

## Moving into the arts? It's a no-brainer

“A nice balance of right and left brain,” is how Victor Kline describes his working life. Kline edits the authorised Federal Law Reports and Federal Court Reports. He's done that for 16 years. But he spends the rest of his time working in theatre – as a playwright, a director and actor. Both worlds share a love of words. “Being a wordsmith is probably the reason many people go into law”, he says.

As a legal editor Kline works hard to produce beautiful clear copy, but he describes a court style which produces consistency and logic, necessarily making it hard to distinguish the judgments of different judges, as frustrating to the creative mind.

Working as a barrister, he would look for innovative legal arguments. “That can be a problem”, Kline told *LSJ*, “if you antagonise the judge because an argument's too far-fetched and they pull you up to say, ‘you're not going to win this case’.”

Kline was admitted to the Bar at 22. “Terrifying”, is how he describes it. But not half so terrifying as becoming inhouse counsel in the Northern Territory at 24. “That was really terrifying.”

The NT had a dearth of lawyers, and Kline found himself covering murder trials, rape trials and huge tort actions. He moved into legal aid work and describes seeing the worst aspects of discrimination in Alice Springs. He was asked to defend a white man who took part in what was described as ‘boong hunting’. Not charged with grievous bodily harm, or attempted murder, the man was found guilty of common assault and fined \$100.

Some of the material re-emerged in Kline's short stories of the '90s and his 1996 novel *Rough Justice*.

Kline's thespian life began when he studied acting in Perth in the mid-'90s. He responded enthusiastically to landing the role of Mark Anthony at short notice: “You get tossed that

brief, sorry, that role, and say ‘you beauty’.....”

“Too often people grind along doing something they don't like. It's exacerbated now for lawyers by not having enough money, the cost of chambers.

“As a director you have to work at what you believe in. Not only because you'll spend weeks or months on it, and only find well-paid work at the senior level. But it's also part of the nature of the work. A playwright only writes the dialogue. You're in the hands of the director. You can only produce honest, believable dialogue and hope the director and actors bring their experience to it.”

Unlike film, where a script will detail shots, costume, angles and lighting, for stage “the convention is that stage directions are up for grabs. You are at the mercy of whoever gets a hold of your play.”

The lack of guidance in the script of a play can mean that unknown work, which is not signposted by success, can slip through the net. It takes a director's vision to see the potential of the raw material.

As Kline moves away from the practice arena his focus has shifted to the complexity of relationships in the modern world: his latest play, which runs at the Tap Gallery through February is called *love.com*.

He rejects the worn old chestnut of the film world that we don't have enough good scripts. As well as his own play, Kline directs two short plays in the current Shorts and Sweet festival, which is staging 90 10-minute plays over five weeks. He says that the festival's artistic director estimates that of the 1,000 scripts submitted, 200 were “excellent”.

However, theatre companies still look for well-known work. “Aussies are still unsure of themselves,” says Kline. “What we need are more artistic entrepreneurs.” □

*Love.com* plays as part of the Sydney Mardi Gras festival from

3 to 24 February on Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday at 8.00pm. For bookings phone 9439 1906.

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**Factory Space and LSJ are pleased to offer three free double passes to love.com on any Friday in February. To enter, send contact details by email to [factoryspace@telstra.com](mailto:factoryspace@telstra.com) with “Love.com” in the subject line.**

**Writer and director of love.com, Victor Kline in the new theatre space downstairs at the Tap Gallery in Sydney's Darlinghurst.**

