

Felony Charges Against Rave Promoter Dismissed

BY DENNIS ROMERO

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Nate "Igor" Smith/L.A. Weekly

UPDATE at 3:47 p.m. Friday, Aug. 5, 2016: Promoter Reza Gerami and former Coliseum manager Todd DeStefano pleaded no contest to their charges today. See details below. First posted at 7:25 p.m. Thursday, Aug. 4, 2016.

Charges of conspiracy and bribery against Insomniac founder and CEO Pasquale Rotella were dropped today, nearly bringing an end to a case that alleged he and fellow concert promoter Reza Gerami were involved in a bribery scheme to secure sweetheart deals for events at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum.

Prosecutors alleged that Rotella and Gerami secretly paid the former manager of the taxpayer-

owned L.A. Coliseum in exchange for favorable deals to hold events at the complex, which also included the Los Angeles Sports Arena. Rotella and Gerami were accused of shelling out more than \$1.8 million between 2008 and 2010 in order to secure favorable access to the venue.

But from the beginning the case had holes. For one thing, [it was fairly clear that the rave promoters didn't exactly land sweetheart deals at all](#). If they paid anything, it was for nothing, because other events received similar or even better deals.

Rotella today pleaded no contest to a misdemeanor conflict-of-interest charge and was ordered to serve three years' probation and pay \$150,000 to the county government.

Gerami, who was charged with a misdemeanor allegation of conflict of interest, will appear in court tomorrow. His Go Ventures has held raves, such as Monster Massive, at the complex since 1999.

Todd DeStefano, the manager accused of taking Pasquale and Gerami's money, is still awaiting trial.

"I always knew the charges were politically motivated and publicity-driven," Rotella said. "While it's taken too long to finally put this behind me, I can now focus my energy where it belongs: my family and my company. Thank you to everyone who has supported me through this."

His lawyer, Gary Jay Kaufman, said the dismissal of felony charges "confirms ... that Mr. Rotella is innocent," an assertion he "maintained from day one."

The *Los Angeles Times* has repeatedly patted itself on the back, claiming the case against the promoters stemmed from its 2011 investigation. But while it was the first publication to air the allegations of a cozy relationship between the Coliseum manager and the rave promoters, [an inquiry into the alleged racket was already under way, and the Coliseum Commission was notified of it, one week before the paper published its first story](#).

An unhappy whistleblower who ran a janitorial company contracted to clean the venues had, in 2010, set out to "burn the whole place down" and reveal that Coliseum general manager Pat Lynch and his venue manager, DeStefano, were allegedly taking kickbacks. (Lynch has since pleaded guilty to a felony conflict-of-interest charge and was scheduled to be sentenced in fall.)

The allegations came at a terrible time for the rave industry. Just a few months before, in June 2010, a 15-year-old girl named Sarah Rodriguez had sneaked into Rotella's Electric Daisy Carnival at the Coliseum and died soon after. Coroner's officials said the drug ecstasy was the sole cause of her demise.

Rodriguez's death put a burning hot spotlight on the parties, and the Coliseum Commission

considered banning rave events altogether.

The promoters lined up the support of lobbyists, politicians and even police officials and appeared to have the situation under control in 2011 when the *Times* began publishing the allegations of under-the-table payments to DeStefano.

"DeStefano used his official position on behalf of Rotella and Gerami to try to see that the Coliseum Commission continued to allow the concerts," prosecutors later said in one filing.

Raves were essentially finished at the venues.

Rotella subsequently allowed Beverly Hills-based Live Nation, arguably the world's largest concert promoter, to buy half his company. And he took his flagship event, June's Electric Daisy Carnival, to the much friendlier political climes of Las Vegas, where EDC has seen about one patron death each year since 2011. Ecstasy has been the most-cited culprit.

Attorneys for the promoters alleged misconduct on the part of prosecutors after deputy district attorney Dana Aratani was accused of reading a cache of emails Rotella had sent his attorney. Aratani was removed from the case, and the judge, Kathleen Kennedy, scolded the DA's office.

But ultimately the question of whether the promoters, both 41, were really bribing a public official for special access appeared to haunt the prosecution.

A motion to dismiss the case filed on behalf of Rotella in 2013 noted that he had a fairly standard \$25,000 rent deal in place and argued that [payments made to DeStefano's private side firm](#) were for "honest services outside the scope of his duties."

In fact, it turned out that Coliseum and Sports Arena officials were so happy to host concerts – and to scoop up the ancillary income they brought via concessions and other sidelines – that they waived rent entirely for the likes of Bruce Springsteen. But not for raves.

UPDATE at 3:47 p.m. Friday, Aug. 5, 2016: Reza Gerami, the other rave promoter charged in the case, received the same deal: Serious charges were dropped, and he pleaded no contest to a misdemeanor count of conflict of interest, prosecutors announced this afternoon.

Gerami was ordered to pay \$30,000, and he was placed on summary probation for three years.

Former Coliseum manager Todd DeStefano pleaded no contest to a felony count of conflict of interest. He was sentenced to six months in jail and three years' formal probation. He also was ordered to pay \$500,000 to the county.