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# Between The Lines... With Paul Gross and Martha Burns



The Canadian showbiz couple talk reuniting on stage in their new play, *Domesticated*.

"I think everyone in the world would like to have heard the first conversation after [the Monica Lewinsky affair] between Bill and Hillary [Clinton]," Canadian actor Paul Gross laughs as we chat in a back room at the Berkeley Street Theatre in downtown Toronto. "Just what did they say to each other? 'A cigar?' I can't quite imagine that conversation."

The former *Due South* star turns to his wife, actress Martha Burns, with whom he co-starred in the Canadian television comedy *Slings and Arrows* between 2003 and 2006. They exchange smiles about an hour before they have to head down the hallway to a stage about a hundred feet away to channel a Clintonesque world of political scandal in the Company Theatre production of *Domesticated*. Penned by Pulitzer Prize-winning American scribe Bruce Norris, the story centres around a politician caught in bed with a prostitute and the marital fallout that ensues.

The play is brash, blunt, devastating and often hilarious, but as the couple's onstage marriage crumbles their off-stage union thrives.

In 1984, Gross performed alongside Burns at the Centaur Theatre in Montreal in a production of *Successful Strategies*. They married four years later, had two children and starred in the Canadian television comedy *Slings and Arrows* in the early 2000s, between leading separate, successful acting careers. They, however, never appeared in the theatre together again.

Now, Gross, 56, and Burns, 57, who met during a 1982 National Arts Centre production of Walsh, reunite on stage for the first time in 31 years for the Toronto production of *Domesticated*.

MIKE CRISOLAGO: How did it come about that you are performing on stage together after 30-plus years?

PAUL GROSS: Phil Riccio, the director, had approached me about the part. When I read it I thought Martha should play my wife. Then he said, "Well Martha's unbelievable but I hesitated to ask because I thought it would be too weird for a married couple to do it." I said, no, I think it would be better because ... we have a short-hand so you don't have to go through that long period of getting to know someone you're working with. And it's been fantastic.

I think he thought we were going to stab each other in rehearsal or something. Or she'd punch me or set me on fire. I don't know.

MB: But I think it'd be more likely that two people who didn't know each other that well would have developed really antagonistic connections because all the clues in the play are all the things that have gone wrong recently, not so much about what went right.

MC: Did you attempt to channel real-life marital emotions while performing as a fictional married couple?

MB: Yeah ... you've built up your layer of experience and you want to have something to draw on. Your imagination can take you into the fictional relationship. Or when you know someone well it's easier to think of one thing that bugs you and just go for that.

PG: For me, if I'm angry in a scene I don't think, "I remember that time I was angry at Martha." But that's all you have to use is your emotional life ... and then that kind of finds its way through the words you're given to say. You're kind of always just using yourself, which is why many actors are so horrifying to be around. [Laughs]