

The Romantics settle lawsuit over song royalties with former band member

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Wally Palmar, lead singer of The Romantics, belts out an old classic during the Charity Preview at the 2010 North American International Auto Show at Cobo Center.

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Pontiac After nearly six hours of mediation Tuesday, the Detroit-based rock band The Romantics reached an agreement with a former bandmate, averting an Oakland County Circuit Court trial scheduled to begin this week that would have opened up tax and business records, personal bankruptcy and, perhaps, the seamier side of the recording industry.

The Romantics, who performed in Detroit this summer, have recorded five albums and had a string of international hits in the 1980s fans still dance to today, including What I Like About You and Talking In Your Sleep.

George Coz Canler, a former lead guitarist with the band from 1980 to 2011, sued two years ago, claiming he was cheated out of royalties from recordings that went to Master Beat, an entity created by the band to share profits. Band members countered saying Canler, who lives in Florida, was not entitled to monies from songs he neither wrote nor performed on, including What I Like About You, recorded in 1979.

In an agreement put Tuesday before Judge Wendy Potts, in exchange for Canler relinquishing a 25 percent share in Master Beat, he will be paid \$50,000 within 14 days and \$20,000 annually for the next four years for a total of \$130,000. He also will receive 15 percent of all future royalties due for songs he either wrote or performed.

I have learned a lot about the recording industry today, said Potts, who met with both sides separately throughout the day. I think your music was great, and it continues to be great.

Earlier in the day, Potts encouraged lawyers and their clients to resolve the lawsuit before they lost control in a lengthy and potentially costly jury trial. After accepting the agreement, the judge was given a signed CD from band members.

Attorney Sharon Almonrode represents two current band members, Walter Palamarchuk, a co-founder, guitarist, songwriter and vocalist who lives in Birmingham and Michael Skill, vocalist, guitarist and songwriter who lives in Happy Valley, Ore. She said the agreement should not be misinterpreted by anyone.

This is in no way an admission of any liability, Almonrode said. My clients have always compensated

(Canler) appropriately. This agreement was to avoid a trial, although we were well prepared to argue our position.

According to court documents, the bands first three albums lost money. And decades after the big hits, others continued to profit off the groups most popular recordings, yet little of the money has filtered back to the artists.

Court records show The Romantics won a \$1 million settlement award in 1995 against two former managers, Arnie Tencer and Joel Zuckerman, for withholding royalties for more than 1 million records sold between 1980 through 1993. That lawsuit found that before 1993, profits came solely from band members personal appearances, while their managers made deals for commercials without their approval. Except for getting the return of song copyrights, the band was never able to collect the award because those associates subsequently declared bankruptcy.

Canler claimed in his 2011 lawsuit that contrary to a signed agreement to share in group profits, hes been cheated out of hundreds of thousands of dollars in music royalties. Those close to the band estimate the groups royalties could run into several million dollars because besides collections, some songs have shown up in video games, TV commercials and at least four films.

There is still a pending lawsuit from a third ex-manager, Joel Martin of Huntington Woods, who was called in to straighten out the bands fiscal problems after the bands lawsuit against Tencer and Zuckerman. Martin, who was removed as manager in August 2005, claims he, too, is owed money. Martin has produced various recording artists, including Eminem.