

Channelling the comfort of a cuppa

Streaming services vie for wallets of those who love British TV, E2

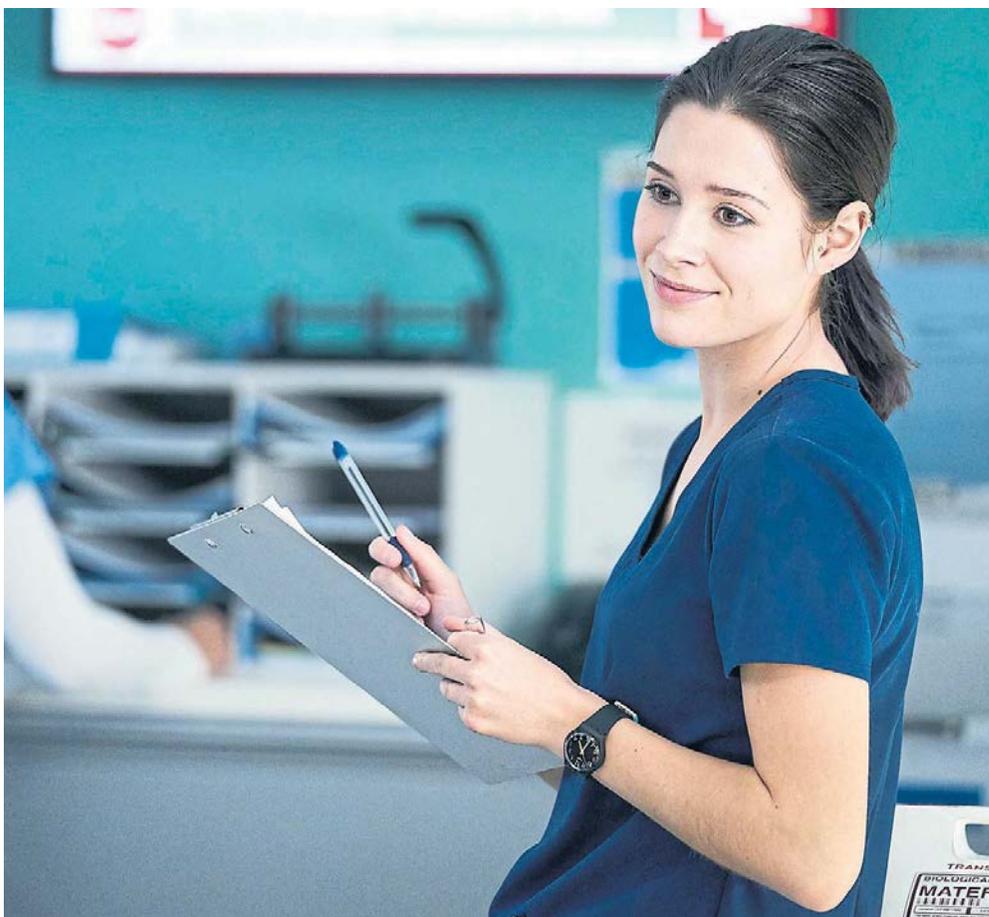


'Princesses are never disabled'

Hamilton author Amanda Leduc takes on fairy-tale culture, E11

ENTERTAINMENT & BOOKS

MEDICAL CENTRE



CORUS ENTERTAINMENT

Natasha Calis plays Ashley Collins in Global's new drama "Nurses," executive produced by Ilana Frank ("Rookie Blue").

Nurse and doctor series have always been popular, but there's been a sudden surge in Canadian-made creations hitting the air



ELLY DASSAS CBC

Serinda Swan as coroner Dr. Jenny Cooper in CBC's "Coroner." Rights to the show have already been sold to the U.K., Germany, France and Australia.

BILL BRIOUX SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Maybe it's because of universal health care, or that our own waiting rooms and walk-in clinics are so crowded, but Canadians seem to have a fever right now for hospital-based TV shows.

The ABC import "The Good Doctor," starring Freddie Highmore as a young autistic surgeon with savant syndrome, is now the most-watched series in English Canada. This season, it has been drawing close to 2.5 million viewers a week on CTV, according to ratings-gatherer Numeris.

Other medical shows such as "New Amsterdam," "The Resident" and even 16-year-old "Grey's Anatomy" are enjoying healthy ratings.

Since, as radio wit Fred Allen once quipped, "Imitation is the sincerest form of television," Canadian programmers have taken note. This week alone has seen the premiere of "Nurses" on Global and the return of "Coroner" on CBC. Coming soon: the launch of "Transplant" on CTV. There's even a new B.C.-based YouTube series from established pros lampooning the genre

TELEVISION continued on E3

> LOOKAHEAD

Twenty books you need to know about

Dealing with grief continues to be a topic that fascinates publishers and authors

DEBORAH DUNDAS BOOKS EDITOR

We might look at the new year as a blank page onto which we can write a whole new chapter of our lives. We can also look at it as the chance to add to our to-read piles and be introduced to a whole new year's worth — and in this case decade's worth — of new ideas, characters and stories.

Even this early in the year some trends are becoming apparent.

Women writing thrillers have been dominating the bestsellers lists for a few years now, and that trend shows no sign of slowing down this spring. Canadian women writing thrillers you'll want to grab include Roz Nay with "Hurry Home," Robyn Harding, who's out with "The Swap," and Amy Stuart with the thriller "Still Here."

Dealing with grief and dying continues to be a topic that fascinates both publishers and authors, but new takes on it resonate in a time of broader societal difficulty — how do you find joy in times where grief and death seem overwhelming: "How to Die," by Ray Robertson, (Biblioasis, Jan. 28) riffing on Montaigne's idea that "He who would teach men to die would teach them to live.," in "Nobody Ever Talks About Anything But The End," by Liz Levine (Simon and

BOOKS continued on E10



Jim Carrey's "Memoirs and Misinformation" is a semi-autobiographical novel.

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Hospital shows sell globally

TELEVISION from E1

— “Hospital Show” stars Sara Canning and Adrian Holmes as actors forever tongue-tied when it comes to spitting out medical terms.

“Nurses,” on the other hand, plays it straight. The series follows the lives of five young nursing interns as they are thrown into the life-and-death struggles of a big-city emergency room.

In Monday’s ripped-from-the-headlines pilot episode, the kids have barely scrubbed in when several severely wounded pedestrians from a vehicular manslaughter attack are wheeled into the ER.

Why are there suddenly so many medical shows on network television? The simple answer is because they sell. Broadcast networks in the U.S. and Canada like procedurals because viewers return to them, week after week. Plus, if a genre is booming in the North American market, producers can reap bigger rewards through international sales to the U.K., European markets and, now, international streaming services.

One who knows the TV game well is Ilana Frank, who hopes to find another Missy Peregrym among the new nursing recruits. The executive producer helped shepherd that Montreal native and current “FBI” star to fame a decade ago on “Rookie Blue.”

Frank, also an EP on CBC’s “Burden of Truth,” says she



YAN TURCOTTE RICK HENRIQUES PHOTO

Hamza Haq, left, stars alongside John Hannah in the new TV series “Transplant,” in which Haq plays an ER doctor who fled his native Syria to come to Canada.

pitched the basic idea for “Nurses” to Corus, home of Global TV, after reading the bestseller “The Making of a Nurse” a decade ago. There it sat before the success of “The Good Doctor” pushed it to the top of Corus’ list.

Linda Pope (who worked with Frank on the hospital series “Saving Hope” as well as “Rookie Blue”) is also an executive producer as is Adam Pettle, a writer and showrunner on “Hope,” “Blue” and now “Nurses.” If the new show seems like it could have been called, “Saving Rookie Nurses,” thank these three.

“My dad’s a doctor, my step-mother’s a nurse. I kind of grew up in and around a hospital,” says Pettle, who was excited at the opportunity to “flip the medical drama on its head a little bit. Nurses are usually

background performers on TV. I wanted to see a show from the nurses’ point of view.”

It helped, says Frank, that the producers were able to assemble much of the “Saving Hope” production team. One exception was production designer John Dondertman (“Orphan Black”), who turned a converted warehouse in Mississauga into the series’ fictional hospital.

The setting has to look real, says Frank. “So much of the series takes place within these hospital walls.”

The setting on the upcoming Montreal-based CTV series “Transplant” is equally authentic. Production designer Andre Guimond (“Street Legal,” “19-2”) and his team constructed an entire hospital floor at Montreal’s Cinepool Studios.

The irony here, after decades

of Toronto and Montreal-based shows standing in for Chicago and New York, is that “Transplant” is shot in Montreal but set in Toronto. In TV, this may be the ultimate compliment: Canada is finally good enough to stand in for itself.

Torri Higginson (“This Life,” “Stargate Atlantis”), who plays head nurse Claire Malone on “Transplant,” feels the set becomes a character on the series. Recreating a hospital set is actually harder than creating the interior of a spaceship, says the Burlington native, because “this is real, whereas the other represents something we haven’t seen before so you don’t have the same marker for authenticity.”

Scottish actor John Hannah (the “Mummy” film series), who plays the chief of the emergency department, gets all the

fuss about hospital dramas. “You have life and death situations and you have an interesting group of people who are facing it and that’s hopefully what the audience are going to connect with, the different characters.”

The hook with “Transplant” is the transplanted young medic at the centre of the story. Hamza Haq (“The Indian Detective,” “Quantico”) plays Bashir “Bash” Hamed, an ER doctor who fled his native Syria to come to Canada. At first he’ll take any job, no matter how demeaning.

Hannah thinks Haq’s storyline will set “Transplant” apart from other medical shows. “Immigration is a very hot topic,” says the actor. “To have this guy, who is living here, working in a kitchen, unable to work in his profession, get this opportunity is a really interesting journey for a TV show.”

Unlike “Nurses” and “Transplant,” CBC’s “Coroner” combines the two pillars of broadcast network drama: cop and doc shows. Serinda Swan stars as an intense, Toronto-based medical examiner, shattered yet steeled after the death of her husband. “It sort of has a ‘Nurse Jackie’ vibe to it,” says Swan, referring to the U.S. cable drama from the decade just ended starring Edie Falco. Roger Cross stars as the seasoned detective delivering newcomers to her morgue. Together they’re sort of the Mulder and Scully of cop-doc crossovers.

The series is executive produced by Morwyn Brebner, who also worked with Frank on “Rookie Blue” and “Saving Hope.” “Coroner” averaged over a million viewers a week last season as Canada’s No. 1 new homegrown drama and is a strong export for distributor NBC Universal, with rights already sold to the U.K., Germany, France, Australia and several other territories.

Says Swan, “It’s the little engine that could.”

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