**WS:** Besides being first on the call sheet, what extra responsibilities do you have as one of the executive producers on the show?

**Meloni:** We all have different talents or gifts. I think one of mine is being able to see a scene and help give it clarity or possibly a little more dynamism. That’s really my role. I say the writers break the rocks, and I just sit there and polish them! I try to do it respectfully and with their blessing. I want them to engage. But I do have a point of view. Sometimes, I don’t understand the scene. Or I suggest, again, very respectfully, how I think the scene may serve the story better in the long run. That’s where I put my two cents in. Every once in a while, I’ll make a suggestion to the director. I’m there to be another set of eyes – a set of eyes that has done this role for a long time.

**WS:** Well, the writers don’t act.

**Meloni:** Yes. It’s just a different angle. That’s why I’m saying another set of eyes. Very often, things are written, and I’ve written stuff, where, in my head and on the page, it was great. Then you hear it read, and you think, oh, something is missing. There’s a punch missing or something’s off about it. It is a collaborative endeavor, and I’m part of that collaboration.

**WS:** The television landscape has become very competitive. We viewers have almost too much to choose from. Do shows need to the different today?

**Meloni:** For as many stories as there are out there, there are as many viewers to pick and choose what kind of story they like being told. I know what you’re saying, and I agree. I’m all over the landscape. Sometimes I like a great story, but they are telling it in their own unique fashion. That’s great and very entertaining. Or you want something totally outside what you are used to.

**WS:** And they like coming back to characters they love. I think the whole Law & Order franchise offers that.

**Meloni:** Yes. I think that’s the role this show plays, and my character supplies. Our marching orders were to tell stories in a little more cinematic fashion. And again, because we have the luxury of having eight episodes to tell a story, we have a little breathing room in how we unspool the story, but it still has to have dynamism and something a character you enjoy, trust, or have feelings about because he’s been in your den for 20 years.

**WS:** As an extension of that, to what do you attribute the worldwide popularity of Dick Wolf’s Law and Order franchise?

**Meloni:** I don’t know. I find it fascinating, and I have it at that. Dick Wolf has really hit on some kind of formula.

**WS:** Stabler displays strength and vulnerability. In the last episode of season two, he is awarded a Combat Cross medal, given for acts of extraordinary heroism. That was difficult for him to accept. Can you explain why? Will we see that side of him again?

**Meloni:** That was about a man coming to terms with the multifaceted aspects of his relationship with his father. We all come to terms with the dynamic with our parents. I think that’s what that was all about and the power behind that whole storytelling. We haven’t picked up that line in the season three, but we can always return to it.

**WS:** Speak for a moment about your fellow cast members, from Ellen Burstyn, who plays your mom Bernadette, to everyone else. They’re great.

**Meloni:** Yes, and they’re great to work with Ellen, I don’t have the words. Some cast members are new. Working with Danielle Truitt [Sergeant Ayanna Bell] has been fun. It’s so nice to come back in the Law & Order world and have the themes to find the relationships that make up who we are to each other.

**WS:** Last but not least, working with Mariska Hargitay, was that like getting back on a bike? The dynamic seems precisely the same.

**Meloni:** What you see is people who know each other, love each other, respect each other, have singularly unique relationships with each other off the screen, and I think that translates to on the screen. The fans help that along, their enthusiasm for what they know and yearn for. All that stuff is baked into the cake of when we get together.

**WS:** Will there be Bensler? Will Olívia Benson and Elliot Stabler get together?

**Meloni:** I wish I could tell you, but then I’d have to kill you!