

# The Argus

## Liberace's libel victory

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**Fifty years ago this month, one of the most sensational libel trials of the century took place in the High Court.**

The plaintiff was Liberace, the American pianist, who was one of the best known entertainers in the world.

The defendants were the Daily Mirror, then the top-selling paper in Britain, and its famous columnist Cassandra, whose real name was William Connor.

Liberace took exception to an article Cassandra had written three years earlier which certainly pulled no punches.

Describing Liberace as the biggest sentimental vomit of all time, Cassandra added: “He is the summit of sex – the pinnacle of Masculine, Feminize and Neuter, Everything that He, She and It can ever want.”

And in the most quoted sentence of all, he called the pianist a “deadly, winking, sniggering, snuggling, chromium-plated, scent impregnated, luminous, quivering, giggling, fruit-flavoured ice-covered heap of mother love.”

Liberace, who had a fanatical female following, felt the article indicated he was a homosexual, which half a century ago was illegal in Britain. Cassandra and the Mirror admitted the piece was defamatory but claimed it was fair comment.

Now a book about this case called *Crying All The Way To The Bank* has been written by Brighton-based Revel Barker.

Barker, himself an old Fleet Street hand, describes how the sharp-suited solicitor David Jacobs from Hove played a pivotal role in proceedings.

Jacobs, who had a two-tone pink Bentley, three chauffeurs and a table permanently booked at the Caprice, was gay. He was also shrewd and recommended Liberace should hire Gilbert Beyfus, the top libel lawyer of the time.

Liberace was horrified when he clapped eyes on Beyfus, who was 73 and suffering from terminal cancer. With his old-fashioned mannerisms and clothes, he looked like a throwback to the Edwardian age.

On spotting the much younger Gerald Gardiner, who appeared for the defendants, Liberace said: “That’s the lawyer we should have got.”

But Beyfus scored his penultimate great victory in the court. He managed to present Liberace as a consummate professional who was also sincere and truthful.

He successfully persuaded Connor to be drawn up some blind alleys of argument which made him appear pompous.

Jacobs performed one last service for Liberace after the jury had found in his favour and the judge had awarded damages of £8,000 plus costs, when one plainly sympathetic woman juror arrived at Liberace's hotel and asked for his autograph. Jacobs grabbed the pianist's arm and said "Quick, run for it. If she speaks to us it could mean a new trial."

Liberace became the world's best paid entertainer in the 1960s and 1970s before his death in 1987, but the defendants did not do too badly either.

Cassandra continued to write his coruscating column until his death in 1967. He was also knighted. The Mirror's circulation continued to rise.

But the same could not be said of Jacobs. Professionally, he reigned supreme and was known as solicitor to the stars. His clients included Lord Olivier, Judy Garland, Marlene Dietrich, Zsa Zsa Gabor, Brian Epstein and the Beatles.

But privately he was not a happy man and he hanged himself in the garage of his luxury home in Hove in 1969 while being investigated by police regarding an incident in Hampstead Heath. He was only 56.

<https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/4452067.liberaces-libel-victory/>