

L&O's Wolf Holds Reporters in Contempt

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By Jim Benson -- Broadcasting & Cable, 7/25/2005 9:31:00 PM

Law & Order brand creator Dick Wolf Monday lashed out at the press, complaining that it has characterized his shows as "too old" and "battered" while ignoring the fact that they are the "most profitable brand in the history of the medium."

The three shows, mother ship Law & Order, along with Criminal Intent and Special Victims Unit, last year generated \$1 billion in advertising revenue, according to Wolf.

While critics continue to give his shows good reviews, he said it turns into a "self-fulfilling prophecy when you guys write about the demise of a show. ... That's what I react to." "There is no bad news here," he said.

Wolf pointed to the "unheard of" business partnership between Wolf Films and NBC Universal for the past 16 years and summer rerun ratings last week showing that Law & Order and CSI shows accounted for seven of the top-20 shows. "I'm not saying television should be filled with just procedurals, but look at the numbers guys."

Saying he wanted to "get this off my chest," Wolf criticized the press for basically ignoring Criminal Intent star and panelist Vincent D'Onofrio in his first season with the show while lavishing all its praise on ABC's Alias.

"If you guys had been paying any attention, I firmly believe he would have gotten an Emmy nomination and a Golden Globe nomination the first season," Wolf said.

Now, five years later, Wolf said Alias reruns sold three weeks ago for \$175,000 per episode, while *Criminal Intent* "sold for 1,100 percent more." (A representative from Buena Vista TV claimed the \$175,000 figure was too low, but would not provide an exact figure.)

The three shows in the Law & Order franchise have a combined 605

episodes, and have turned TNT into the No. 1 and USA into the No. 2 basic cable networks, according to Wolf.

Wolf has been bombarded over the last year with stories about how supposedly bad his shows have been hurt by the likes of Desperate Housewives and, early in the season, CSI: New York.

Wolf insists that Criminal Intent is the "only show that could have possibly held up against Desperate Housewives" on Sunday nights. "Sure it was down, but it was not out."

Citing a "lack of sophisticated business reportage" in the consumer media, Wolf spent a good deal of time during his 30-minute TCA press tour appearance Monday sparring with reporters.

"We're not looking to be the hot show," he says. "That's not what the brand is about. It's about longevity, repeatability and about staying on the air and being a profit center for NBC for years to come."

Wolf went on the attack when asked whether his procedural dramas which, along with the CSI franchise, now proliferate primetime television run counter to network executives' desire to "think outside the envelope" to develop future hits.

'L&O' creator angry over cancellation

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By BILL BRIOUX -- Toronto Sun

BEVERLY HILLS -- Dick Wolf doesn't like getting cancelled.

The Law & Order creator told critics yesterday that he was "incredibly upset, disappointed, dismayed, any other adjectives that you could care to add," when NBC pulled the plug this spring on his third Law & Order spinoff,

Law & Order: Trial By Jury.

The courtroom drama, starring Bebe Neuwirth and, briefly, the late, great Jerry Orbach, became the first Law & Order series ever cancelled.

"How could I see it coming?" he responded after the session, rattling off statistics that showed the series pulling solid numbers in the all important 18-to-48-year-old demo just weeks before it was yanked. "How do you cancel a show that does a 6 (ratings share)?"

By giving Wolf another series -- fast. Out of the ashes of Trial By Jury will rise a new Dick Wolf series -- pitched just last Friday -- set in the world of assistant district attorneys. Always resourceful, Wolf said that series will be shot on the still standing Trial By Jury sets. He's looking to cast "five or six of the best looking, most talented actors under 30 in the country," in the new series.

NBC entertainment president Kevin Reilly told critics Sunday that "it's highly unlikely" the new series will have Law & Order in the title.

Wolf refused to rule out the possibility.

After all, as Wolf is happy to point out, the three L&O series generated one billion dollars of ad revenue last year for NBC. Would you tell this guy he can't pick titles?

Wolf also announced yesterday plans to conquer the world. He has a deal to produce a localized, French language version of Law & Order: Criminal Intent for France in 2006. "To my knowledge," said Wolf, "there's never been another format sale of a drama to a European broadcaster."

Dubbed versions of the three Law & Order series already run in 180 markets around the world. As Wolf says, "clearly, there is a tremendous appetite for the brand."

While the French legal system is far different from the American model, Wolf says the new series "won't be in conflict with the Napoleonic code." He hopes to eventually expand the brand worldwide in many different

languages.

Meanwhile, he is busy shoring up his three remaining L&Os. He has brought in new producers and writers on the 16-year-old original to help reach his stated goal of keeping it on the air longer than *Gunsmoke* (TV's current record holder for dramas at 20 seasons).

Annie Parisse, the new ADA on L&O, is part of that makeover. She joined Wolf on yesterday's panel along with Mariska Hargitay (L&O:SVU) and Vincent D'Onofrio (L&O:CI).

A beefy D'Onofrio was almost unrecognizable at yesterday's session. The actor may have bulked up to play the title role in *Five Minutes, Mr. Welles*, an upcoming film about the legendary director.

His split schedule next season (he's sharing the lead in L&O:CI with former L&O star Chris Noth) will allow D'Onofrio to devote more time to films (he just shot *The Breakup* with Vince Vaughn and Jennifer Aniston) and family. D'Onofrio is also jazzed about studying his scripts a full "10 days before we shoot it. As an actor, especially a film actor, that's an incredible thing for me."

Hargitay, nominated for her second-straight Emmy, is pumped about Season 7 on SVU. One storyline has her character thinking about a baby. Is she pregnant in real life? -- she was asked.

"Oh, just read the local rags," she said.

Dick Wolf Bares His Fangs

By Lisa de Moraes

Tuesday, July 26, 2005; Page C01
BEVERLY HILLS, Calif., July 25

"Law & Order" franchise creator Dick Wolf is angry, angry, angry that critics devoted more attention to "Alias" than to "L&O: Criminal Intent" when the shows debuted back in 2001. It cost "CI" star Vincent D'Onofrio some acting trophies, he claimed.

"The first season all the heat was on 'Alias,' and we had to fight to get anything in the press, and [D'Onofrio] was doing a job that, if you'd been paying attention, I firmly [believe] would have gotten him an Emmy and a Golden Globe," Wolf told critics Monday during NBC's second day onstage at Summer TV Press Tour 2005.

Besides which, "Criminal Intent" has proved to be more lucrative in syndication, he said.

" 'Alias' sold [in syndication] for \$175,000 an episode; 'Criminal Intent' sold for 1,100 percent more. Do the math," snapped a steamed Wolf, who

apparently did not get the NBC memo to staff re: colonic (everyone gets one; everyone loses sense of entitlement) that NBC Entertainment chief Kevin Reilly had spoken of so glowingly the day before.

(FYI: According to trade reports, cable network TNT bought weekday syndication rights to "Alias" for about \$200,000 per episode, and distributor Buena Vista sold weekend syndication rights to broadcast stations in a barter-only deal, which means BV gets to sell ads in the show on those stations. The trades reported that cable nets USA and Bravo anted up an estimated \$2 million per episode to split syndication rights to "Criminal Intent." And here's probably a good place to say that NBC, TNT, USA and Bravo are all owned by NBC Universal, which also houses Wolf's production company, Wolf Films.)

"The three [Law & Order] shows have turned TNT into the number one network on cable and USA the number two network on cable," Wolf fumed.

What really had his knickers in a knot were articles written last fall about how "Law & Order" series were dinged in the ratings opposite launches of "Desperate Housewives" and "CSI: NY."

"There is no bad news here," he said. " 'Criminal Intent' is the only show that could possibly have held up against 'Desperate Housewives.' Sure it was down, but it was not out, and all you have to do is look at the repeat numbers this summer.

"You guys don't report the financial aspects of how successful the brand is," he lectured critics, one of whom noted afterward that "Alias" was probably more lucrative than, say, "Macbeth." ("News flash: Dick Wolf hates us," another critic cracked in the press room.)

"This brand exists, at the moment, alone in the cosmology of long-term profitability," Wolf proclaimed during his morning Q&A session.

But wait, there's more.

Critics don't "fuss" enough about "Law & Order: Special Victims Unit," even though it's generally described as a "mature" show, Wolf complained.

"You read about who's hot, who's not -- these shows are never mentioned," he said, turning right around to say, "We're not looking to be the hot show; that's not what the 'Law & Order' brand is about. It's about longevity and about repeatability and about staying on the air and being a profit center for NBC for years to come."



(By Mario Anzuoni -- Reuters)

One critic noted that Wolf was onstage "with three very well-reviewed actors" from his shows, that "your shows regularly get good reviews," and that he has the only series on TV "where cast changes are reported generally with gusto, but you always seem to be angry at us and . . . I'm seriously wondering, what would you consider fair treatment?"

"What makes me angry is the lack of sophisticated business reportage," Wolf shot back. "I understand there are business sections and television sections, but, come on, guys, there are no good-news newspapers."

The success of "Desperate Housewives" at "Law & Order's" expense is "a legitimate story, but . . . there is no recognition . . . that, yeah, we may get knocked around a little bit, but this is still the most profitable brand in the history of the medium . . . these shows generated \$1 billion in advertising revenue last year."

(Variety reported on Monday that the "Law & Order" franchise runs an average of 45 times a week on NBC, TNT and USA, and the trade paper quoted an NBC Universal rep saying the brand generated more than \$1 billion in ad revenue across those platforms last year.)

Wolf acknowledged that he had seen such references about the shows in "business articles" but not in "the popular press."

Wolf had opened his Q&A session with a little speech assuring critics he was "incredibly upset, disappointed, dismayed and any other adjectives that you could care to add" about NBC yanking "Law & Order: Trial by Jury" off the air last season. But, he noted, his relationship with NBC Universal is more like "a long-term marriage with no possibility of divorce" than a standard business relationship, and promised critics that the brand "is the most important piece of business to both of us."

Easing the pain somewhat, Wolf is now at work on a new series about New York assistant district attorneys that will use the "Trial by Jury" set -- did you know that the average age of an assistant DA in Manhattan is 28 years? Wolf says so.

And Wolf wanted critics to know he "couldn't be more thrilled" that his dream of selling the "Law & Order: Criminal Intent" format to an international network has come to fruition.

In one of those strange coincidences that make you think that maybe there is a higher power and maybe Jennifer Love Hewitt really can talk to dead people, on the very same morning that Wolf took the stage to reprimand critics, Variety broke the news that Wolf had struck a deal with French TV network TF1 to format "CI" for French audiences. Wolf told the trade paper that it was "an enormous accomplishment" and "by creating a localized French version, the potential to grow that audience becomes limitless."

At some point during his rant, Wolf insisted, "I'm not [ticked] off. I'm a very happy guy."

Mr. Wolf: I have served with happy guys. I knew happy guys. Happy guys are friends of mine. Mr. Wolf, you're no happy guy.

'Law & Order' creator Wolf mad about ink

By Kevin D. Thompson

Palm Beach Post Television Critic

Thursday, July 28, 2005

BEVERLY HILLS, Calif. — Dick Wolf is arguably the most successful producer in television history.

The last time I checked, about 38 Law & Orders were on the air. OK, there's really only three. I've never been that good at math. The point is, Wolf is a producing machine who can probably afford to buy his own island-nation.

So, why is it that whenever Wolf comes to the TV Tour, he always appears, well, angry?

"I'm not angry," Wolf responds when the question is raised.

Then he goes on to explain why he is angry.

"What makes me angry is the lack of sophisticated business reportage," Wolf says. "I'll send you the clips. If you saw the volume of articles in the fall (about) how badly the (Law & Order) shows have been hurt by CSI: NY and Desperate Housewives, it wasn't good reporting."

Wolf isn't finished. In fact, he's on one of his legendary rolls.

"Yeah, we may get knocked around a little bit, but this is still the most profitable brand in the history of the medium," Wolf boasts. "I mean, these shows generated \$1 billion in advertising revenue last year... but I'm not (ticked) off. I'm a very happy guy."

He should be — for a lot of reasons.

The most recent one is that NBC has announced a French version of Law &

Order: Criminal Intent. (Just how do you say perp in French?) Anyway, it's in pre-production in Paris and scheduled to air in 2006.

"I couldn't be more thrilled," Wolf says. "Many of you, over the years, have heard me talking about this as a dream. It's now become a reality. Because of the French love of mysteries, we are in a situation that could really bear fruit. And I think if it bears fruit in France, it's a pump-primer for the rest of the world."

It's official: World domination is Wolf's ultimate goal.

And just what does Vincent D'Onofrio, who plays the quirky Detective Goren on Criminal Intent, think of the new French version?

"It means that we have a good show and a good formula," he says. "I think it would be great to see it played. I'm sure whatever actor it is, (he's) going to do it differently than I do it. I don't know if his name is going to be Goren."

Says Wolf: "It doesn't sound very French to me."

Speaking of Goren, NBC announced last year that D'Onofrio, who had some health issues, would appear in only half of the Criminal Intent's 22 episodes while Chris Noth would reprise his hunky Mike Logan character for the other 11.

That unorthodox arrangement works fine with D'Onofrio.

"It means for the first time since the first season, I will actually be able to sit with the script in my lap for 10 days before we shoot it," he says. "As an actor, especially a film actor, that's an incredible thing for me. Secondly, I'll have a life."

That life will include more film work. D'Onofrio says he just finished shooting The Breakup with Vince Vaughn and Jennifer Aniston. He also recently produced, directed and starred in Five Minutes, Mr. Welles in which he plays the famed Orson Welles.

Mariska Hargitay, the hard-nosed Olivia Benson on *Special Victims Unit*, silently wishes she could cut such a deal.

"I'm not going to lie — I'm very jealous," she says. "But Vincent really needed it. I don't think he was ever not in a scene."

But getting back to Wolf.

Not surprisingly, he wasn't too pleased when NBC yanked *Trial By Jury*.

"I was incredibly upset, disappointed, dismayed and any other adjective that you could care to add," he says.

The move, however, was business, not personal. Nobody understands that better than Wolf.

"That the (*Law & Order*) brand is the most important piece of business to obviously both of us, this is much more like a long-term marriage with no possibility of divorce," he says. "We're stuck together and as in every long-term marriage, there may be hills and valleys."

On the bright side, Wolf points out that a new character-driven show about assistant district attorneys will air on NBC in the next year.

"It's going to be much more of an ensemble than the other shows," he says. "There is going to be more time spent figuring out how (the characters) are driven and what made them who they're becoming."

We all know Dick Wolf is driven. Now, if only he could be a little happier at Press Tour.
