



Pure Goldwyn

Tony Goldwyn sinks his teeth into a new series that's equally *Scandal-ous*.

BY LAUREN PAIGE KENNEDY

SCOTT MODERMOTT/CORBIS OUTLINE

When presidential poser Tony Goldwyn (of ABC's deliciously addictive *Scandal*) met Barack Obama at the White House Correspondents' Dinner last May, the leader of the free world reportedly held out his hand to the actor, shook it firmly and said, "Mr. President."

What was Goldwyn supposed to do but return in kind? "I repeated it, trying not to look like an idiot," he told a blogger in June. Did POTUS cop to watching the show?

"He told me he [does], but I doubt it," Goldwyn says. Word on the street, however, is that Michelle binge-watches the show whenever the first family is on vacation.

If you love watching the 54-year-old Goldwyn as — hands down — the sexiest president ever, you'll definitely want to check out his riveting new series *The Divide*, which debuted on WE TV in July. He co-executive produces and often directs the series (although he never appears on-screen, sad as the news may be for fans of "Fitz").

Despite the WE network's rather fluffy image, *The Divide* is a smart, serious, scripted and character-driven series based on the inherently dramatic workings of the Innocence Project, which is a national litigation and public policy organization dedicated to exonerating wrongly convicted individuals through DNA testing.

The show shines a light on questionably litigated convicts, and challenges the evidence, police, attorneys and judicial system that put them in prison. On the series, the organization is called the "Innocence Initiative" and is guided behind the scenes by real-life Innocence Project co-founder Barry C. Scheck.

The actor's long been interested in the show's subject matter, and has even actively lobbied on the Hill with Scheck and other IP heavyweights. He first became involved with the Innocence Project when he directed the 2010 feature film *Conviction*, starring Hilary Swank as the sister of a man wrongfully convicted of murder.

"It took several years to get production going on *Conviction*, and during that time I got engaged with Innocence," Goldwyn says. "There are so many stories of the odysseys people go through when in prison; every story is inherently dramatic. While we were shooting the film, I kept saying to one of my production partners that there's a TV series here somewhere. We couldn't figure out how to do it about the Innocence Project alone; that had been tried before, unsuccessfully." It was over drinks with his producing partner, Richard LaGravenese, when the pair "started kicking around ideas, and asked, 'What if we make this the story about a prosecutor who maybe gets it wrong?' Then we saw potential."

What makes *The Divide* so gripping is that it presents a roster of characters that challenges established notions on race — the district attorney is African-American,

while the pilot's first showcased convict is white — while tackling economic and gender issues, too.

"We look at it in all aspects: marital relationships, power and politics, and the divides we ultimately find within ourselves," says Goldwyn. "As for issues of race, we take a postmodern view of where we are right now in our country, in terms of our attitudes. A central character [on the show] is an affluent, powerful, middle-aged black man who sees himself in a post-racial light; he's of the Obama generation. We have a black president, and we like to perceive ourselves as living in a post-racial society. But it's just not the case. This character's father, however, is from a previous generation, and he sees things in a context of a harsher reality. He fought for civil rights long and hard against a white-dominated system. Now he's the black police commissioner [of Philadelphia], and his son is a black DA.

Goldwyn is also excited about the multidimensional, "real" female characters on his new series. "Marin Ireland and Nia Long both play strong female characters on *The Divide*," says Goldwyn, "which is the mandate for WE. It's AMC — with a slight tilt toward women." And while both actresses are undeniably attractive, neither is "glammed up." The show is intentionally raw and un-scrubbed.

When Goldwyn isn't busy penning scripts, guiding actors, reimagining networks, acting on and off-Broadway or putting in long hours opposite the incomparable Kerry Washington on *Scandal*, the self-described political junkie also closely follows what's happening in D.C.

"I've always been fascinated by Washington. Early in my career I played so many characters that worked in or around the White House," he says, referring to his acting stints as Jimmy Carter's Press Secretary Jody Powell in a 1991 made-for-TV movie, as well as the role of chief of staff in the 1993 blockbuster *The Pelican Brief*.

Those starter jobs ignited an interest in lawmaking that led to his serving as president of arts advocacy group The Creative Coalition for seven years, where he pushed Congress for tax incentives to keep film productions — and the many American jobs they potentially delivered — from migrating to other countries.

And while he's never stumped for a political candidate, he continues to keep up with social causes, including the Innocence Project — which explains the personal passion he brings to *The Divide*. And if it's anything close to what he delivers on *Scandal*, prepare to get hooked. ☘

Tony's Stage Turns



TV fans know Tony Goldwyn as President Fitzgerald Grant III. Film buffs recall his breakout role as the baddie in *Ghost*. But it would be scandalous to not mention his bona fide cred as a stage actor. And he can sing! Goldwyn's most recent theatrical turn was as Captain von Trapp (opposite Laura Osnes as Maria and Brooke Shields as Elsa Schröder) in a one-night-only concert performance of *The Sound of Music* at Carnegie Hall to benefit music education in March 2012. He's also appeared in a Broadway production of *Promises, Promises* and *Holiday*, as well as off-Broadway in *Lady in the Dark*. —LPK