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CORONER: DIRECTOR WINNIFRED JONG ON THE SHOW'S REWARDING CHALLENGES

Bridget Liszewski | January 27, 2020 | [Canadian TV, TV News](#) | [No Comments](#)



CBC

After getting her first shot at directing network television during *Coroner's* first season, Winnifred Jong returned to the CBC drama to lead up two more episodes in Season 2. Last week's episode, "Crispr Sistr," was extra special for Jong because it was directed and written by Asian women and featured an Asian woman as the primary guest star (Eileen Li). Then, she also directed this week's episode that will see Jenny (Serinda Swan) investigating two grisly deaths in the suburbs, and features another powerful guest star turn from Walter Borden.

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Jong began her career in the TV industry as a script supervisor before taking charge behind the camera and turning to directing. In addition to her two *Coroner* episodes this season, she also directed an upcoming episode of Global's *Nurses*. Jong recently spoke to *The TV Junkies* about the importance of representation behind the scenes, why she loves working on *Coroner*, and her favorite scenes to shoot. Jong is also the creator of the digital series *Tokens*, which was recently nominated for an ACTRA Toronto award for Best Ensemble.

The TV Junkies: Last year you got the opportunity to direct one *Coroner* episode, and it was actually your first experience directing a network drama. What was it like to come back and get two episodes in Season 2?

Winnifred Jong: It was a huge opportunity to direct network television the first time. To be asked back for another season, and given more episodes, is an honor for me to know the confidence and support that Morwyn [Brebner, showrunner] and Adrienne [Mitchell, executive producer] had for my storytelling. Every time you're starting out, you're always trying to prove yourself, and I felt that they were comfortable with me and what I was achieving. Two episodes is harder and not something they normally give newer directors. So with that came a lot more responsibility.

TTVJ: Writer Nathalie Younglai [spoke with us about how Episode 203 was special because it was written and directed by Asian women and had a main guest that was an Asian woman. What did that experience mean to you?](#)

WJ: Usually, when you work in film you don't see representation or have the writer writing specifically for your culture. You don't usually get to direct people that look like you. There's a shorthand you have with the culture that you understand inherently. Having that with Nathalie, the questions you ask are a little more in depth because you actually understand where it's coming from. That felt like an honor and an opportunity to fully express myself, instead of having to express a stereotype that has been written by someone who doesn't quite understand the culture or have the nuance to give it a three-dimensional shape.

Then, Eileen was just amazing to work with because there's someone who has this much talent, that I've never met before or seen on screen. For me, never having her guest on anything was a revelation. She's such a professional and so talented.

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@nyounglai

TTVJ: I had the same thought watching her last week, 'How have I never seen her in anything before?' She was wonderful.

WJ: There are people that do a lot of the Asian stories and they become familiar with the audience. So to have someone who is going to play twins, first of all, and can carry that load, we were just shocked with her. Where has she been?

She was just super talented, so nice, and so professional. She really gave it her all and the scene with the twins required so much work for the production of it. She had to switch back and forth between the two and we had to double up the production.

TTVJ: Right, that scene had to add an extra challenge for you as a director to shoot.

WJ: It was my puzzle for Episode 203. I had to direct the performance, but also figure out the technical aspect of it. There was a lot of planning involved because you can go down a rabbit hole of time if you're not prepared.

TTVJ: Another technical aspect I was curious about, is in regards to the fact that Jenny is experiencing this sleepwalking as a result of her trauma, and it keeps getting worse and worse. The show has found a really interesting way to convey that to the audience. How did you approach depicting what she's going through as a director?

WJ: The sleepwalking is a visceral feeling when she's in it, and Adrienne and Samy [Inayah, Director of Photography] are the leads for that and developed that imagery early in the season. They've depicted a language that gives you a visceral feeling of being in there. In Season 1, Jenny has this secret of pushing her sister down the stairs that manifests into panic attacks about the dog. This year, what she's dealing with starts with the fire and it's something that smolders underneath. Having that visceral smolder

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is what Adrienne and Samy have marvelously depicted and is what we're watching.

TTVJ: In your *Coroner* episode last year, you had the shot of the snake coming out of that guy's mouth, and now this year we saw your episode have rats and the fluid being pulled from that eyeball. What's with you and the gross shots?

WJ: I don't know! For me, it's so weird because normally I have heebie-jeebies for gross stuff, but in *Coroner* just find it fascinating. We even had that autopsy with the open chest and blood and I didn't find it gross. We've had some great prosthetics that way.

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Don't worry, don't worry. Brad's eyes weren't harmed - just those of any squeamish fans (me) [#CoronerCBC](#)



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TTVJ: Maybe approaching it from a technical standpoint really helps you. Who knows?

WJ: I guess so. It's all written on the page so you're figuring out how to achieve it. That's where you're slightly detached. I'm not a horror fan because I get too scared, but now I think maybe since I've done some of this stuff that I could actually direct a horror film or genre.

TTVJ: So then what are your favorite type of *Coroner* scenes to shoot?

WJ: Any scene with Jenny is fun because Serinda is so deep into the character and you're always collaborating with her. You're trying to figure out what she's trying to achieve as the character and it's a wonderful challenge. Sometimes it's tough because you're trying to figure out all the work she's done and put together, and I tell her afterwards, 'Now I understand all the things you're asking me!' You can get caught up in trying to get things done and you realize that there's so much work that goes behind it. Part of my challenge, but also a reward, of working with Serinda, is that you get this heavily-layered performance and you're just trying to figure out how to achieve all the work she's done.



[@worldwidewinnie](#)

TTVJ: Your web series *Tokens* was recently nominated for an ACTRA Toronto award for Best Ensemble, and it's the only digital series nominated. What did that feel like?

WJ: In a way, *Tokens* is a comedic love letter to actors. It's about their struggle and how they overcome stereotypes. In a lot of ways, people came together to tell this story, but they also understood that deeper message. The ensemble worked well because we were like a family together on set. It was such an experience to have the chemistry that existed off camera show up on camera and jump out. For me, it was a reward for the cast. We were the first digital series ever to be nominated. I think people just enjoyed the comedy and spirit behind it.

TTVJ: What other projects do you have coming up?

WJ: I have an episode of *Nurses* coming up that airs February 10.

TTVJ: What was that experience like?

WJ: It was a lot of fun and I had such a great experience. The show focuses on nursing relationships so it was less procedural and more relationship-based. It was so great to have a huge hospital set to play in as well.

TTVJ: Anything else you wanted to add about your *Coroner* experiences?

WJ: There's always a difference between a cool shot and a shot that tells a story. What I've discovered in *Coroner* is that shots tell a story, and I've learned so much from Adrienne. In the Season 2 premiere, Jenny goes into the smoke and there's a metaphor for the confusion of the smoke and fog that she's experiencing. When shooting *Coroner*, we're always trying to marry cinematography and camera with storytelling. I'm very proud to be able to do that on Episode 204.

Excited for this week's *Coroner*? Sound off below!

Coroner airs Mondays at 9 p.m. ET on CBC. *Tokens On Call* is available to stream on [YouTube](#).

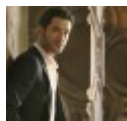


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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bridget Liszewski

Editor in Chief Bridget Liszewski comes from a long line of TV Junkies who fostered her love of television from a very young age. She's channeled that passion into covering both US and Canadian television shows, and is thankful everyday for the invention of the DVR. A graduate of the University of Notre Dame, she loves



college football and is a fan of sports in general. Bridget is always up for talking TV and you can follow her on twitter at [@BridgetOnTV](#).

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