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## GOREN, NOT FORGOTTEN

By David Roberts

Less is more for actor Vincent D'Onofrio, writes David Roberts

JUST like his television counterpart, Bobby Goren, Vincent D'Onofrio is unpredictable. The *Law & Order: Criminal Intent* star goes from garrulous to introspective to curious while being interviewed.

It seems spontaneity is everything to D'Onofrio, 46, both on and off screen. Which is why it didn't come as a surprise to *Law & Order* producer Dick Wolf when D'Onofrio told him that he couldn't star in all 22 episodes of the new series.

"In the first conversation Dick and I ever had, he promised me that I would still be allowed to have some freedom," D'Onofrio says. "He knows I'm a very spontaneous kind of person. I'm not the typical actor who shoots for the stars. I just do what I want."

As a result, Goren and partner Det Alexandra Eames (Kathryn Erbe) will only feature in every second episode of *Criminal Intent*, which returns to Channel Ten on Sunday at 9.30pm. The other 11 episodes will be centred around Det Mike Logan, played by former *Law & Order* star and *Sex and the City's* Mr Big, Chris Noth. Co-starring as Mike Logan's sidekick, Carolyn Barak, is Annabella Sciorra.

But the Goren/Eames team and the Logan/Barak duo won't be crossing paths. "I don't want to cross into Chris's episodes," D'Onofrio says. "It's his own show. Dick and I are giving him the opportunity to do it and make it a success."

While eventually stepping away from *Criminal Intent* was always D'Onofrio's plan, being so immersed in playing Goren has meant the decision has taken longer than he thought. "The show was so exhausting for me for the first few years that I had to be really careful with how much I did other than that," he says. "It's taken me four years to figure out how to do that job and other things that I really want to do. I'm kind of slow. And I love acting so much that it's hard to be kept away from it."

The catalyst for change was when the star fainted twice last year, once on the set of the series and again at home five days later. D'Onofrio was diagnosed with exhaustion. His fainting was not, as some reports suggested, the result of his devastation over the result of the US presidential election. "I wish it was that," D'Onofrio laughs. "Everybody knows that I'm a really big Democrat and we all kind of metaphorically fell over (when John Kerry lost to Bush)."

His exhaustion stemmed from a combination of 14-hour days on Criminal Intent and his work co-producing, directing and starring in a short film about Orson Welles. "I found out the hard way how to get my projects developed at the same time I'm doing the show -- I ended up in hospital," he says.

But he is happy with his subsequent change of lifestyle, especially since he has two children: a daughter Leila, who's 13, and a son Elias, 5, the products of his now-dissolved marriages to Greta Scacchi and Carin van der Donk respectively. "I'm friends with the mums and I love my kids. They spend a lot of time with me," he says.

"So this is how it has to be. And I'm at a really good point in my life where I'm ready to make an ass of myself all over again -- like when I was a kid. Take chances, you know? And I want to do that with filmmaking this time rather than acting."

The erratic Goren in Criminal Intent is the perfect character for D'Onofrio to play. "It's worked out well," D'Onofrio says. "But it was all a plan. I didn't want to get bored so I made sure that Goren was not easy to follow. Goren is a complex character and so am I. It sets up a precedence for the audience to understand that I'm not just one kind of guy. I'm several kinds of guys," he says.

"It reminds people that I'm an actor so when I have other parts in films and stuff, they're going to accept me because they know Goren is a lot of things -- he's Vincent, the actor."