

A photograph of Justin Melvey, a man with dark hair and a goatee, wearing a white t-shirt with a graphic of a skull and a heart. The heart has a banner that says 'LOVE KILLS' and the skull has a banner that says 'SLOWLY'. He is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression, resting his head on his hand. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

JUSTIN TIME

From Days Of Our Lives to Dancing With The Stars, Justin Melvey has come a long way since sunning his buns in Summer Bay. He tells Matt Myers about his new multi-millionaire role, Kentucky soap fans and making room for Matt LeBlanc.

DNA: You've been runner up for the Cleo Bachelor Of The Year Award. How do you deal with the heartthrob label?

Justin Melvey: [Laughs] I forget it! As soon as it goes in one ear I let it go out the other. In fact, I think I get more shit from my own family than from anyone else. It's all very flattering but you don't let it go to your head.

Plenty of gay guys find you attractive. How do you feel about that?

It is what it is. I'm not homophobic. It's nice to know that anyone would find me attractive.

Do you have gay mates?

Yeah, I've been in this industry for years. I've worked with gay agents, make-up artists, stylists, photographers... but I don't really play into people's politics, religion or sex. I just play to their character traits, like integrity, trust and honesty. Whether they are gay, straight, Muslim, Catholic or Jewish, it doesn't matter. If they're a good person, I love them unconditionally.

It's been a long road since your Most Popular New Talent Logie back in 1988. What's the secret to your success?

You really have to get away from the ego and believe in what makes you happy. I've made a lot of choices and some of them aren't exactly acting choices. I went off and did *Dancing With The Stars* because it supports my charity, which is diabetes. But if you get caught up in the whole 'actor' business then you just believe in your own shit. If you do the work and believe in yourself and you're good to others and don't burn the hand that feeds you, then I think you'll always work. I think things come up in life and you've just got to go with your gut feeling.

Did working on *Days Of Our Lives* differ much from *Home And Away*?

It's a huge difference. *Days Of Our Lives* is one hour of television shot in a day and that's five hours a week. So it's twice as much work and it's a show that's been running for 45 years. It's shot at the NBC Studios, where some of the cameramen have worked on it for 25 years. Everything is different, from the way it's shot to the creativity. You also have a certain status in America and the fans are more aggressive than in Australia, where we don't give a shit. But in America they follow you for the rest of your life!

You played Dr Colin Murphy on *Days* from 2001 to 2003 but Channel Nine decided to skip these two years to update Australia with the US. Was that frustrating for you?

Well, during that time I spoke to David Gyngell [Channel Nine CEO] at the Logies

and he told me they were updating the show by a few years. I said, "Oh great," but then I thought, "Thank God!" because I realised I had played such a bad character. I was in bed with different women, money laundering, blackmailing and making sex tapes! I thought, "God, if my mother saw that it would be the end of me!"

Do you think being on *Dancing With The Stars* caught the eyes of the *Days* producers?

It did but it was too late. By the time *Dancing With The Stars* came out it hadn't come out in America. It actually did wonders for Kelly Monaco who plays Sammy on *General Hospital*. She won the second season of *Dancing With The Stars* in America and I went back to America and did *General Hospital* with her. She was my love interest in the show so they wrote some dance history into my character.

***Friends* had the classic storyline of Joey scoring a role on *Days Of Our Lives* as doctor Drake Ramore. Did you cop jokes about that at the time?**

Yes! [Laughs] His character was hilarious. *Friends* was on the NBC network as well so sometimes they would set up a shoot on the *Days Of Our Lives* set where Matt LeBlanc would come on and film his scenes.

So you were part of television folklore.

You can't take it too seriously. It's a job that 60 million people are watching in a week and we would get treated like superstars,

"I've run in Hollywood circles for a long time and I have a lot of powerful gay friends."

especially when we went down to the south. There are a lot of people out there in Middle America – like stay-at-home mums – and it's amazing what holds some people together. We were as big as the country music stars there. We'd get flown down in Lear jets to places like Louisville and Kentucky. I hosted a telethon in Tennessee. It was crazy. People would think we were the actual characters! It's kind of surreal and it's where I would pinch myself. The whole daytime soap thing feeds a lot of people. It has a huge viewership worldwide.

Would you ever return to *Days*?

They've brought back a lot of the old characters and there are flashbacks of their storylines, which included me. For one thing that means I get more residual cheques [laughs]! But yeah, the writers have been asking where I am and what I'm doing. I'm filming here in Australia at the moment and I love working here. Would I go back? I don't know.

What about returning to *Home And Away*?

[Long pause] I don't know. Let's say there's no talk about my character returning to *Home And Away* but there is talk from *Days Of Our Lives*. I haven't been able to explore that avenue yet because I've been busy working on *The Phone*. But I'd prefer to work on an Aussie show than an American show. I've bought homes in Hollywood Hills and Colorado and I've done great in America. I've achieved a lot but I think it's family and lifestyle that's my greater love. I grew up in Sydney and I still play golf and go surfing. Sometimes there's a bit more to life than the lifestyle I was living in America.

Who would you turn gay for?

Hmm... Barack Obama!

The man of the moment. And a hot black man.

[Laughs] Yes! A hot black man!

Have you ever been mistaken as gay?

I don't think so. I'm pretty much a man's man. I've run in Hollywood circles for a long time and I have a lot of really powerful gay friends. I got to Hollywood the fast way and I've been there since the early '90s. I get treated with a lot of respect by my gay friends because I don't care if they're gay or straight, I love them for our friendship. And I don't get propositioned but I wouldn't shy away from it. I'd make them feel comfortable because no one likes to be rejected and no one likes to be taken the wrong way. I wouldn't want someone to feel uncomfortable or think that I'm uncomfortable because of the way they feel.

***The Phone* is a faux-reality-TV show where you play a multi-millionaire called *The Clue Master*. Tell us about him.**

He's very much a flamboyant millionaire with an agenda. He leads two contestants on a cat-and-mouse trail through the city to win \$25,000. He's always trying to get the right girl, make the right business deal or buy the right property... he's into fast cars, boats and planes. He gives the messages by phone and through video at the MCG or the plasmas at Federation Square or on the Gold Coast. There are all these crazy messages that he leaves with the contestants and they have to find clues that lead to the cash. It's 24 meets *The Bourne Identity*. In fact, one of the contestants is gay and he and the girl are hilarious together. She thinks she's a man-eater but he thinks he's a bigger man-eater. But at the end of the day only one person can win. 🍀

The Phone premieres this month on FOX8.