

THE GRILL
BY DI WEBSTER

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Hospitalised last year with exhaustion, Vincent D'Onofrio, 45, quirky Det Goren on Law & Order: Criminal Intent, will share screen time in the fifth season of the TV drama with Chris Noth (Sex and the City's Big).

What are you doing here? Don't you work around the clock?

I'm taking my first break because Chris Noth is doing his first episode. In the previous four seasons it's been me 22 episodes a season. So now it will be Chris and Annabella (Sciorra) doing an episode, and me and Kate (Kathryn Erbe) doing every other episode.

Is this a development you welcome?

It's absolutely necessary, otherwise I wouldn't have made it. I was finished. If it was up to (the US network) they would have replaced me or I would have quit, because nobody was listening to me and I ended up in the hospital. My boss Dick Wolf came forward with this idea because we've been friends for a while and he wanted to protect his investment. I want to keep doing the show and he wants me to keep doing it. So, do I welcome it? It was partly my idea.

I heard you collapsed because Bush got re-elected ...

Yeah, I wish! I wish I could say that I actually did. That would be hilarious. But I collapsed because I was tired.

I liked the Bush story better.

Yeah, me too. I think mentally a lot of us collapsed when Bush was elected.

What did you do when he won?

I collapsed! (Laughs) Us Democrats, we don't know what to do. We don't have anybody to stand up for us right now. Hopefully Hillary (Clinton).

You're five seasons into Law & Order. How are you enjoying the TV experience?

This show is awesome for me. I get to play this character, Goren, and it's hilarious to me. I just love the guy. I knew right away that I was going to play him full-out and either people were going to like it or not like it. It was basically, "Please like this, and if you don't, OK, fine, I'm gone." (Laughs) I wanted to set the precedents in the first season: this is not a typical cop show. This is me f--king around. Bear with it or don't. If you don't, kick my ass out. I'm a character actor, I'm fine. I'll do my shit.

It must be a relief not to have to bulk up for film roles, though. You're like the Renée Zellweger of men.

I just did it again for the Orson Welles film. I just did a film about Orson Welles.

You directed, produced and acted in that ...

And I put on 35lb (16kg) for it. At the end of the fourth season you'll see Goren getting enough weight to play Orson Welles, and then in the beginning of the fifth season you'll see him begin to take it off. Probably around the fifth episode he'll start looking like Goren again. (Laughs)

Your daughter, Leila (with formerly Australia-based actress Greta Scacchi), doesn't live here anymore?

No, but Leila and I come here more than her and her mum. Her mum still has a flat

here (in Sydney's beachside Coogee), but she rents it out when she's not here, so when Leila and I come ... Leila likes to stay in the city these days, but we spend the whole day on the beach.

She's 13. Have you read her the riot act about boys?
Not yet. So far I haven't had to. We'll see.

How often do you get out here?

Well, we were just here last Christmas, for nothing, just to hang out. I get a break in about 20 days. I think I'll come back then. I've got some business I want to do. I love the winters here. Everybody wears jackets and stuff. It's so funny.