

Why Pop's Biggest Artists Go To This Power Law Firm

From the Michael Jackson estate to Beyoncé and Olivia Rodrigo, the partners at Ziffren Brittenham help music's superstars build their businesses and make smart deals.

BY FRANK DIGIACOMO



John Branca photographed on June 17, 2024 in Los Angeles. Grooming by Colleen Dominique using La Mer at Exclusive Artists. Christopher Patey

As detailed in a *Billboard* feature profile this week, entertainment attorney John Branca represents many of pop music's biggest legacy artists — most famously, the Michael Jackson estate, of which he is co-executor. But Branca is no lone wolf. His partners in the music department at Ziffren Brittenham — David Byrnes, David Lande, Mitch Tenzer and Kelly Vallon — make up, he says, “the most important contemporary music practice of any law firm in the world.” Certainly, along with Grubman Shire Meiselas & Sacks, and Taylor Swift attorney Donald S. Passman's firm, Gang Tyre Ramer, it is one of the premier law firms for the music industry.

Lande primarily represents Selena Gomez, Pharrell Williams, SZA, Olivia Rodrigo, Rosalía and Justin Timberlake (when asked if Timberlake called him after his recent DUI arrest, Lande answers, “No, I called him”), and Byrnes’ principal clients include Travis Scott, Kelly Clarkson, Blake Shelton and the estates of Kurt Cobain, Mac Miller, Tom Petty and Eazy-E — hardly even an exhaustive list of their or the firm’s clients. But the partners all work collaboratively to serve the firm’s clientele, which also includes industry executives.

For example, Byrnes and Lande represent Beyoncé as a team. Lande — who served as a tour manager and tour accountant for such artists as Elton John and Madonna during breaks from his undergraduate and law school years — says he was involved in every aspect of the 2023 *Renaissance* world tour, “from making the initial deal with Live Nation, reviewing all of the business plans, working with her and her team on what that business would look like as a tour, to ultimately its execution.” Byrnes, who worked on the MTV show *I.R.S. Records Presents: The Cutting Edge* and as an editor at the now-defunct music trade publication *Cashbox*, consulted with the firm’s film/TV department to negotiate deals for Beyoncé’s 2019 and 2020 films, *Homecoming* and *Black Is King*, respectively. Tenzer and Vallon work on many clients.

Given the depth and breadth of their music industry experience, legal and otherwise — Tenzer was director of business affairs at Sony Music, and Vallon’s résumé includes roles at CAA, AEG, several labels and *The Colbert Report*, for example — “We have really good market knowledge of what’s cutting edge and what’s achievable, and we all end up being business advisers to our clients — helping them think through deal structure and the kinds of deals they ought to do,” Lande says.

With more artists preferring independence over label deals and labels holding off on signing acts until they build a significant fan base, the deals before the firm’s music department have evolved significantly. “There’s a plethora of independent distributors and labels out there

offering development-type deals, and we're dealing with those every day," Byrnes says.

And Lande explains that artists are now more interested in building long-term value through equity. "Years ago, it was just, 'Pay me this amount of money and I will endorse your product or service,' " he says. Those deals still happen, but "more and more, our clients are entering joint ventures, funding things themselves and building businesses that capitalize on their celebrity in an organic way. They take more risk by doing that, and it takes a longer time to build value," he continues. "But the ultimate payoff is significant."