

Interviewing the interviewer: Stephen Lawrence of *The Wigs*

By Douglas McDonald-Norman

Since its debut in September 2019, popular legal podcast The Wigs has been a forum for legal commentary and a voice for law reform in New South Wales. Douglas McDonald-Norman spoke to one of the founders of The Wigs, Stephen Lawrence, for Bar News.

The host and stars of *The Wigs*. Left to right: Felicity Graham, Jim Minns, Stephen Lawrence, Emmanuel Kerkyasharian.

Douglas McDonald-Norman (DM): Steve, tell us a bit about yourself. How long have you been at the Bar and in what areas do you practise?

Stephen Lawrence (SL): I've been a lawyer since the year 2000. I started my practice in the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department and then the ACT Director of Public Prosecutions. I've worked overseas in the Solomon Islands, Afghanistan and the Palestinian Territories. After that overseas work, I had a stint as a political adviser, worked for the Aboriginal Legal Service for five years, and then started at the private bar.

I've been at the Bar now for almost six years. I practise predominantly in criminal and administrative law. I reside in Dubbo, where I also have the privilege of being the local mayor.

DM: Who are the team behind *The Wigs*?

SL: It's me, Felicity Graham, and Emmanuel Kerkyasharian, who are also barristers. Our host and producer is Jim Minns, who is a videographer.

DM: How and why did you decide to set up *The Wigs*?

SL: The shared vision of the three barristers involved in *The Wigs*, and Jim also shares this vision, is to provide an entertaining and insightful podcast of interest to lawyers and non-lawyers, which also plays a role in law reform and advocacy.

We see the podcast not just as an opportunity to inform and entertain, but to take forward certain perspectives and critiques about the law, to popularise them, and through that to change the law in a positive way.

DM: Who do you see as your audience? Are you predominantly trying to reach an audience of lawyers, or are you aiming to reach a broader non-legal public?

SL: We have a real commitment to the idea of making complex legal ideas accessible to the general public. We love the fact that we have a non-legal audience. But we also unashamedly want to connect to lawyers, to parliamentarians, to the people that shape and inform public discussion on important legal issues.

DM: What do you see as *The Wigs*' main topic and focus?

SL: We do a lot of criminal law matters; criminal law and its nexus and intersection with human rights is a recurring theme in our podcasts. But we haven't shied away from various aspects of the civil law, particularly as it pertains to access to justice.

DM: How much work goes into each episode? In particular, how much work is required behind the scenes to prepare and produce each episode?

SL: Jim carries the burden of most of the work, because there's a lot of work in the production, recording and editing of the show.



Each of us undertakes to prepare one topic for each episode. That might range from a couple of hours to a day or more in terms of preparation. But we're lucky, because our podcast obviously complements our working life and vice-versa, so often we're pretty well informed on the topics.

DM: Do you have a favourite episode among those that you've produced so far?



SL: Yes, I definitely do – it’s the episode where we talked about our involvement in the Black Lives Matter litigation in 2020.

We were privileged, all three of us, to be involved as the barristers in *Raul Bassi v Commissioner of Police*, which ultimately reached the Court of Appeal and successfully legalised a mass protest about 10 minutes before it started. It was then a further privilege to have a platform for the three of us to talk about how

that case came together and the issues in that case, and to pay tribute to various people involved in that case and in that protest activity.

So that’s definitely my favourite episode. Even though I did reveal the colour of my pyjamas in that episode.

Plus, it was obviously a favourite with our audience – that episode shot us up to first place in the podcast charts for the whole country!

DM: *What are your future goals and ambitions for the podcast?*

SL: We want to continue to build the podcast. I think we’re pretty happy with the quality and the content, although we do have some adventurous ideas for different formats and so forth. I think our primary aim is to continue to build our audience and to reach realistic maximum capacity for a podcast of this nature. **BN**