

The New Zealand Herald

Pounding the offbeat

5:00AM Thursday February 14, 2008

By [Rebecca Barry](#)



Vincent D'Onofrio's Bobby Goren sometimes seems more psycho than cop.

Vincent D'Onofrio has a theory as to why his TV character, Detective Bobby Goren, is such a weirdo.

"He's a mess, an absolute mess," he says on the phone from New York. "I think he puts his mind on his work to keep himself sane, even though he's dealing with mostly insane people."

Goren is a pretty intelligent mess, even if fans of *Law & Order: Criminal Intent* will have noticed he's messier than usual.

What started out on paper as a Sherlock Holmes-type role soon morphed into a man who stares at people, pauses in funny places, cocks his head to the side or erupts in spontaneous anger - mannerisms that suggest he has more in common with a previous role as a psychotic killer in *The Cell* than a detective.

There are even inklings of Goren's feelings being hurt when people tell him what a "wack job" he is.

And although we'll never know what he sings in the shower or if he's having an affair with the neighbour, fans are being treated to a little more insight into his personal life.

Last season his mother died and he met his long-lost brother. In last night's new season premiere, he watched as his on-screen partner, Detective Alexandra Eames (Kathryn Erbe), broke down after confronting her husband's murderer.

We can look forward to Goren losing a few more marbles later in the series.

"Like, is he truly nuts or is he, y'know, quirky?" says D'Onofrio. "He goes undercover in an institution and there's this question as to whether he loses his mind a bit in there. It's a cool episode."

The personal stories might seem unfaithful to the laws of procedural drama in that *Criminal Intent*, a spinoff from the long-running *Law & Order* franchise, was

conceived to explore the psychology of criminals, not the authorities. It's also an odd move in that the show is now facing more competition with shows such as *Bones* and *Criminal Minds* tackling forensics and friendships in equal measure.

"It's to keep things interesting," says D'Onofrio. "In my character we have an opportunity to go places with it and I think eventually we had to. We always did just a tiny bit. If I'm going to stay interested in doing the show I think they have to do that. As long as you don't get too soapy you know, as long as it's not romantic stuff, I wouldn't want to get into that.

"In television you don't always get to do as much performance stuff as you do in films so it's always more fun for Kate and I when we actually have, like, emotional stuff to do, whether it's happy stuff or downbeat things.

"At the same time we've proven in the seventh season that we can keep it interesting and people will keep on watching and we can take it in other directions sometimes and people will still watch it."

Much of the credit belongs to Warren Leight, the new head writer who came on board with a new team in the sixth season. For the first time, D'Onofrio says, he can tell who wrote a particular script.

"Yeah, he's writing some good stuff. The seventh season is pretty powerful. We didn't want to get too heavy with it straight off the bat. But we do keep the background stuff alive as we're solving the crimes. We have a bunch more to do yet where we're going to explore stuff like my mom and other things as well."

Four years ago D'Onofrio almost didn't stick around. Starring in virtually every scene led to a stint in hospital, suffering exhaustion.

For the fifth season, the writers employed Chris Noth as the alternate lead (the producers at the time pointed out that D'Onofrio was taking on film projects in his own time).

Even now, with a more manageable workload, two kids and another on the way, D'Onofrio still finds the time to make movies. In the northern summer he made two independent New York-based films, *Staten Island* and *The Narrows*.

"As long as I can keep doing films and television, I don't have any plans to go anywhere ... although I definitely think the show can exist without me. They'd have to find a different kind of cop, some interesting character actor somewhere."

Have any of Goren's super-intelligent insights into crims rubbed off on him after seven seasons?

"I've always been pretty good at sussing out shady characters because I come from the street, but not in the way that Goren does. I mean it's all written in a very clever way. Cops love to watch this show. New York cops anyway.

"I actually met a couple of guys who work in immigration in Sydney and they love the show, and when I went through immigration they were commenting on the interrogation techniques and things like that. I thought it was really funny and very cool at the same time.

"But the true answer is no. The show is based on criminal facts that have to do with the justice system and criminal psychology and when we do those sorts of things to suss out characters, you learn that stuff and you don't forget it."

D'Onofrio and Erbe also have their way of dealing with the seriousness of their on-screen jobs.

"We goof off all the time. Kate and I, late in the day, we really have to concentrate because there are times you find the things that you're doing as actors totally ridiculous.

"And we'll be laughing at each other and it's really not nice to do to the guest actors, so we have to control ourselves. But at times it's just uncontrollable and people just have to wait."