

GOSPEL OF POP

The founders of Choir! Choir! Choir! say it's a mystery why it just keeps growing. E2



ENTERTAINMENT



Serinda Swan stars in CBC's *Coroner*. Left, Swan as Paige Arkin on *Graceland*, sporting a look she says held her back.

CBC

The LONG & SHORT of a career

Cutting her hair changed the kinds of roles Serinda Swan took on, including CBC's new drama *Coroner*

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TELEVISION CRITIC

Serinda Swan could likely write a graduate thesis on the cultural weight that society places on hair.

After all, when the Vancouver native chopped off her signature flowing locks she inadvertently started a social experiment that changed the trajectory of her career.

It started with her starring role as Medusa on the big budget *Marvel's Inhumans* for ABC (cancelled after one season last November). The part required her to have short hair after her superhero character is shaved bald by her enemies to strip her of her mighty powers.

And it ends in her starring role as doctor Jenny Cooper in the CBC TV drama *Coroner*, which premieres Jan. 7 at 9 p.m. In between those roles, the experiment would lead to a TED talk on body image and the perception of sexuality in the entertainment industry.

"There is a connection between hair colour or hair cut and what people think you're capable of in the industry," Swan said in an interview with the Star.

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Haircut 'changed things completely'

SWAN from E!

"And early on I had to play into that typecasting to make my career work. I had to slowly take these shiny characters and maybe give them a little more humanity, and people started to give me more opportunity."

Early in her career Swan played sexualized characters such as Dwayne Johnson's love interest in *Ballers* or Aphrodite, the goddess of love in *Percy Jackson & The Olympians: The Lightning Thief*.

Her roles earned her a spot as a Maxim cover girl as "Canada's hottest export."

But after chopping off her hair for *Inhumans*, the 34-year-old actress noticed an immediate effect: She would lose social media followers every time she posted a photo of her new hairstyle. But this, she says emphatically, wasn't an end but a beginning.

"Marvel gave me this opportunity to shave my head. And all of a sudden I was able to go for different roles that I normally don't go out for," says Swan.

"It changed things completely."

That led her to the starring role in the Toronto-shot *Coroner*, based on the books by British novelist M.R. Hall and created by *Saving Hope's* Morwyn Brebner.

"I knew that I didn't want to be wigged. I wanted to play her with short hair because she has this utilitarian vibe; that's who she is," says Swan, who also put on weight for the role. "In the first episode she cuts her hair off, she's struggling because her husband just died and nobody is going to save her but herself."

The decision to change her look, she says, garnered no pushback from the CBC, helped by the fact that it is a largely female-driven show from the creator to the executive producers.

Swan, of course, is not the only Canadian to have launched a noteworthy career with a pixie cut: Linda Evangelista proved that a bob was worth its multimillion-dollar weight in runway and modelling contracts.

But for Swan, it meant trying



CBC

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out for fewer, not more glamorous roles.

In *Coroner*, the decision seems to have paid off. Swan's noteworthy ability to channel that everyday ordinariness, to make you feel the weight of her situation, is the foil to the unexpected and sometimes over-the-top investigations that she finds her character embroiled in.

That includes the premiere episode, in which she is called to a luxury condominium to investigate the death of a cannabis mogul who was in the middle of a sex party, including

guests in bunny suits.

"Her full humanity is on display. She's a human being that just happens to be a coroner," says Swan. "It's important to show her as real as possible because when the circumstances are that heightened you don't lose track of reality, the audience feels as you do."

For research, Swan talked to a young female coroner who was of similar age, and she attended an autopsy in Toronto.

"It was incredible and really personal. I wanted to pick her brain to see what it felt to be

female coroner and how people would react to her," says Swan. "And the actual autopsy was incredible to see. There is a lot of dignity for the person who has passed. It's not this slab of human you toss around. I would not have been able to bring that element to the show if I hadn't seen it."

Born in West Vancouver, Swan's father Scott is a Canadian theatre director who runs an acting studio.

Her first break in TV was in the Vancouver-shot *Supernatural*, in which she played a hospital receptionist. She also had a role in *Smallville*, playing the DC Universe superhero Zatanna Zatara.

Swan says one of her regrets is that she never got to meet Stan Lee, the creator of *Inhumans*, who died on Nov. 12.

"His creation put me on a path I never expected," says Swan. "I did meet his granddaughter at Comic Con and we had a conversation about Medusa and his love for that character. But he was definitely one of the humans on my bucket list that I wanted to sit down and talk to."

"He was influential in so many ways beyond the superhero world and he showed that you can place a humanity to something that is inhuman. And that's something that I try to bring to everything that I do."