

Miley Cyrus and Susan Boyle

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International arbitration is an odd world of the elite and pampered celebrities and the quiet and unassuming masses. On the one hand there is the glamorous world of investment arbitration. She may be the new kid on the block, but she gets all the attention from the paparazzi. On the other hand, there is the rather dull, unpretentious world of international commercial arbitration. Occasionally, someone in the masses will merit some press, but typically it is because she has strayed so far from the norm that she has become defective or mentally challenged. The public image of international arbitration is a perverse mix of celebrity teen idols and dysfunctional grown-ups. It's a world of Miley Cyrus and the lunatic fringe.

Meanwhile quietly in a corner of the world, away from the flood lights and celebrity trade rags, there is Susan Boyle singing away in the local choir of a village parish. No one knows she exists, except for the few who have the good fortune to see her ply her craft. For those few, it is a complete privilege to watch her in action.

You wouldn't know it for looking, but there is a whole world of mature, sophisticated, and responsible international commercial arbitration. It's what most of us do. It's so effective and marvelous that it has become routine. It's not glamorous, but it keeps the system of international business running.

One senses that much of this world of international commercial arbitration longs to be free from the constraints of confidentiality and quiet obscurity. If only one could bring it out from the shadows, we could discover its beauty, depth, and richness. It longs to be the next Elaine Paige, but has never been given a chance.

Here's hoping it will change.

Roger Alford