

Vancouver's Serinda Swan gets real in new CBC drama *Coroner*

Swan stars as a Toronto coroner who has to raise her teenage son on her own after her husband's sudden death.

[Dana Gee](#) Updated: January 7, 2019

Coroner

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Serinda Swan felt there was more to her new TV character coroner Jenny Cooper than the study of bodily fluids, skin tissue and blood spray patterns.

Swan felt Cooper, the lead in the new [CBC drama *Coroner*](#), had an internal life that was also ripe for dissection.

"I really want to keep her as human as possible. I don't want her to be a coroner that happens to be a person. I wanted her to be a person who happens to be a coroner," Swan said she told *Coroner* executive producer and director [Adrienne Mitchell](#) and showrunner/creator [Morwyn Brebner](#) when they were discussing the role.

"I wanted to be able to lead with her humanity. I wanted to lead with everything she feels."

In the new eight-part series we meet Swan just as her husband has

dropped dead.

Once an emergency room doctor, Swan's mounting anxiety has forced her to make big changes and navigate new, very often, emotional waters. To help start anew she packs up her teenage son moves to Toronto and takes a job as a coroner.



The CBC drama *Corner* stars Serinda Swan as coroner Jenny Cooper. Photo: Ben Mark Holzberg Ben Mark Holzberg / PNG

"First and foremost it's watching a woman's experience in this new life," added Swan, who grew up in [West Vancouver](#) but has called Los Angeles home since 2009.

"Jenny is an amazing experience for me because she is definitely a weird one and I love her for that. I love going to work and getting to explore,"

added Swan about her character, who is based on the protagonist in the book series by author [M.R. Hall](#).

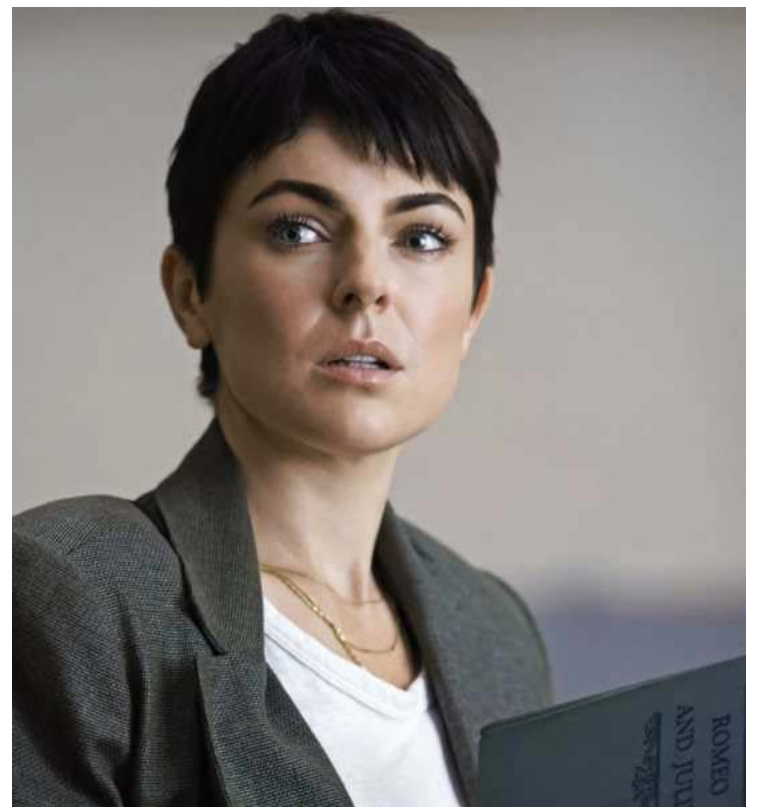
Cooper is as complex and screwed up as they get, but at the same time she is a focused truth seeker who isn't stymied by either red tape or old ways. She is thorough, thoughtful and unwavering in her desire to crack a case. She works closely with a detective played by Vancouver's Roger Cross.

This new role marks a strong addition to Swan's resume which over the last decade has included many TV roles, most notably Inhumans, Ballers, Chicago Fire and Breakout Kings.

The daughter of a theatre director (Scott Swan) and an actress turned spiritual healer (Alandra Napali Kai) Swan's first gig was alongside her mother on the Ted Danson and Isabella Rossellini 1989 film Cousins when she was just three years old. She remembers there was candy.

In her teens she began to model but that life was not for Swan. She didn't like the scene, the process and what it represented and how it made her feel. She says it was a life she was happy to walk away from.

"We can all be duped into thinking our value is the sexual energy we can get from another person, or the sexual attention we can get," said Swan adding she never saw herself as a model turned actor.



Serinda Swan. Ben Mark Holzberg / PNG

"That has nothing to do with me. That's my mother. That's my father. That's my genetics," said Swan of her model-friendly looks. "If I solely rely on my genetics for my life's creativity then I'm a bit of a jackass."

Her new TV character is a long way from glossy magazine pictorials. Sure she has great eyebrows but Jenny isn't running around crime scenes in four-inch stilettos and perfectly tailored, designer suits.

"I put on 8 lbs for the character and I made sure when I cut my hair my bangs were a little off. I wanted it to look utilitarian. I wanted it to look like she did it in her sink," said Swan.

"I didn't want this to be a pretty shiny character."

A pair of Hunter gumboots used for outdoor crime scene investigations is as fancy as Cooper gets.

Swan is looking to substance over sex appeal, plain and simple.

"The people who have longevity in this industry are the people who have made themselves, and they have made themselves into many different characters," said Swan, who played Anne Bancroft opposite Jessica Lange's Joan Crawford in TV mogul Ryan Murphy's miniseries *Feud*.

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"As a woman we are told our value decreases as we get older," added Swan. "I'm like: my value actually increases. On the outside I may not be valued as much by society but the conversations I can have and my ability to contribute to society, the wisdom that increases my value."

There is no word yet if Swan will get to play Cooper again, that will be determined after the series goes to air. Either way she says she is really proud of the show and loved that she got to shoot it in Toronto and Toronto got to remain Toronto.

"I think through specificity it creates universality. You look at shows like *Shetland* or *Happy Valley* — these BBC shows that are so specific to their little towns, and we love them. We love them because we feel like we are

part of the community. We know the local pub. We learn about different areas. We get to see the landscapes. It's so specific and you become so invested. Part of the reason why I took this project was because it is so specific. It is a Canadian woman in Toronto. We are shooting it in downtown Toronto. We are talking about Dundas; we shoot in the TIFF building. Our language is very specific to Toronto."

It also has a language very specific to the job.

Coroner is a procedural drama and these types of shows take some extra work and some outside guidance to pull off. Medical specialists are signed on as consultants to help the actors with everything from the holding of a scalpel, to the angle of an incision, to what to wear to work.

Swan also had an extra expert on set if she needed to talk about being a coroner. In fact she had access to the OG Canadian TV coroner Nicholas Campbell, a.k.a. Dominic Da Vinci, from Da Vinci's Inquest. Campbell shows up in this new series as Cooper's father.

"He's a legend," said Swan, when asked about the award-winning Campbell. "It was a total fluke. It was hilarious.

"On the last day of shooting he said this is one of his favourite projects he has ever worked on," added Swan. "It brought tears to my eyes."

Swan said Campbell offered to hook her up with coroners and pathologists he knew if she wanted to get some questions answered or just learn cool stuff like how she should react when she comes across

So after eight episodes and plenty of bodies does Swan have a good story or fascinating fact she can pull out at a dinner party?

"Oh yeah, I do," said Swan, who then explained what happens in a regular autopsy after they take out organs and dissect and test them.

“At the end of it everything, including your brain, goes into a yellow plastic bag and gets sewn into your stomach, your chest cavity,” said Swan. “So any time there is ever an open casket everything is just in there, in the stomach, in a bag.”

Right now Swan is back at home in Los Angeles and working on the education technology company that she co-founded two years ago.

[Deedly](#) (as in good deeds) is a free education app to which kids grade 6 to 12 can sign up with their teachers. In the app is a curriculum that is based around world issues like mental health, education, poverty and environmental conservation. Through the app kids have access to charities that work with those issues.

To date Deedly has piloted in 500 schools so far and it will be available in Canada in fall 2019.

This project is an extension of Swan’s other interest of working with [Together1Heart](#) and the U.N. to combat human trafficking.

“I had this moment in 2011 when I realized that my voice can’t just be telling my story. It needs to be an educated voice, and it needs to tell the story of many,” said Swan.

Swan sees fame not as a place to reside on a pedestal but rather a place to build a platform that will support many people.

“That gave me permission to chase fame or chase celebrity in the way that I can now. Because before it was just this narcissistic thing,” said Swan.

“I am now: Give me that spotlight I have something to say because I have sat in refugee camps on the border of South Sudan. I have sat with women who were victims of sex trafficking in Cambodia and I’ve sat down and done this work and I have stories to tell.

“I have things that I want to change and if you follow me on Instagram I’m going to tell you what I’m thinking either about my favourite sweater or about the situation in Myanmar. I am figuring out what my voice is, who I am as I go but less and less I am being controlled or being tricked into this shiny version of myself.”



Roger Cross as Det. 'Mac' McAvoy in a scene from the new CBC drama Coroner. Photo: Ben Mark Holzberg.
Ben Mark Holzberg / PNG

A busy actor for two decades [Roger Cross](#) has had recurring roles on shows like Taken, The L-Word, The X-Files, 24, Continuum and Arrow to name a few.

Now Cross can be seen as Detective Mac McAvoy in [CBC's](#) new TV drama [Coroner](#), which debuts Jan. 7 at 9 p.m., and stars another Vancouver actor Serinda Swan.

The series wrapped in late November, and Cross had some time to answer some questions:

Q: Do you still have family in Vancouver?

A: Most of my immediate family still lives in Vancouver.

Q: What comes to mind when you think of Vancouver and first moving here from Jamaica at age 11?

A: Fresh air and beauty. It was a much smaller city when I first moved here a few million years back, but you can still see the natural beauty of this city.

Q: What is on your must-do list when you come back to Vancouver?

A: Besides seeing family, I love going to Riddim & Spice and getting some Jamaican food. The family and I also love going on walks and hikes.

Q: You have an aviation degree from [Trinity Western University](#), and you were a pilot. Do you still fly?

A: I don't get to fly very often. Insurance companies get a little nervous when actors fly, so it's on the "dangerous activities" list. The last time I went up was about a year ago.

Q: What's your favourite plane, and why?

A: I love the new 787 Dreamliner. It's an amazingly efficient and beautiful airplane, plus it's really comfortable to be on.

Q: You are kind of a Vancouver film industry OG actor, as your IMDB page credits go back to 21 Jump Street, Wiseguy and Neon Rider. What do you remember most from those first jobs?

A: Joy! It was all so new and exciting for me, and I was just learning so much.

Q: What's a piece of advice you would give a young actor starting out?

A: 1. Find out who you are: Learn the good and bad, and be honest with yourself. Then you'll be able to use all the tools at your disposal. 2. Work hard at your craft, and never stop learning. 3. Love what you do. This industry can be rough on you, If you don't love what you do, it will chew you up and spit you out; or you'll become cynical and bitter, even if you succeed.

Q: What is the biggest difference in the Vancouver film industry since your early days?

A: The sheer size of it. We used to have a few shows and movies, and you knew everyone. Now there are dozens of shows and movies at any given time.

Q: You have worked consistently for many years. Aside from your talent what has been the key to working so much?

A: I love what I do, and I never stop learning.

Q: What was the job that made you think you could make a living at this?

A: The International Rescue that I shot in China was the true spark, and when I got back to Vancouver and booked Wiseguy, I knew I was in the right place.

Q: What do people most recognize you from, and what do they ask you?

A: It depends where I am. Everyone has a different favourite for various reasons. But, because of the magnitude of it, 24 is probably the one. And the question most asked is, "Why did they have Jack shoot you, man? It didn't make sense, Curtis always had his back".

Q: How many cops have you played over the years?

A: I have lost count.

Q: Do you have a favourite character? One you wished you could have spent more time playing?

A: Aside from my current role as Det. McAvoy, I'd have to go with Travis Verta on Continuum, Curtis on 24, or Six on Dark Matter.

Q: What's this latest cop, Det. McAvoy, like? What are his strengths and weaknesses?

A: McAvoy is a complicated man. He's great at his job, but his personal life needs work. He has been on the job a long time and, as is apt to happen, he becomes a bit jaded. He has been married a few times, and his current relationship isn't the healthiest. But he's a very just and fair man and reads people very well.

Q: Does he have secrets? It seems like he has some secrets.

A: He most definitely has some skeletons in the closet, but you'll have to tune in to find out more about them.

Q: Do you get nervous when you start a new job?

A: I'm not sure it's nerves, but the anticipation of starting a new job is always there. You're not sure how your portrayal of this character will be received, how this director and producers will be to work with, and what your fellow actors will be like to work with.

Q: Actors often are superstitious. Are you?

A: Not really. I have no set pattern for anything.

Q: Do you live in L.A.? If so, how long have you lived there?

A: I do live part time in LA and Vancouver. I hesitate to say, but it's coming up on 20 years in L.A.

Q: This is a bit broad, but what's it like right now to be a Canadian in America? Do you feel a difference? Is the current political climate always the topic of discussion?

A: I think the world is feeling uneasy about the current political climate. The U.S. went from an amazingly eloquent, educated, and fair president, who showed the world the U.S. was progressing in the right direction, to this current p—y grabbing, egocentric, conniving, mean president. So, yes, it's always a topic of discussion.

Q: What's your next job?

A: I'm working on some writing projects that have been put on hold while I was working, so I'm not currently signed on to any projects right now. But look for Headshop coming to a theatre near you, and of course Coroner.

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