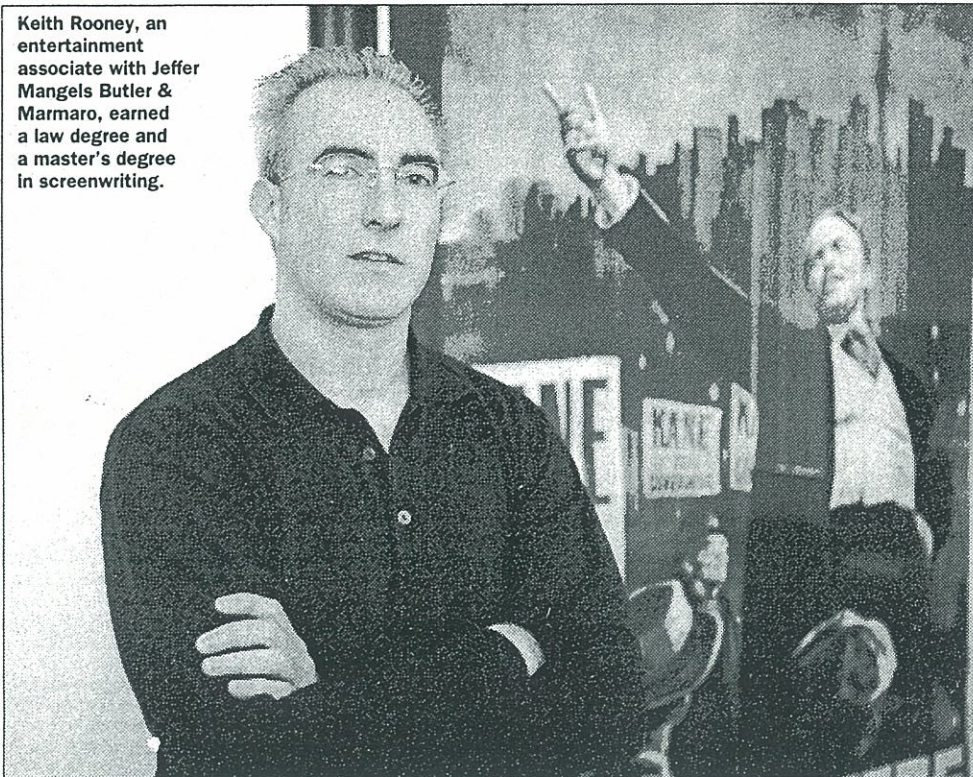


Hollywood

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Hollywood Lawyer Straddles Two Worlds

K eith Rooney, an entertainment associate with Jeffer Mangels Butler & Marmaro in Century City, speaks the language of Hollywood's writers.

Rooney earned both a law degree and a master's degree in screenwriting from Columbia University, in 1991 and 1994, respectively.

After he graduated, Rooney got an agent on the strength of his thesis screenplay, "Cold Blooded Killers, A Romantic Comedy." However, a flurry of meetings with Hollywood executives didn't materialize into a deal.

But at least his experiences helped him understand an artist's perspective on Hollywood's creative process. Now, Rooney mentions his master's degree as evidence that he can sympathize with writers trying to navigate the production process.

"Sometimes that's convincing, and sometimes it isn't. But I say it, anyway," Rooney says.

According to Michael Sherman, chair of Jeffer Mangels' entertainment practice, Rooney's early experience as a writer does come in handy.

"Occasionally, we look at scripts for clients or potential clients, so his having that background and that education is helpful, because he can come to not only a business judgment but a creative judgment about material," Sherman says.

Rooney, 37, briefly was torn be-

tween practicing law and sticking it out as a writer.

"I wanted to be doing something in entertainment, whether it was on the business and legal end or the creative end," he says. "When I graduated, I was offered a couple of creative positions. The problem was they didn't pay anything, and I had this staggering student debt from getting both degrees, so I opted for the attorney route."

Practicing law nearly has replaced his urge to write, he adds.

"I did do some more writing after that, but once I started working as an attorney, I really felt [I did not have] that much time," Rooney says.

Rooney's first job as a lawyer was at now-shuttered Roxy Pictures in New York, a small production house where he served as executive vice president and general counsel.

Two years later, when the founder of Roxy Pictures decided to dismantle the company in favor of an Internet startup, Rooney jumped to an in-house position at MGM in Santa Monica.

Rooney, who worked at MGM from 1996 to 1999, devoted much of his time to rights research in the studio's library.

Rooney left MGM for Century City intellectual property firm Leopold Petrich & Smith in 1999. At Leopold, he helped firm clients exploit their intellectual property rights and handled a

few Screen Actors Guild arbitrations.

But Rooney heeded the siren call of Jeffer Mangels in April and has been working with Sherman ever since. Rooney and the department's other associate, Thomas Greenberg, do transactional work for Jeffer Mangels' entertainment clients.

Rooney declined to name any of the firm's clients but says they range from studios and smaller-production companies to individual writers and directors, as well as some clients in the recording industry. According to other sources, the firm represents the estate of 1920s star Charlie Chaplin and arena rock band The Eagles.

Lately, Rooney has been working on production deals for a motion picture with a budget between \$80 million and \$100 million, drafting director and music supervisor agreements for the production company.

Rooney's long hours of deal making mean he won't be adding to his writing portfolio (which so far includes two screenplays and a detective novel) anytime soon. But he finds the complexity of transactional work more than a fair trade for a creative career.

"I still find it really interesting and captivating how these deals are put together," Rooney says. "It's like doing the New York Times crossword puzzle."