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Finding character in Intent

D'Onofrio finds depth in solving crimes



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Vincent D'Onofrio first burst onto the scene with his role in 1987's *Full Metal Jacket* and has been wowing critics and fans with his work from then on. Since 2001 he has played Detective Bobby Gorin on *Law And Order: Criminal Intent*. Recently Boston Now talked with him about the series, his career, and this Thursday's powerful new episode.

BostonNOW: Untethered is a very different kind of episode for *Law And Order: Criminal Intent*. What was your reaction when you got the script?

Vincent D'Onofrio: We had been talking about it for a long time. There was a show on *60 Minutes* about something very similar and I had talked to Warren (Leight, the show runner) about it, conversations about how we might be able to do something like that, with me going into an institution of some kind undercover. Warren came up with the story about bringing my brother into it and turning it into a *Criminal Intent*. When I read the script it was great. It was great from the first draft, actually.

BN: Because there are multiple scenes where it's just you on camera, was preparation for this different than usual for you as an actor?

VD: It's very similar to the episode we did at the start of the season that featured Kate's (Co-star Kathryn Erbe) past a bit, an emotional journey for her. She was able to apply her acting style in a more specific way to it. This episode of mine gave me the same chance to really just do what I do, that I don't get to do a lot on the show, because there's no room for it. We mainly do crime stories and you can't be too indulgent with crime stories; everything is about plot points and it's very important to hit certain things at certain times.

BN: You've got 43 minutes to tell the story and solve the case.

VD: Exactly. But something that requires a more emotional base, you can always approach it with an easier flow ... I did ask them to schedule the last three days so that all the stuff when I was tied down to the slab happened at the end, so I could go deep, acting-wise.

BN: In those scenes where you were strapped down, did you get up and move around between takes?

VD: Most of those shots of me on the slab, they would just let the camera roll and then cut it into what you see on the show. They would roll and I would improvise. In one, 10-minute length, I would give them different stages of me being on the slab, but in an improvisational kind of way.

BN: You and Tony Goldwyn (who plays D'Onofrio's brother on the episode) have a great chemistry on the show. Was that something that happened right away?

VD: Tony and I met on an airplane and I asked him if he would come and be my brother on the show. We love him here. He's going to direct an episode, too. I just love the guy. There are some actors you just work with really well ... He makes my acting better.

BN: Law And Order Criminal Intent started back in 2001, and now that you're in your seventh season, with over 100 episodes, are you happy with where the show has gone, both overall and specific to Gorin?

VD: I think the writing on the show these days is strong. The first couple of years when we were figuring out what the show was, it was a lot of fun to just see if what we were doing was going to work at all, but since then Warren Leight has put out some of the best scripts we've done. I like it.

BN: When I interviewed Kathryn Erbe earlier this fall, she said the change in schedule from doing every episode to every other, "saved her life." Do you feel the same way?

VD: I agree with her. It was absolutely life saving. We were working way too much and they were kind enough to do something about it. It's worked out terrific.

BN: In the Law And Order universe there is no character the fans are more passionate about than Gorin. Do you get that fans coming up to you.

VD: Every day, everywhere I go. I don't mean that to sound egotistical.

BN: Does that ever get old?

VD: No, it doesn't. It actually helps me stay on the show. When you do theater, at the end of the show you get applause. When you do film and television you never get that, so it's like getting that applause, which is nice.

BN: Living and working in NY, what's the reaction you get from the NYPD?

VD: It's great. They just treat us so well. It's hard to describe but it comes down to everyone - regular guys walking the beat to Chief Scagnelli - they are all absolute gentlemen. They like the fact that it's about the NYPD, it's their life.

BN: Can you feel a difference in the support now that the show has moved to the USA network?

VD: I think one of the things that has helped this season is USA's attitude towards the show, how they are treating us, the way they are considering it a "new" show for them. I think it's helped morale a lot, actually. The whole way they are doing it is fun ... You just get a good feeling from them, and that's nice to have.

BN: Criminal Intent is pretty intense. Does doing that kind of thing 11 episodes a year affect the other choices you make for work?

VD: I have better opportunity now to do what I like to do most, which is supporting parts in films. That's what I really like to do most of all and now people are able to board me in because I have 8 to 10 days off every eight days

BN: Why the preference for supporting roles?

VD: I don't know, it's just always been my thing. I like creating characters. It's always been that way.

BN: I would think it might give you a little more freedom and a little less pressure.

VD: Maybe. I like creating stuff. I don't like repeating things and when you're a character actor you don't repeat a lot, which kind of suits my personality more.

BN: Having played such an incredible assortment of characters over the years, are there some that stand out to you, where what you were going for ended up perfect?

VD: Oh no, I don't think anything I've done is perfect. I'd like to change all of them, actually.

BN: Do you spend a lot of time thinking about roles you've done and things you'd change?

VD: You do when you're young but you get over that fairly quickly. You learn from directors and other actors to get over that - it's in the can and that's all you can do. Probably the first five or six years of your career you dwell on everything you've just

done, or done previous, and then after a while you understand that as long as you don't feel guilty, as long as you put 100 percent effort into it, that whatever it turned out to be is what it was.

BN: You did a Miami Vice episode way back in 1984, when the show was at its pop culture zenith. Was it crazy to be a part of such a huge thing?

VD: I guess. They were kind of like icons at the time. I hadn't really thought about that before. I had already done Full Metal Jacket, I had already worked with Stanley Kubrick. So I pretty much had the experience working in the upper echelon. I knew what I was doing and what show I was on, and I definitely appreciated it.

BN: Can you give me any scoop on what lays ahead for Criminal Intent?

VD: I can't; it wouldn't be fair to the writers ... You can't forget that we are a crime show and while I'm on the show I'm going to play a detective who solves crimes, mostly homicides. That will continue but with Warren as our show runner, we tested the waters a bit this year with the emotional stuff and it's worked well for us, and I think we'll go in that direction even more so.