



The Smart Jazz Execs

Confucius wrote in *The Book of Rites*, “Music produces a kind of pleasure which human nature cannot do without.” If you’ve attended Orange County legal events, then you’ve likely had the pleasure of enjoying live jazz by the “Smart Jazz Execs.”

“Music has charms to soothe a savage breast,” wrote English playwright William Congreve. That’s particularly true of the Smart Jazz Execs and their positive impact upon the community, particularly stressed-out lawyers.

The Smart Jazz Execs have become a fixture at Orange County legal events. Their music has soothed nerves at Judges’ Night (the past five years in a row), law firm parties, the Lavender Bar Association soirées, the OCBA Charitable Fund’s annual gala, Veterans Legal Institute events, and many more. “Music is the universal language of mankind,” said poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Indeed, wherever the Smart Jazz Execs play, the atmosphere is more harmonious.

Alejandro Angulo, a partner at Rutan & Tucker and Chair of Rutan’s Diversity Committee, is a founder of the Smart Jazz Execs.

Years ago, Alejandro served on the Board of The Smart Foundation, a self-sustaining non-profit that raised revenue through a music instrument rental program, portions of which were (1) donated to supplant cuts made to public school music programs; and (2) used to underwrite a guitar program at the Boys & Girls Club of Santa Ana. The Smart Jazz Execs was formed to share The Smart Foundation’s mission.

After donating nearly \$200,000 to the community through its rental program, however, The Smart Foundation was forced into dissolution when the program was no longer sustainable. In 2013, California passed legislation, which affirmed a constitutional right to a free, public education—prohibiting fees for things like instruments and athletic uniforms. (Cal. Educ. Code §§ 49010-49013). The new law was catastrophic to The Smart Foundation, as it lost its self-sustaining instrument rental program that it used to support music programs. “Rather than providing their students with free instruments, many schools opted to terminate their programs altogether,” explains Angulo.

The lack of state funding for music programs “is a tragedy of which many are unaware,” says Angulo. Indeed, studies have shown that music education improves academic performance. Angulo notes: “Music education correlates with higher academic performance in science, math, and reading. It promotes confidence, emotional stability, empathy, and working well with others. It teaches discipline and listening to others. It also calms the daily stresses of students and allows them to connect with other people.”

Though The Smart Foundation is gone, the Smart Jazz Execs remain a presence in Orange County thanks to Angulo and the volunteer

musicians who perform with the band, all of whom are daytime professionals. The volunteers play every gig free of charge asking only that donations be made to an account they maintain at the Orange County Community Foundation entitled, “The Smart Foundation Fund.” The donations are used to fund local music programs for underprivileged children. Though The Smart Jazz Execs typically ask for a \$150 donation per musician, many have donated far more.

It’s no surprise that the volunteer musicians, including Angulo, credit their professional success to the music education they received as children. In addition to attorneys, the volunteer musicians include doctors, college professors, entrepreneurs, and C-level executives, among others. Angulo credits his ability to adjust rapidly in the courtroom to his music education, and jazz in particular. “When you’re playing jazz, you have to be in constant tune with your fellow musicians. You have to be aware of your surroundings, and how you are being perceived. You have to respect and support others, constantly adjust, and express yourself in a constructive manner. Children, of course, need these skills to develop the confidence required to take their education to the next level.”

Although they typically appear as a quartet, the Smart Jazz Execs have about fifteen volunteer musicians on their roster. In addition to Angulo, who plays upright bass, the legal professionals who have played with the band include: Geoffrey Glass, Orange County Superior Court Judge (guitar); David Harshman, Toshiba General Counsel (electric bass); David Libman, Law Office of David E. Libman (drums); and Brent Triff, Western Digital In-House Counsel (drums and sax).

The impact of the Smart Jazz Execs on underprivileged children in Orange County? They have raised nearly \$50,000 from playing their gigs. The members of the Smart Jazz Execs are true heroes who give of themselves, to touch other people’s lives. Angulo says, “In addition to raising money for a good cause, every gig is my way to protest the cutting of music programs and depriving children of a music education.”

If you are interested in improving the atmosphere of your events while making tax-deductible donations for a good cause, then contact Angulo at (714) 641-3401 or aangulo@rutan.com to book the band. You should also contact Angulo if you want to play with the band. “We’re always looking to add other day-time professionals who share our passion for making music for a cause close to our hearts,” notes Angulo.



L-R: Judge Geoffrey Glass, Jeff Randolph, Alejandro Angulo

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