

Atlantic Records and Founder Ahmet Ertegun's Estate Sued Over Alleged Sexual Misconduct

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Legal News

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The lawsuit from a former staffer says the label's culture at the time allowed the powerful exec to "abuse women with impunity."



Ahmet Ertegun attends Kennedy Center Honors Reception Dinner on December 5, 1981 at the State Department in Washington, D.C. *Ron Galella/Ron Galella Collection via GI*

A former Atlantic Records talent scout is suing over allegations that label co-founder **Ahmet Ertegun** sexually assaulted her repeatedly from the 1980s to the 2000s – and that his conduct was enabled by a “boys will be boys” culture at the company.

In a lawsuit filed Monday in Manhattan court, **Jan Roeg** said Ertegun (who died in 2006) assaulted her on their first meeting in 1983 and that his abuse then continued for “decades” after that. She says Atlantic had “ample opportunities” to observe his behavior, but “did not

act” to protect its female employees.

“The permissive ‘boys will be boys’ attitude that prevailed at companies such as Atlantic Records was not just about having harmless fun,” her lawyers wrote. “Instead, it gave license to powerful figures like [Ertegun] to physically and sexually abuse women with impunity, with no fear of repercussions or opposition from the people who depended on his company for their livelihood and lifestyle.”

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Roeg’s lawsuit was filed under the New York’s Adult Survivors Act, a new law that created a one-year window for alleged abuse victims to file long-delayed lawsuits that would normally be barred by the statute of limitations. The statute just went into effect last week, and more high-profile cases in the music industry are expected over the next year.

The complaint contained extensive details of alleged misconduct by Ertegun, who co-founded Atlantic in 1947 and went on to become one of the industry’s most powerful executives. After the first incident, the complaint says he “violently sexually assaulted Ms. Roeg at his Upper East Side home.” On at least two occasions, she says she found him “openly masturbating in his office.”

But she says he made very clear that she could not push back: “Women who wanted to do business with Atlantic had to play along with Mr. Ertegun’s sexual desires, and could not rock the boat with a complaint or lawsuit.”

In addition to naming Ertegun’s estate as a defendant, the case also directly names Atlantic Records, which is a unit of the Warner Music Group. Her lawyers say the company failed to take action to rein him in – and that the company even took actions to cover up his misconduct.

“Atlantic’s top executives and other management had ample opportunities to observe Mr. Ertegun’s drunken, abusive conduct and hateful attitude towards women, including in Company meetings in which he would openly brag about and recount in detail sexually exploitative escapades he engaged in backstage at concerts and the like,” her lawyers wrote. “Atlantic also is known to have regularly paid money to women accusing Mr. Ertegun of sexual misconduct, both before and after his abuse of Ms. Roeg had begun.”

In a statement to *Billboard*, a representative for Warner Music Group said the company takes such allegations “very seriously” and stressed that the allegations dated years into the past. As is often the case in such long-delayed lawsuits, Atlantic’s corporate structure, policies and executives have changed dramatically in the years since the alleged misconduct took place.

“These allegations date back nearly 40 years, to before WMG was a standalone company. We are speaking with people who were there at the time, taking into consideration that many key individuals are deceased or into their 80s and 90s,” WMG wrote in the statement. “To ensure a safe, equitable, and inclusive working environment, we have a comprehensive Code of Conduct, and mandatory workplace training, to which all of our employees must adhere. We regularly evaluate how we can evolve our policies to ensure our work environment is free from discrimination and harassment.”

A representative for Ertegun’s estate could not be located for comment. But in a statement released to *Rolling Stone*, an attorney for the late executive’s widow said the case was “meritless and will be vigorously defended on her behalf.”

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