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## Atlantic Records Sued Over Ex-CEO's Alleged Abuse In 1980s

By **Dorothy Atkins**

Law360 (November 28, 2022, 10:28 PM EST) -- An ex-talent manager sued Atlantic Records and co-founder Ahmet Ertegun's estate in New York state court Monday, claiming they should be held liable under the Adult Survivors Act for fostering a "boys will be boys" culture that allegedly allowed Atlantic's then-CEO to repeatedly sexually assault her and other women in the 1980s.

In a 29-page **complaint**, Jan A. Roeg said Ertegun, who co-founded Atlantic Records in 1947 and died in 2006 at age 83, sexually assaulted her multiple times in the 1980s, with the first attack occurring in 1983 when she met with him in his Manhattan office to discuss the label signing an artist she represented.

Days later, the suit claims, Ertegun assaulted Roeg again at his Upper East Side home at a business meeting attended by two other Atlantic executives, Earl McGrath and Noreen Woods, as well as talent agent Irving "Swifty" Lazar and his friend. Shortly after, Ertegun allegedly told Roeg that she had to go along with his sexual desires in order to work at the record label.

Roeg says in her suit that those incidents were the start of years of abuse she was to experience at the company, which she alleges fostered a "damaging and sexually exploitative culture" that allowed criminal, abusive behavior to "run rampant, unchecked and uncontrolled, without consequences for the many men who engaged in it or redress for the women at whom it was directed."

"The company allowed sexually inappropriate behavior to go completely unchecked, with at least one male employee reportedly adorning his office with sex toys," Roeg said in the suit.

For years after the initial incidents, Ertegun continued to assault Roeg in the office, in a car with other women and on business trips, causing Roeg to take "precautions" around him, changing the way she dressed and trying to ensure she wasn't alone with him, according to the complaint.

"Atlantic's management knew about Mr. Ertegun's conduct, and his obsessive sexual pursuit of Ms. Roeg, which was characterized by volcanic eruptions of anger in the office, was obvious to all at the label," the complaint said.

Roeg claims that Ertegun would masturbate openly in front of her despite her objections, would repeatedly call her and show up at her home unannounced "at all hours of the day and night" even though she was in a committed relationship, and would physically try to force her to engage in sexual acts.

On a flight to Mexico, Ertegun taunted Roeg and tried to assault her, forcing her to seek shelter with the flight attendants and causing such a disturbance that the pilot was alerted and police were awaiting the flight when it landed in Mexico, according to the complaint. Later in the trip, Roeg alleged, Ertegun broke into her hotel room while she was asleep and sexually assaulted her, causing her to scream for help.

On another occasion, she ended up in an emergency room with her stomach pumped after Ertegun drugged her at a dinner, the suit says. Throughout her time at the label, Ertegun would routinely withhold her royalty payments in retaliation for rebuffing his advances, according to the lawsuit.

Roeg alleges the abuse she suffered at the record label affected her career and caused her to become

suicidal and depressed, for which she is still undergoing treatment.

Other women were allegedly also targets of Ertegun's abuse, and the company's top brass were aware of his "erratic" behavior, which typically occurred after he drank heavily and did cocaine, the suit claims. However, management still allowed Ertegun's conduct to go unchecked despite having witnessed women frequently "disheveled" after interactions with Ertegun, according to the suit.

"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," the complaint says.

Roeg claims the record label regularly paid women to stay silent or drop their sexual abuse claims against Ertegun.

The five-count complaint asserts claims of emotional distress against all the defendants, a claim of negligence against the record label and battery and sexual assault claims against Ertegun's estate and trustees under the New York Adult Survivors Act, which took effect Thursday, **creating** a one-year window for survivors of adulthood sexual abuse to bring otherwise time-barred claims.

Roeg's counsel, Lawrence M. Pearson of Wigdor LLP, said in a statement Monday that Atlantic Records' "sex, drugs and rock n' roll" culture was taken as license by powerful men like Ertegun to engage in sexual assault and abuse women.

"Now, Ms. Roeg and other survivors of sexual assault who in past years were forced into silence due to the threat of retaliation or loss of their careers can get justice under the Adult Survivors Act," Pearson said. "Ms. Roeg and we look forward to holding the defendants accountable and finally getting some relief for her pain over the years."

Atlantic Records' parent company, Warner Music Group, didn't immediately respond to a request for comment Monday.

During her career, Roeg signed multiple high-profile artists to Atlantic Records, including Lynyrd Skynyrd, Johnny Van Zant, Bad Company and Robert Matarazzo, and she first entered a commission-based royalty agreement with the company for finding new artists in September 1984, according to the complaint.

Roeg is represented by Lawrence M. Pearson of Wigdor LLP.

Counsel information for the defendants wasn't immediately available Monday.

The case is Jan A. Roeg v. Atlantic Records Group et al., in the New York State Supreme Court, New York County. The case number was not immediately available Monday.

--Additional reporting by Dave Simpson. Editing by Linda Voorhis.