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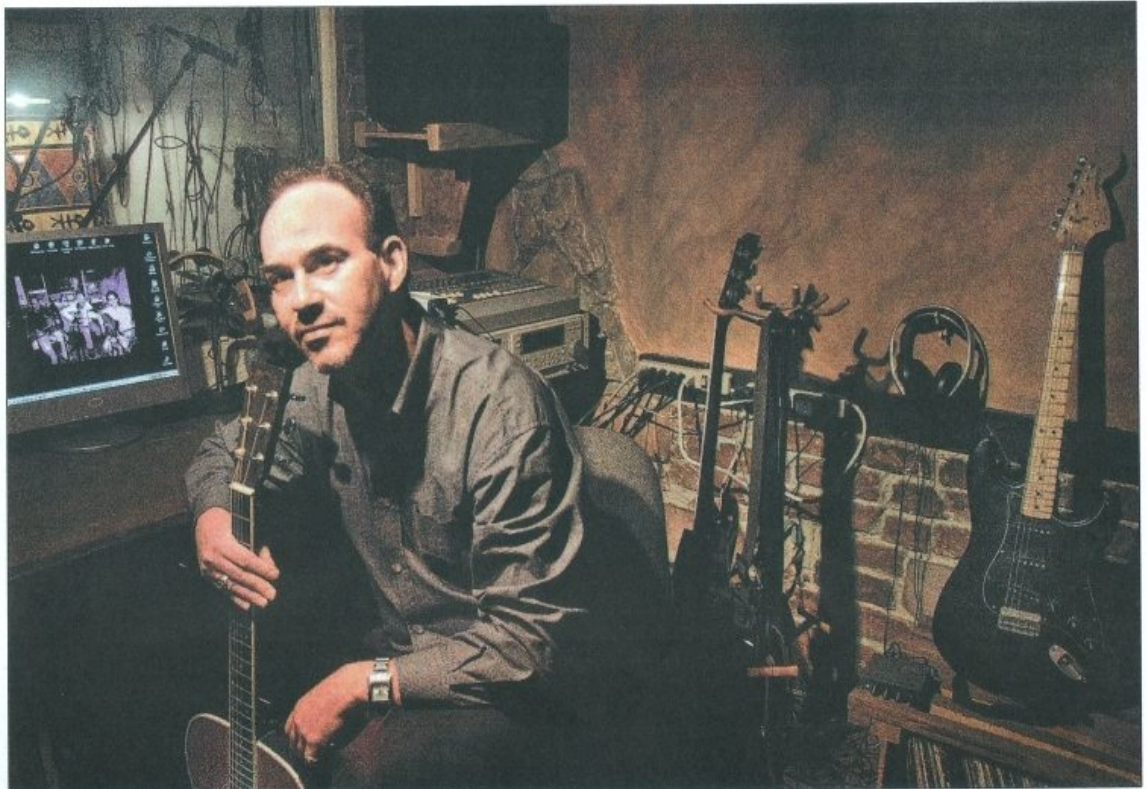
Storytelling in pleadings and song

By Bill Rogers
Toronto

Technology is a many splendored thing. And if you think it has revolutionized the practice of law, you should see what it's done for music. No one knows this better than Toronto lawyer and singer/songwriter Garry Wise. He laughs about the fact that when he started his legal career 20 years ago, the fax machine was a novelty. Now we've progressed to Blackberries and broadband. In music technology, computers have replaced tape and the cost of producing fabulous-sounding recordings has fallen dramatically. As Wise explains with a beaming smile, firing up the computers in his home studio, "you can do fairly professional-quality home recording now for practically no budget. It's new world."

Wise clicks his mouse and boots up a rough version of a new song. It sounds great — think Bruce Springsteen meets Crosby, Stills & Nash. He says that he and former high school band mates Wayne Kirsh and Michael Lindberg are in the process of

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Garry Wise in his home studio. Photo by Paul Lawrence

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I've got the music in me

MUSIC

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working on harmony vocals. "We're having a great time doing it," he says. "Every time I get together with those guys, it's the best day of my life."

He adds that he intends to "keep going until we've got something finished, whether it's for our own use, or posterity, or beyond that. I'll guess we'll see what we have." This particular song is not posted on his website yet — www.wiselaw.net/unsung-music.html — but there are a bevy of other musical gems there revealing the impressive depth of Wise's talent.

A litigator who works mostly in the fields of family, employment and personal injury, Wise sees some similarities between

being a songsmith and an advocate. "If you look at crafting a song and crafting a pleading, the parallels are obvious," he says. "I'm basically telling stories. Litigation comes down to being able to tell the client's story in a compelling way."

He adds that the songs he writes are usually about real people and real experiences, just like his practice area, which he fondly terms "real-people law." "There's one incredible unspoken blessing about our careers," he says. "It's the ability to really speak in an intimate, confidential way with people and find out what they really think, what they really believe, and what really happened. In my area, clients typically are going through shake-ups. And as a lawyer I've been able to learn a lot about how

people really are in that kind of situation in their lives. I don't know, maybe that sensitivity informs my music and my writing as much as my music and writing informs my lawyering."

While troubadours and litigators share much in common, one thing they do not necessarily share is ethics, says Wise. "Being in the music world in a semi-professional way has really taught me to appreciate the legal profession," he laughs.

"Sure, lawyers get mad at each other once in a while, and we point fingers, but you know what? We've got a rule book. We have a strong professional sense of where right is. And I certainly haven't encountered that in the music world."

Still, he remains passionate about his music, and proud of

what he has accomplished. As a high school student at Forest Hill Collegiate, he played in a folk band with notable pop singer/songwriter Amy Sky. They created "Hillstock," an outdoor music venue at the school. Some 30 years later, Hillstock remains a tradition there every June. Wise also looks back fondly at a series of summer concerts he played with Canadian music legend Ronnie Hawkins.

But it's not all about past achievements — the musical future looks bright as well. "The spark never goes away," says Wise, noting that he's thinking of taking to the stage and performing once again after his recording project is completed. His ideal? "I strive for songs that tell a story, that are well sung. It doesn't have to be pretty. I don't think anybody who's listened to my singing has ever said it's pretty. But it's got to be expres-

sive. There's got to be some emotion in it, and it's got to be evocative in some way."

The computer technology he uses to record at home is called "Pro-Tools," and he points out that you can buy the entry-level version for a mere \$1,000. This has made it possible for Wise to have his own studio and therefore the luxury of time. "I can take my own time," he says. "I can leave it and come back to it when I want to. I can wait until the feel is 100 per cent there."

Although he happily describes his budding three-lawyer firm, the Wise Law Office, as "incredibly busy," he still finds time to keep the music flame alive. And he's quite sure he's not alone. "Very few lawyers don't have other passions in their lives," he says.

"If you talk to most lawyers, you'll find they're up to something other than practising law."