

“There’s a mystique about being an entertainment attorney,” says Symeon Davis ’97, a partner with Hobson Dungog Bernardino + Davis LLP in Los Angeles.

“But most entertainment attorneys will tell you we’re doing many of the same things the real estate attorney is doing: We’re at our desks, negotiating on the phone, drafting agreements and advocating on behalf of clients who want to do deals.”

A former musician himself (trumpet), Symeon, who earned his AB at Princeton, managed a singer-songwriter before attending IIT Chicago-Kent and planned to become an entertainment attorney

all along. “It was a way to combine my analytical skills with my artistic side so I could stay in touch with both.”

But he quickly discovered that “it’s tough to be a working enter-

tainment attorney in Chicago if that’s all you do,” he says. “The deals typically bounce out to the East and West coasts.”

He wanted to stay in Chicago, and he did a good number of music and television deals but increasingly worked on commercial real estate deals and found they were surprisingly similar.

“You’re still negotiating over property,” he says. “One is real and one is intellectual. A lot of my skills were transferrable.”

But the real joy for him is “representing the ‘creatives’ in this business—artists, producers, on-air talent and directors in music, film and television against studios, networks and large companies.”

He currently represents a stable of singers, songwriters, actors and producers. “I’m excited about my clients,” he says. “They’re pretty spectacular and have a real chance of going all the way.”

Since moving to Los Angeles with his wife in 2007, his practice has flipped from 60 percent real estate and 40 percent entertainment to 85 percent entertainment and 15 percent real estate.

Symeon recently negotiated a number of music licensing deals for his client Robin, who has had three consecutive Billboard-charting dance hits. He also handles many of the merchandising and licensing deals for his firm’s client Manny “Pac Man” Pacquiao, a 10-time world champion boxer and congressman in the Philippines.

He also just secured a management deal for Isaiah Pittman V (Ip5), a young singer/dancer/actor from the Chicago area with a “mega-manager” who represents the likes of Justin Timberlake, the Jonas Brothers and Ciara, and who managed Britney Spears, Janet Jackson, *NSYNC and other big acts.

“He now has a really great management agreement with a world-class manager,” Symeon says. “The most exciting thing for me is representing a client who thinks he doesn’t have much bargaining power against Viacom, Sony, Universal or another big company and then negotiating a deal with them that really pushes the needle in my client’s favor.”

To be an effective negotiator, he says, you have to know the law and have command of your facts and issues, but you also need to focus on style. “Anyone who is not high on style points is at a disadvantage in the entertainment business,” he says.

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When he was at Chicago-Kent, all indications were that he would end up as a litigator, but he became more and more curious about the transactional side. “I wanted to be in a win-win situation,” he says, “instead of a zero-sum situation where there’s a winner and a loser.”

Chicago-Kent’s “rigorous legal writing program” prepared him well for the “tough work of both technical writing for contracts and writing that’s persuasive and effective at winning your negotiation points.”

That has come in handy over the last year as he has been representing a film production company in its efforts to acquire the rights to the last film shot by an iconic world-renowned director who died before it was finished. The film has been sitting in a vault for over 30 years,

and though many companies have tried, no one has been able to secure the rights to finish it.

“The process of negotiating with rights-holders all over the world has been very involved,” he says. “From a legal perspective, it’s been fascinating, challenging and rewarding.”

His advice to young lawyers is the same advice he received from a mentor while attending Chicago-Kent: “Pick a practice area that you’re passionate about, because being a lawyer is difficult. Being a great lawyer requires even more effort, so you’d better be in a practice area that you love.”