

Patricia Sheridan's Breakfast With ... Vincent D'Onofrio
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By Patricia Sheridan, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Actor, director and producer Vincent D'Onofrio first got the attention of audiences and critics in Stanley Kubrick's "Full Metal Jacket," playing an emotionally unhinged soldier. Although he continues to do films, his big-screen career has been temporarily eclipsed after six years as Detective Robert Goren on "Law & Order: Criminal Intent," which is moving to the USA Network. The new season begins Thursday at 10 p.m.



Q: What do you get out of acting?

A: You know, it lets me do my thing. Well, honestly it's hard for me to answer that question, honestly, because it's what I do. My job. You know I get to do the things that I like to do and that's all acting.

Q: Do you put a lot of pressure on yourself to achieve?

A: Yeah, I try to do the hardest things I can do whether it's film or on the show. I'm much more interested in the more difficult episodes to get away with than the easy ones. When I do films, I pick parts that I've never done before and parts that scare me a little bit, so that I can have a thrill out of trying to accomplish it.

Q: Intense seems to be a word used a lot to describe your approach. Is it fair? Are you intense?

A: Um, I don't think so, no. That's something somebody else would have to say. I don't think I am. I think that the guys and the girls on the set here, you know, after six years, they know me pretty well. I don't think they think I'm intense. I don't know.

Q: How do you feel about the fame that goes along with acting?

A: Well I never really used to have it until the show ["Law & Order: Criminal Intent"]. I used to be able to stay under the wire and do lots of films and sometimes get recognized. But the show has changed all that. It was strange the first couple of years, but I've gotten used to it. I have peers and friends that have had to deal with that their whole careers. Some of them handle it well. Some of them don't. I learned from an old friend of mine. He's

passed on. Gregory Hines taught me to be gracious to fans, and I've always tried to be.

Q: A lot of actors talk about how shy they were, and it seems an unlikely career choice for someone who is, so were you shy?

A: I was very introverted as a kid. So I guess I'm like all the other ones. You hide behind the work. You've got this title of being an actor. So it's a pretty big mask to wear. It really does work.

Q: When you are doing a weekly series for as long as you have, does it help the character or does it become stale or robotic?

A: As far as the character that I play, Goren, it was the first three years that I used to do everything I could to make it different than the other shows. After that you have to be careful because you don't want to repeat yourself. So I made a choice to go more inward with the character, less frenetic. What's good about this season, what's really good about it for me, we're starting to play with more character-driven stuff. Stuff that we've been kind of hinting at for six years. There's still things that the fans like. I only know this because on the streets everywhere I go, people comment about certain things that the character does. They call this thing "the dip" that I do, where I kind of bend over. It's kind of weird for fans to say, "Oh I remember you doing this dip." So that's turned into a kind of kitschy kind of thing. After six years if I want to, at any given time, I can throw that in as a character choice. I can give them a little bit here and there.

Q: So there is a certain luxury to doing a role for a long time.

A: It's hard. My job to keep it interesting, and if the script's good, and they have been, then I'm good.

Q: "Law & Order" is such a formula show, and yet people never seem to get enough. What is it about this franchise that has made it such a success?

A: My opinion is that it's because people like crime stories. They like to read crime novels. They are like short crime stories. It's scary and it's weird, yet they can keep a distance from it.

Q: Are you involved in any movies as a producer or actor now?

A: My company, Brooklyn Hazelhurst, has two movies we are actually not too far from going into production on. One is a father and daughter relationship film. The other one is a Western I've been putting together for the last couple of years. It seems to be rolling forward now. I did two films, somebody else's films this summer. One called "The Narrows" and another one called "Staten Island."

Q: How comfortable are you doing the publicity side of business?

A: It's not the first thing on my mind to do. I'm not as good at it as some of my friends. But I understand that it's part of the business, and I don't mind doing print work and stuff like that. I used to do "The View" because my mom likes it so much. But I'm not good on the talk shows and stuff like that. I stay away from the talk shows.

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