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From Broadway to law firm

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While Chicago attorney Neil B. Posner left his life as a professional musician who played on Broadway and in such famous venues as Carnegie Hall, he continues entertaining colleagues by plinking away at piano keys.

"He reminds me of Yo-Yo Ma," said Marvin N. Benn, Posner's fellow principal with Much, Shelist, Denenberg, Ament & Rubenstein P.C., referring to the renowned cello player.

"When (Posner) plays, he smiles," Benn, who plays the violin and guitar, said. "He's in touch with the music."

Posner, a classical pianist, said he now performs a couple of recitals annually, including some for charity. Among the selections he plays are Mozart piano sonatas, along with works by Franz Schubert and Robert A. Schumann.

He enjoys listening to the music of pianists such as Vladimir Horowitz and Arthur Rubinstein, along with Paul Lewis.

Posner, who is chair of Much, Shelist's policyholders' insurance coverage group, finds similarities between playing musical compositions and practicing law.

"A successful music performance is a persuasive one, likewise, a successful legal representation involves persuasion, involves rigorous analysis and telling your client's story," Posner said.

"I find a lot of parallels between the kind of abstract analysis required to interpret classical music and the kind of analysis that the law requires," he said.

The 61-year-old typically plays a Steinway Model B piano at his home for a few hours each week. When preparing for a performance, Posner will practice for an hour or two each day.

"I have a pretty big appetite for performing," Posner said. "I don't get to do as much of it as I would like."

He recalled that there was always a piano in the house when he grew up in New York City.

Posner's father, Herbert Posner, and grandfather, Maurice Posner were both pianists.

Herbert Posner started providing piano lessons to Neil when he was about 5. After



Chris Bernacchi

Neil B. Posner, a principal with Much, Shelist, Denenberg, Ament & Rubenstein P.C. who is a former professional musician, practices the piano at PianoForte Chicago Inc., in the Fine Arts Building at 410 S. Michigan Ave. See the video of Posner playing at www.chicagolawbulletin.com.

that, Neil received lessons from a professional teacher.

Posner took music courses while attending New York University.

After receiving his undergraduate degree, Posner worked for several years as an off-Broadway musical director. Posner later moved to Los Angeles to do studio recording work, including scores for television shows.

Posner said he toured with Andy Williams and Peggy Lee.

"The times I spent playing with famous artists were frequently interspersed with playing with people no one ever heard of and no one will," Posner said. "But those were all good experiences."

Posner played in the pit orchestra for "A Chorus Line" on Broadway. He also performed at the Lincoln Center and Carnegie Hall, both in New York.

"It's really hard to beat Carnegie Hall,"

Posner said. "When you walk out at Carnegie and look down at the floorboards and when you think about the truly great artists that have walked there before you, it takes your breath away."

Travel was part of the job that started to wear on him, Posner said.

"When you are a young musician being paid what seems like an exorbitant amount of money to put on a tuxedo and play at Caesars Palace, it seems very glamorous and exciting at first," Posner said. "But in the long run, after a while, I didn't like being on the road that much."

After performing for a number of years, Posner launched a small recording studio in Los Angeles called 52nd Street Studio. The studio specialized in post-production recording services such as editing, mastering and duplication that needed to be performed at a high level, he said.

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Because he lacked a business background, he took finance and accounting night classes at UCLA. He also studied business law there.

"I really loved it and caught the bug," Posner said about the business law class. "I reached the point where I felt I had done everything that I could do as a professional musician and in the music industry. I really wanted to try something new."

So, in 1993 at about age 40, Posner enrolled at Marquette University School of Law in Milwaukee. He received his law degree from Marquette in 1996.

Posner was admitted to the Illinois bar on Nov. 7, 1996, and was also admitted to practice law in Wisconsin.

Posner's first job out of law school was with Mayer, Brown LLP in Chicago. He later joined Sachnoff & Weaver before landing with Much, Shelist in late 2005.

Posner's "abilities as a lawyer are only exceeded by his ability as a concert pianist," said James R. Carroll, another Much,

Shelist principal.

"He's an exceptional lawyer in a very specialized area," Carroll said. "He knows more about insurance coverage law than anyone else (I've known) in my 30 years of practice."

John S. Vishneski III, a Reed, Smith LLP partner in Chicago, got to know Posner through their joint involvement in the Illinois Policyholders Counsel Group, an informal group of lawyers from different Chicago firms who represent policyholders. Vishneski and Posner had another common interest.

Vishneski is the principal clarinet player for the Chicago Bar Association Symphony Orchestra and leader of the Barristers Big Band.

Each March, Vishneski and Posner head to Tucson, Ariz., for the American Bar Association's Insurance Coverage Litigation Committee meeting.

"We get together at the hotel's piano and play for hours and hours," Vishneski said.

For the past two years at the meeting, the duo have played at a Friday night dinner. Among the selections played at the most recent meeting were Beatles songs, including "Here Comes the Sun," Vishneski said.

"He's a joy to play with," Vishneski said.

Vishneski introduced Posner to Sara Su Jones, a violinist who is concertmaster of the CBA's Symphony Orchestra

In early 2009, Posner and Jones began rehearsing together. Nearly a year ago, the two played together at a Symphony Orchestra event.

Jones, who has a law degree and operates an educational coaching business, said Posner enjoys collaborating musically.

Posner and Jones plan to play together again later this year or in 2011.

"His playing is characterized by thoughtful precision and sensitivity," Jones said. "He's really a very avid chamber musician. He has a very strong technique."