

MVP: O'Melveny & Myers' Molly Lens

By Ryan Boysen

Law360 (November 26, 2019, 4:25 PM EST) -- O'Melveny & Myers LLP's Molly Lens spent the past year shutting down a major copyright infringement suit over the hit TV show "Empire," chopping \$128 million off of an arbitration award tied to "Bones," and deftly parrying cross-claims asserted by Netflix in a poaching lawsuit brought by Fox, making her one of Law360's 2019 Media & Entertainment MVPs.

HER BIGGEST ACCOMPLISHMENT THIS YEAR:

Lens has had a big year, especially when it comes to her continued representation of 21st Century Fox.

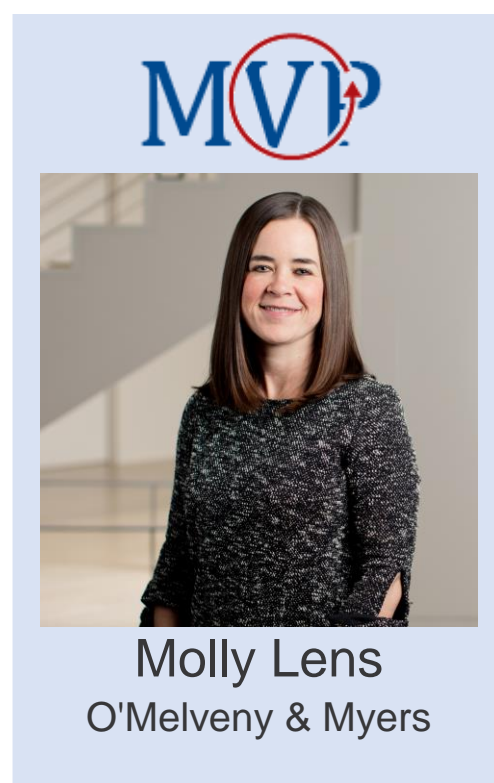
During the spring she successfully chopped \$128 million off of a \$179 million arbitration award against Fox, after key players behind the show "Bones" accused the studio of withholding profits tied to the hit crime drama. That result raised eyebrows throughout the media and legal industry, because it's generally next to impossible to overturn arbitration awards.

Over the summer she followed up by snuffing out a copyright infringement suit brought by a disgruntled screenwriter who claimed the studio ripped him off to create its hit music industry drama "Empire."

Just a few days before that ruling, Lens secured another major victory in California state court, when Judge Marc D. Gross indicated he's likely to toss cross-claims by Netflix accusing Fox of using employment contracts that illegally restrict employee mobility and business competition, as Fox tried to hold the rival movie studio and streaming giant accountable for allegedly poaching two of its executives.

And that's not to mention the quiet settlement that followed the near-total victory Lens secured for a Fox actor accused of gender discrimination by a customer, and the \$150 million sale of a batch of Sunset Strip billboards to Netflix that Lens helped broker.

Given all that, Lens said she's just happy to be delivering for her clients on all fronts.



"The nature of this practice is that the clients come to you when they've got these really big business issues that are keeping them up at night," Lens said. "So it's a very large degree of responsibility you take on. It sounds cliché, but in order to be successful you need to make sure that you internalize that and your clients' issues keep you up at night, too."

"So being able to consistently work on and have success in those types of high-profile matters across a wide variety of areas like copyright, employment, arbitration, you name it, that's really been amazing," she added.

HER PROUDEST MOMENT THIS YEAR:

Setting aside what Lens diplomatically refers to the "acceptance of legal arguments" she's racked up over the past year, she said what's really made her proud is the growth in her relationships with clients that those wins have led to.

"You can talk about the victories in the courtroom, and obviously that's very important to me, but what really defined this past year for me was growing closer to my clients," Lens said. "As you develop your practice it's almost like you become less of just a lawyer, and act more as truly a counselor and adviser to companies and individuals that you've become very close to."

Lens said a lot of that doesn't show up on the docket, because as she becomes closer with her clients she handles a lot of matters that are settled or otherwise dispensed of before they ever see the inside of a courtroom, a result she said can be just as satisfying as good old fashioned victory that comes out of oral argument or motion practice.

"I'm just incredibly proud of the trust my clients have placed in me over this past year. Many of them have approached me to work on new matters even though they know I'm already very busy, usually with their cases," Lens said with a laugh. "So I view that as a very tangible sign that my clients view me as someone they know, and someone they can trust to help them solve their trickiest and most important legal problems."

WHY SHE'S A MEDIA & ENTERTAINMENT ATTORNEY:

Lens hasn't always worked in Hollywood. In fact, she's only lived in California for eight years. Before her current career took off, Lens was in New York at Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton LLP, doing defense work for Wall Street banks and other financial institutions.

Lens said she was drawn to that work because, in New York, Wall Street is king.

"I started my career in New York, and obviously a big part of the city is focused around the financial sector," Lens said. "So it was very exciting to be a part of that. I love immersing myself in legal issues that are central to the community I'm a part of."

When Lens' husband got offered a teaching job at UCLA, though, the two made the decision to move to Los Angeles and she took a new job at O'Melveny. Just like she did in New York, Lens took one look at her new surroundings and decided she wanted to be a part of the industry that dominated her new hometown.

"I tried to focus my career around that," Lens said. "Using the platform that O'Melveny provided, and learning from dominant players like Daniel Petrocelli, I just buckled down and tried to transform myself into a media and entertainment lawyer."

HER ADVICE TO JUNIOR ATTORNEYS:

"I would say, in general, be flexible and don't say 'no,'" Lens said. "What I mean by that is, take a close look at every opportunity that's presented to you and try to make the most of it. Figure out how you can utilize it and leverage it to advance whatever it is you're trying to do."

"When I look back, whenever a new case came along, as an associate I may not feel like it's aligning perfectly with what I want to do," she added. "But now I can see that every opportunity I took advantage of back then has really played an indispensable role in getting me to where I am today."

— As told to Ryan Boysen

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