

WOMEN BEHIND CANADIAN TV: ADRIENNE MITCHELL AND JANE MAGGS

[Bridget Liszewski](#) | February 13, 2017 | [Canadian TV](#) | [No Comments](#)



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Sometimes life is all about finding that one person willing to take a chance on you and give you a real shot to succeed. For writer Jane Maggs, that person was director and executive producer Adrienne Mitchell, with whom she co-created the upcoming CBC drama series *Bellevue* starring Anna Paquin. The women served as co-showrunners on the eight episode series, premiering Monday, February 20 at 9 p.m., about a missing transgender teen from a small blue-collar town. Paquin's Detective Annie Ryder is the cop leading up the investigation and in the process, is confronted with her mysterious past as she tries to get answers. Allen Leech (*Downton Abbey*) plays Annie's on and off again ex, while Shawn Doyle (*The Expanse*, *Frontier*) costars as Annie's boss, Police Chief Peter Welland.

The project began as a script that Maggs brought to Mitchell, a principal owner and Executive Producer at Back Alley Film Productions, who's past credits include *Durham County*, *Bomb Girls* and *Played*. The pair then teamed up on *Bellevue* and recently joined *The TV Junkies* as part of our Women Behind Canadian TV [series](#). They discuss what it was like working together, why it's so important to Mitchell to give other young female

talents a chance, and why today's climate is perfect for the issues that *Bellevue* looks to address.

This interview has been edited and condensed.

The TV Junkies: Did you both always know you wanted to work in television? Can you share a bit about your backgrounds?

Jane Maggs: I went to theater school as an actor originally, so I always knew on some level I wanted to be in the arts. I was really terrible at it and didn't get a lot of parts, so I started writing plays for myself to be in and realized I loved writing much more than I loved acting. I went to the Canadian Film Centre and then met Adrienne and we've been working together.

Adrienne Mitchell: There's a bit of a generational divide between Jane and I, and *Bellevue* is Jane's first series. It's an amazing thing actually that she's been able to do this, and in so many ways has been my equal as a co-showrunner and co-creator on this series. But in terms of me, I knew I was going to be in this industry in Grade 12 when in a Consumer's Education class they showed a video that was behind the scenes of directing and I said 'That's what I'm going to do!' I ended up doing that and never looked back. I love working in television where you can work with sound, visual, actors, writing and it's this multimedia fully immersive experience. That's what excited me and here we are!

I've been a part of some really great shows and in different genres, but it's very hard to find writers that can come up with unique ideas and have a real handle on complex idiosyncratic characters that draw you in. When I read Jane's pilot I was blown away.



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TTVJ: What was the process like that brought you together on *Bellevue*?

JM: I brought a script to Adrienne Mitchell and Janis Lundman, so Adrienne's been very involved in the creative from the very beginning. I've been given opportunities by Janis and Adrienne that, as a young writer, I would've never been given. They want to be true and foster young people, so I'm incredibly lucky.

AM: Especially female talent. That's a real goal of ours is to foster female talent, both writing and directing. We often worked as collaborators, and I will say that I cannot believe how strong Jane is in terms of her work as a showrunner. I didn't feel like I was working with someone that I had to mentor. I felt like I was working with an equal and it was a meeting of minds that I could just dream of. It all worked really well and we just get each other because our aesthetics and ways of telling stories are really quite similar. It's been this incredible, inter-generational union. [laughs]

JM: I will also say we had another amazing woman we worked with named [Morwyn Brebner](#) who I got to work with in the script writing stages. She was incredible in working through every episode and we really lucked out.

TTVJ: Canadian TV, and especially CBC, seems to be taking a lot of risks with their new programs. *Bellevue* tackles what some would call “controversial” topics, given the victim is a transgender teen, but why did you know this was the story you wanted to tell?

AM: I think it's very close to our hearts. I have family—my brother—who is very involved in the community and it's an area we need to talk about, explore and give voice to. We're living in a very strange society right now. On the one hand we've made such strides in the women's movement and LGBTQ rights, but on the other we've got the Donald Trump phenomena happening and those things are co-existing. So in a strange way the series looks at intolerance, what it means to be different in a small town, and the impact on the missing teen and the impact on the town, who is putting all their hopes in this potential NHL hero who may be throwing it all away. These are timely and important questions and we wanted the series to resonate in that way.

TTVJ: You've mentioned fostering young female talent, and in addition to yourself Adrienne, you had [April Mullen](#) direct some episodes. Was that a conscious decision to include a woman since the number of women directors is so low?

AM: Absolutely! Not only is April talented, but yes, I wanted to find an opportunity for her. What was happening with her is that she's moving from shooting genre movies and wanted

to get into more drama series. This was an opportunity for her to do that and I really wanted to give her that. We'll continue to try to find other female directors to give that opportunity to.



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TTVJ: Anna Paquin is a pretty big name to bring on board this project, but what made her perfect for the role of Annie?

JM: She's incredibly talented and such an interesting actor to watch, but when we met her it was so apparent that she had a lot of the qualities that Annie had. I mean that in the nicest way possible because Annie is a bit of a mess, but Anna is not a mess. She's a force and has an incredible amount of energy, her brain moves faster than other people, she has a biting humor, is very smart and in a lot of ways is the character. She was also up for doing a role that wasn't glamorous, it was gritty and real. That was perfect for us because we didn't want to make a cop in high heels running around solving crime.

TTVJ: The first season of *Bellevue* is very focused on one case. Do you already have plans on how you'd handle another season?

AM: Yes we do! We have a great plan for Season 2 and just hope CBC will be on board.

JM: The case will be different, but the characters and their issues will always be there.

AM: All the questions and mysteries opened here will be resolved at the end of this season. People will find the answers they are looking for.

TTVJ: Do you have any advice to share with young people in the industry?

AM: Reach out to people whose work you like. If you feel connected to a body of work and as a writer or director reach out to them. You'll be surprised how many meetings you can get. A lot of female producers, directors and senior directors want to give young women a shot and will find ways to do that. I think it's more about just meeting people and finding people who have a similar vision.

JM: For me it's also trusting that people are interested in what you have to say because for a long time you can doubt that people are interested. Also, trust that there are people in bringing you along and working with you in a mentor scenario.

Are you looking forward to *Bellevue*? Sound off in the comments below!

Bellevue premieres Monday, February 20 at 9 p.m. ET on CBC. Read more from our *Women Behind Canadian TV* series [here](#).