

INDUCTION SPEECH FOR PEGI CECCONI - WALT GREALIS JUNO AWARD RECIPIENT

By Meg Symczyk

The prestigious Walt Grealis Special Achievement Award is given to an individual to recognize their contributions and impact on the Canadian music industry. It is a significant honour that is given to only the select few who have distinguished themselves amongst even the rarified company they keep.

In the 36 years that this award has been given out, this year's award is only the third time it is being bestowed upon a woman; the mark of a true trailblazer. I have every confidence that this will become less remarkable with each passing year because of women like this year's award recipient who light the way.

I'm so very proud to say that this year's recipient - whose 50-year career awes and inspires me every day - is also my friend. She is a richly-deserving recipient of this honour. She is the one and only PEGI CECCONI!

If you know Pegi, then you can appreciate that I really can't share most of her character-revealing stories this evening; but for the millennials listening, I would definitely like to share what makes her an OG. Or, as she has lovingly been referred to by her friends and colleagues alike, the *Queen of F**king Everything*.

If there was an award for the loudest, most distinctive and contagious laugh – Pegi would have been first to receive it. It would be named for her.

If there was an award for the most passionate, say exactly what you mean, and with emphasis – Pegi would have been the first to receive it. And the second. And the third.

And if there was an award for favourite survivor, Pegi would have won that too. #fuckcancer

Put simply, Pegi Cecconi is an exceptional human being.

Pegi has already won 2 Junos. She has won the Brian Chater Pioneer award from the Music Managers Forum, and has somehow received every colour of the Queen of England Solar Waving Dolls have ever produced. So, this Walt Grealis Award really completes her impressive collection.

I have been very lucky to have learned first-hand while working alongside Pegi during the second half of her career. We have all heard the folklore stories from the first half. I wish I had been there too.

Pegi got her start booking bands at 19 years old in South Porcupine in 1970; and after being an agent for a short time joined Ray Danniels at one of the longest standing management, label and publishing indies - SRO/ANTHEM - working with Rush, Ian Thomas, and Gowan among many others.

Pegi has spent 50 years in an industry that to this day remains male dominated. To have her longevity and her success shows that she has been doing it right for a very long time.

Lawyers in the business, including her good pal Cindy Zap agree that there is no one they'd rather have yell at them.

Agents and promoters in the business know she is a smart business woman, but also the first person they want to go to the bar with. Pegi works hard. She plays just as hard(er).

Longtime colleagues refer to her with adjectives like: LOUD, POWER BALL OF ENERGY, FUNNY, FIERCE MAMA BEAR, HEART OF GOLD.

She has no ego, but she has standards. She wants to get the job done right, but doesn't crave the limelight. When it comes to photos – there are only a handful. She truly was the maven behind the scenes.

Pegi also built her reputation on how she made people FEEL.

She has a reputation for knowing her stuff. She is fierce – fighting for the artists to get their fair share. She was *also* the first person everyone wanted to share a meal or to raise a glass with. And if she *really* liked you – she would even cook for you. Only you better not be a vegetarian because, oh, does Pegi like her meat. (editors note: Anyone that has ever overheard Pegi at a meal describing her food could easily have to label it adults-only content).

Pegi, you have helped so many in so many ways – by showing up, by giving REAL advice rather than platitudes, and by making us laugh so, so many times. I wish I could share all the Peg-isms, but I will save those for the after party, and the inevitable memoir I'm writing. Oh, didn't I tell you?

You may not have been bestowed a CEO title – but that has never mattered because everyone knows you are the boss. Your experience and contributions are richer and more valuable than any title could be in so many ways, and we collectively have reaped the rewards of it. Your achievements stand the test of time and you have built relationships that have stood for decades.

What you said and fought for at the board room tables throughout your career has made a difference. You were heard. And the artists and industry are better off for it.

You have most certainly made an impact, and will one day, long from now, leave amazing black, Italian leather shoes to fill.

Pegi Cecconi, it gives me great pleasure to present you with this most deserved Walt Grealis award.

ACCEPTANCE SPEECH FOR WALT GREALIS AWARD

By Pegi Cecconi

THANK YOU for this honour.

I have been to every JUNO Awards since 1978. Yes, that is 42 years of watching this show evolve. I should get an award for *that*. I thought I was too young to receive *this*, although it's very encouraging. So, thank you, CARAS.

I came from a large family in Northern Ontario – called SOUTH PORCUPINE. It was so small that I was born January 10 and I was the New Year's baby. In our family on your 18th birthday, mom would buy us luggage - all of us - we never stayed.

So, I made my way to Toronto and from those early days I don't remember much distinctly. I mean, it was the 70s.

Having made it this long in the music industry, you can appreciate that I have been the honorary member of "the Original Boys' Network" and I would like to credit some key veterans who helped me in the beginning.

First, I would like to thank Larry Green who didn't hire me at Warner.

Music publisher Brian Chater – always fun, typical Englishman, who can hold his beer. From Brian I learned you can scream at someone over a deal but then have a beer with him. He would fight all day and party all night.

Attic label founder Al Mair -- he taught me how to do Midem conference right.

True North Records founder and manager of Bruce Cockburn, Bernie Finkelstein – turncoat #3.

Fellow Walt Grealis award winner Frank Davies – who taught me you couldn't overpay royalties and expect to get the overage back.

Duff Roman, another Walt Grealis recipient and a fellow longtime FACTOR board member -- Duff calmly explained to me I couldn't just say "F**K IT" whenever I didn't agree....

Ross Reynolds and Randy Lennox at Universal Music – for putting up with me.

Bob Farmer - he taught me about law and never spoke down to me.

Deane Cameron – who was pure love and all about the music. Love and miss you Deane.

Jon Box – for explaining all about digital, slowly, when I asked "how f**k does this work? I don't know where the artist makes money". Miss you Jonny Box.

They all took me under their wing but also pushed me in other ways.

You see, when I was coming up there was no “Women in Music”, and in fact that suited me just fine... because I wanted to be where the deals were being made – and at that time, that wasn’t at an event all full of women. And that still hasn’t changed much, unfortunately.

You see, Feminists believe in equality. I don’t.

Women are better.

But don’t take my word for it, just look at the output of the top label – Atlantic in the US - run by a woman who has nurtured 50% female staff and weaved them into the fabric of the company.

I know they say women can have it all but, man, do we have to work harder for it.

There have been a few staunch supporters that I want to thank because we really did support each other -- at that time when women really didn’t do that because they thought they were fighting over one spot collectively.

Thank you to Rhonda Ross, Heather Ostertag, and fellow Walt Grealis winner, Denise Donlon.

But I do want to thank Ray Danniels for giving me enough rope to prove myself. Ray is the brother I wanted. And smartly, he never came into the office when I was there.

And over the years I’ve had the formidable opportunity to work with people that became part of our larger SRO/Rush family – Ray, Sheila Posner, Mike & Patrick McLoughlin, Neil Warnock, Bob Farmer, Val Azzoli, the late Steve Hoffman and Shelley Nott, Cynthia Barry, Andy Curran, David Steinberg, my QOFE-in-training Meg Symsyk, and last but certainly not least, Geddy, Alex, and Neil.

To my family– my sister Elaine “Beatle” Cecconi and my daughters Kate & Toni.

And, finally, to Judge Judy – who taught me so much but also made me LAUGH.

Because if you can’t have a good laugh while getting work done, what’s the point?