDelaware and at the Aspen Music Festival.

“I don’t think I would be satisfied in life having done just one or the other,” Parker said. “I’m so grateful people even still want to hear me sing, and I’m so grateful to do that, to perform and have that be a part of my life when so much of my life is practicing law.”