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EXEC PROFILE: SIDNEY KIBODEAUX WHITE

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COO

AFM & SAG-AFTRA Intellectual Property Rights Distribution Fund

Years with Company: 3+

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Participants: 30,000+

BACKGROUND

The AFM & SAG-AFTRA Intellectual Property Rights Distribution Fund is a non-profit, but that doesn't mean it's a charity. Its purpose is to distribute royalties that non-featured musicians and vocalists earn on sound recordings to deserved recipients. Sidney White took over as COO of the Fund three years ago, expanding on her decades of experience at SAG-AFTRA.

Starting Out

I was working at a law office Downtown and hated it. A friend of mine working at a placement agency said, "Can I place you somewhere?" And I said, "Anywhere. Please." He said he had this place, AFTRA. I said, "Is that another law firm? Let me interview and see if I like it." The staff and the atmosphere were much more relaxed than the law office. They said, "Can you start today?" So I started working there and loved it.

I was at SAG-AFTRA for 32 years. When Stefanie Taub went over to the Fund, she said, "I want you to be the COO." For about 8 months, I did part-time work for the Fund and SAG-AFTRA until they found a replacement.

Giving Money Away Ain't Easy

I thought, how hard could it be to give people money? I'll be like Oprah. "You get a check, and you get a check!" Well, it's not easy. I've gotten hung up on a couple of times. People think it's a scam. Even managers that know the music business don't really believe that it's true so it always takes some convincing. I've had to use my contacts from my years at SAG-AFTRA. "Hey, remember me from SAG-AFTRA? I'm at this Fund that pays performance royalties to background performers."

No Union Necessary

A lot of performers will say, "I'm not union, or that song wasn't union, why are you calling? I didn't pay my dues. Can I pay it now?" I tell them we are not the union and we pay whether a person is a union member or not and sometimes they will still say, "No, I'm not interested." That happens a lot more than it should.

The Matching Game

We want to automate matching titles by name better. Right now, a lot of it's manual. We match as much as we can, but if someone titles a song "Don't Rock the Boat," and one version comes with an apostrophe and one without, our system may not always pick that up. So we're upgrading our systems to automate things better and pick up nuances that we may be missing.

They Find You

With most other PRO's, you have to join as a member. And if you don't join, you don't get paid. I love that we are a non-profit and tasked with trying our best to find the performers and get them paid. We use many resources to help find information regarding a musician. We'll call cousins and neighbors trying to find people. Sometimes it's easy and sometimes it's not.

The Right Info

We're looking for any verifiable documentation. Some people have brought us check stubs from payroll companies. The label's business affairs department sends us letters. We get session reports from the unions, which is essential because the more union reports we can get, the more time there is to work non-union tracks.

The most challenging genre is rap because they rarely list credits. They tend to list the featured performers or producers only. So it hasn't been easy reaching out to that community and convincing them that you must keep proof or get credit on these titles so you can get paid.

We've even had videos of performers in recording sessions. We'll get people saying, "Everybody knows that's me." We can't put that on paper. We need some verifiable documentation. Some people say, "Why don't you just get the information from the record labels?" That would be great; however, most of the time they won't have non-featured information. Back in the day, they didn't know they had to keep that kind of information. It's even more challenging since many performances have shifted to remote recording, allowing musicians to record separately. It's normal for the drummer to record in Los Angeles in the morning, bass player in NY in the afternoon, and keyboards in Atlanta that night for the same song and producer.

Life of a Researcher

We have a great team! Many of our researchers are musicians. That helps because they know other musicians. Our research department consists of about 11 people. In the future, we may be looking to expand that department. You don't have to be a musician, but we do want some love and appreciation of music. They often focus on a particular genre, whether Spanish, Rap, Country, or Symphonic, because they have the expertise or special interest in that area.

It can be a tedious job. Researching one track could take 5 minutes or maybe an hour. So you have to really like that type of work. You do get together and collaborate now and then, but most of the time, you're working alone. ↑

Big Heir

When a performer dies, we're looking for the beneficiary of that performer. We've had Miles Davis' name on the list for quite some time because he has performed as a session performer on someone else's album/project. And people will ask, "Why is he on your list? Don't you know how to reach his estate?" While we have contact information and send paperwork to his people, we still have to wait to get the completed paperwork back. If not, he will stay on our list as long as there is money for him that remains unpaid.

On another note, we're very excited when we find the beneficiary of a performer we have been searching for. They provide the paperwork and we give them an unexpected five-figure check.

Persistence

It's tough convincing participants to give us documentation. They say, "Oh, yeah. I'll send it to you." And we won't even get the paperwork back. They won't do it, so they end up on our Unclaimed List. For some, they think we are a scam. We tell them that we may have money for them and all they have to do is send back paperwork verifying their identity. They will say, "Well, so what do I have to do to get this money?" We say, "just complete the form." They say, "Well, I don't know. I'm going to think about it." They often don't reach back out to us and our staff will continue to reach out to them. We are really persistent. I say if you found someone and they haven't given us documentation, stay on them. Bug them, because it's our job to get them their money.

ABC: Always Be Checking

When someone is registered with us and receiving checks, they think we have all of their song credits. That may not always be the case. Look at our list of covered titles and make sure you're getting paid for every track you performed on. For example, we may have a Mark Jones credited on three titles, but he played on six titles. Make sure you look at your statements and check out our Covered Titles List because you could be missing from other titles if we did not find credit for you. As a practice, you should check our website's Covered Title List once a year as new titles are updated.