

KEVIN KLING

author, playwright, teller of tales

Kevin Kling is an award-winning storyteller, playwright, and solo performer based in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and one of the most respected voices in contemporary American storytelling. For more than forty years, Kling has brought audiences together with performances that blend humor, emotional honesty, and deep curiosity about what it means to be human. In recognition of his lasting cultural impact, he is the Minneapolis Story Laureate and is often referred to as a “Minnesota State Treasure.”

He first gained national recognition with his landmark one-person play *21A*, in which he portrayed all the characters riding the 21A bus through Minneapolis. With humor, empathy, and sharp observation, the piece created a vivid cross-section of urban life and established Kling as a major new voice in American solo theater. The success of *21A* led to extensive touring and a national reputation for storytelling that was both theatrical and deeply human.

His national profile was further expanded through his appearances on National Public Radio’s *All Things Considered*, where his distinctive voice and finely crafted stories reached millions of listeners and introduced a wide public to his work.

Kling’s body of theatrical work includes both acclaimed one-person performances and a wide range of full-cast plays. His solo shows include *21A*, *Home and Away*, and *How How Why Why Why*, while his full-cast plays range from intimate dramas to large-scale ensemble works, including *Lloyd’s Prayer*, *The Ice Fishing Play*, *The Education of Walter Kauffmann*, *The Seven Dwarfs*, *Tales from the Charred Underbelly of the Yule Log*, *Northern Lights/Southern Cross*, *Mississippi Panorama*, *Perfectly Persephone*, *Lyle Lyle Crocodile*, *Lilly’s Purple Plastic Purse*, *Gulliver Unraveled*, *Scarecrow On Fire*, *Fool’s Paradise*, *Breakin’ Hearts & Takin’ Names*, *Best Summer Ever*, and *Invisible Fences*, among many others. His plays have been produced in local, regional, and national theaters including the Guthrie Theater, Illusion Theater, Open Eye Theatre, Children’s Theatre Company, Mixed Blood, Frank Theater, History Theatre, Seattle Repertory Theatre, Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park, the Goodman Theatre, the Kennedy Center, Denver Center for the Performing Arts, Merrimack Repertory Theatre, Spoleto Festival USA, and Off-Broadway at Westside Arts and Second Stage Theater.

Kling was born with a congenital disability in his left arm and in 2001 he was seriously injured in a motorcycle accident that left his right arm paralyzed. The loss of his dominant arm, layered onto a lifelong physical difference, became a profound turning point in both his life and his art. His journey back to performance was documented in the

regional Emmy Award–winning PBS film *Kevin Kling: Lost & Found*, which chronicles his artistic recovery and return to the stage.

In the years that followed, Kling began creating performances that more directly explored disability, recovery, identity, and resilience. These themes came to the forefront in works such as *Invisible Fences* and *Kevin Kling: Unraveled*. These pieces combine memoir, storytelling, and theatrical craft into performances that are both intimate and powerful, without losing the humor and warmth that have always defined his voice.

Kling is also a committed advocate for disability culture and access in the arts. He shared in a regional Emmy Award for the PBS documentary *Art + Medicine: Disability, Culture and Creativity*, which highlights the creative contributions of artists with disabilities and explores the intersection of art, lived experience, and healing.

Beyond the stage, Kling has been a valued collaborator in oral history and public humanities projects. Working with organizations such as the Minnesota Historical Society and community groups throughout the Midwest, he has gathered and shaped stories from veterans, immigrants, farmers, workers, families and people with disabilities, preserving voices that might otherwise go unheard.

In addition to his work for stage and radio, Kling is the author of several books, including *The Dog Says How*, *Holiday Inn*, *Big Little Brother*, *Big Little Mother* and *On Stage with Kevin Kling*. Across memoir, essays, and story collections, these works reflect the same warmth, wit, and keen observation that define his performances, offering readers an intimate window into his life, imagination, and creative process.

As a teacher and mentor, Kling has led workshops and residencies across the country, helping emerging storytellers find their own voices and learn how to tell meaningful stories with clarity, humor, and heart. His influence can be seen in the many performers who cite him as a formative guide in their artistic development.

Kevin Kling’s work has been supported by organizations including the National Endowment for the Arts, the Bush Foundation, the McKnight Foundation, the Minnesota State Arts Board, and numerous regional arts institutions. Audiences, however, know him best for something less formal: the rare ability to make a room feel connected, as if everyone is sharing the same story for a moment.

Whether performing in theaters, community spaces, or on the radio, Kevin Kling continues to create work that reminds us how powerful listening can be — and how much beauty there is in ordinary lives, honestly told.

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