

Paul Gross and Martha Burns onstage together for first time in 30 years

MARRIED COUPLE TO APPEAR IN DARK COMEDY DOMESTICATED BY BRUCE NORRIS, OPENING NOV. 17.



Photo by Guntar Kravis

The most famous couple in Canadian show business are appearing together onstage for the first time in more than 30 years.

Paul Gross and Martha Burns will star in Bruce Norris's hit comedy *Domesticated*, to be directed by Philip Riccio for The Company Theatre, opening Nov. 17 at the Berkeley Street Theatre in Toronto.

"Why haven't we appeared together in so long?" Gross asks on the phone. "It's mainly because Martha doesn't like my acting."

"I know," deadpans Burns. "It's a real sacrifice to do this."

The couple met in the early 1980s at the National Arts Centre when they both performed in Sharon Pollock's *Walsh*. They later starred together in 1984 at Montreal's Centaur Theatre in the Marivaux comedy *Successful Strategies*.

"And that was it," laughs Burns. Not doing theatre together "really had nothing to do with how well or how badly we got along; it's just that Paul started doing a lot more film and television, and that's how things worked out."

(The couple did work together on the TV series *Slings and Arrows*, which ran from 2003 to 2006.)

The play that has brought them together is *Domesticated*, a dark, dark comedy from the pen of Norris, best known for *Clybourne Park*.

It deals with a popular politician who is discovered by the police at the bedside of an injured prostitute and how his marriage as well as his career are both put the wringer

by the public and the media.

"It's the kind of play that should be wildly enjoyable and yet make you feel extremely uncomfortable," says Gross. Burns chuckles wickedly as she adds, "I'd love to follow all the couples as they leave the theatre afterwards and listen to their conversations."

An assortment of recent philandering politicians, mainly American, come to mind, but Gross insists that "it's not based on any one particular case. You can find a bit of Eliot Spitzer here, a little dash of Bill Clinton there, but it ultimately goes off into its own interior world."

"We've all seen that scene," Burns adds, "the guy on the podium looking shamefaced, while his wife stands next to him, expressionless but devastated. Well, this goes way beyond that. It takes you deep inside these people and their lives and their worlds."

When asked who is the more sympathetic character, Gross jokes, "Say that Paul said he's the heroic one."

Burns snaps back, "And then write that Martha laughed mockingly, because she's the real hero."

"The author takes a pretty sharp knife and pen to both of them," Gross says. Burns concurs: "It's up to the audience to decide who their sympathy will be with."

As for learning how to work together onstage again after so long, Gross says, "We've got it all under control. We're just looking for separate apartments."

"Maybe in separate cities," growls Burns.

And then they laugh the way that only people who have been married for more than a quarter of a century can laugh.