

# Serinda Swan on her CBC series *Coroner* and why Canadian actors in L.A. should come home

[January 4, 2019](#) [Greg David](#)



The last time I spoke to Serinda Swan, she was co-starring in A&E's excellent and cancelled-too-soon *Breakout Kings*. Filmed in Toronto, Swan played one of a handful of criminals who worked with the U.S. marshals to collar prison escapees and have time taken off their own sentences.

Now Swan is back in Toronto, on the other side of the law in CBC's new drama *Coroner*. Debuting on Monday at 9 p.m., the drama—based loosely

on the books by M.R. Hall—stars Swan as Dr. Jenny Cooper, a recently widowed new coroner who investigates suspicious, unnatural or sudden deaths in Toronto. Created by Morwyn Brebner (*Saving Hope*) and produced by Muse Entertainment, Back Alley Films and Cineflix Studios, *Coroner* features Roger Cross as homicide detective Donovan McAvoy; Lovell Adams-Gray as pathologist Dr. Dwayne Allen; Tamara Podemski as Alison Trent, Jenny's assistant; Kiley May as River Baitz, Dr. Allen's assistant; and Ehren Kassam as Ross, Jenny's son.

I chatted with Swan and Cross during CBC's winter media day in November.

***How did you get involved in Coroner, Serinda? Were you looking to come back to Canada?***

Serinda Swan: I've had my eye on projects, Canadian projects, for a while because I feel there's this new face of Canadian television that's coming up or new perception of Canadian television that I think, as Canadian actors, we need to come back. We need to come back to Canada and we need to stop this archaic idea that in order to make it, we need to go to the U.S.

I think that dilutes the Canadian talent pool because we all leave, and then our team and our managers and agents don't want us to come back, and I think this is a time that's really exciting for Canadian television because we're having these shows come out, and they're becoming more specific. We're not making Canadian television for American markets anymore. We're making Canadian television for Canadian markets, and in that specificity, it becomes more universal.

Roger Cross: It's making quality television, and it translates universally.

SS: I read a script a few years ago [for] *Bellevue*. And I loved it, I absolutely loved it, I thought it was incredible. And we got very, very close to actually doing it, and it didn't end up working in the end, and so I had my eyes on [the production companies]. I was like, 'OK, this is a pretty incredible group of humans that are orbiting around some really interesting material.' They

called me when this role came up, and said, 'Would you be interested?'

And they sent me the bible for it, and it just was such an interesting perspective, the imagery that they used in it, the way that they described the character. The fact that she was more human than she was coroner ... And so when I read it, I was like, 'Oh this is some character work. I'm gonna be able to physically, emotionally and mentally change.' And they were all for it. I was like, 'I want my character to cut off her hair, I want to be able to put on weight, I want to be able to change my physicality, I want to be able to have a minute and a half panic attack on television. I want to show mental health issues, I want to show a diverse cast. I want to be able to have gay, straight, trans, black, white, First Nations on our show and not exploit it, but celebrate it. Show what Canada really is.'

And they literally went, 'Yeah, of course.' And I was like, 'Wow, my people.' This is exactly where I want to be, and I want to stop being a part of the problem, and just doing what I think cool American TV is.



***A show like Dark Matter, just thinking most recently Roger, it's just good TV regardless of what country it's from.***

RC: Yeah. And that's the thing, you want to get rid of those labels. Let's

forget about, 'It's good for this,' or, 'You're good because you're a woman.' And hopefully we evolve to that point where we can do that one day, and that will be great.

***Jenny has her world ripped apart, and you see her struggle at times, but evolve and grow throughout it.***

SS: To show the bad and the ugly. She makes good choices, bad choices and then some lovely choices.

***I love the chemistry that Jenny and Donovan have. They have a really good repartee.***

SS: I think that comes from both of them not really giving a shit about the other one. To be honest, she doesn't care if he likes her, he doesn't care if she likes him, and so there's this relaxed sense of just being who you are, that is really interesting when it comes to two different characters. Because, normally, it's two people don't like each other and they're fighting to make each other like each other, and that's not it. I'm after the truth here, with or without you, I'm going after the truth. And so it's this breaking down and figuring it out.

RC: One of the things that homicide detectives have is a consultant we talk to. We had real pathologists, real detectives, we had real SWAT members come out ... We had some great people to lean on, and ask them, 'When you are cutting a body out, would you do this? How would you handle evidence? How would you do things?' We had these great people to lean on. And one thing this homicide detective said to me was, 'Listen, we're the main thing, it's our world. They all serve to assist us to find the murderers and find these other people.' And so, Donovan's been used to that world where, 'OK, we need you, coroner. We need you over here, we need these other people. But we run the show and we know what's going on.' He's been used to doing things his way and had a coroner that would sign off on things, saying, 'Yes, that's how it's done.' 'Yeah? OK good.' [Jenny] comes in and she's like, 'Nah, ah, ah, ah, ah. I'm not signing off until I'm absolutely

sure that that's right.' He's like, 'What's wrong with you? Just stay in line, do your thing.'

SS: He started as Jenny, and then slowly it dulled out, based on the constant rubbing of people just trying to get the quick fix. And so eventually, it's that knife, he comes in very sharp and by the end, you're like, 'I'm worn out, man.' She's coming in strong, and so there is that friction of, 'Don't mess up my life,' on both sides.

***With Morwyn Brebner as the creator, it's no surprise Coroner is a roller coaster of emotion. It just came across like it's a cable show. Yes, it fits on CBC, but it also very much as a cable show where you can have those moments, those long moments to really let a scene breathe and let those emotions come out.***

SS: That was something that was really important to me because that's how I act. I don't react, I act, and in order to act, you have to hear, you have to listen, truly listen and you have to process and then you have to figure out how you want to act. And it could be a reaction, but there is that moment of processing.

*Coroner* airs Mondays at 9 p.m. on CBC and CBC Gem.

*Images courtesy of CBC.*

