

Exclusive Interview with Actress Karen Strassman

by [Bryna Kramer](#) January 19, 2019, 1:00 pm [0](#)

Karen Strassman is an actress, voice over artist, and dialect coach who most recently appeared on the hit AMC series *Preacher* as Dr. Slotnick. I got the chance to talk with Karen and she shared all kinds of stories with me about how she got into acting originally, what made her start dabbling in voice acting, her audition processes for both *Preacher* and her upcoming role on *Bosch* and so much more. Keep reading to see what she had to say!

Tell me a little bit about how you got into acting originally.

It was definitely a nature thing, not a nurture thing. Ever since I can remember, I loved acting. Even as a very little girl, I loved playing make-believe, I loved performing, I loved pretending to be somebody else. So I got involved in the school plays and everything I could. When I was 13 or 14, I got cast in a beautiful production of *The Miracle Worker*, which is the story of Helen Keller as a little girl when she was being brought up by her family; she was deaf and blind and she basically didn't even know that communication existed. She didn't know that seeing existed, so she lived in her own dark world as a little girl and her family raised her like an animal just trying to get her to be obedient... But anyway, I got cast as Helen Keller and I couldn't wait to get to rehearsal after school. I would blindfold myself and walk around the set, imagining what it was to be blind. I just dove into that empathy of what it must've been like to be her. And I mean people from my high school are still talking about it [laughs]. It was apparently a very powerful experience. I just fell forever in love with the art of acting and I was kind of smitten from then on.

But what's interesting is I grew up in Washington D.C. and I didn't know that many people [there] who were professional actors. My dream was to apply to Harvard or Yale acting school, but I just didn't think I was pretty enough or good enough. So I didn't. I ended up studying psychology because I was passionate about people, so I thought, "That's something that I could probably make a living at" and that I loved. I ended up going to France on my junior year abroad, and I got an apprenticeship with a dialect coach, and I started coaching French actors to act in English for TV and film. That led me to being a dialect coach on sets. One day, I was on a set of a TV show in France and they said, "Oh, Karen. She's very cute. We give her a role." So then I started acting in France and I got an agent over there. I went to the French Royal Conservatory of Dramatic Art and I took classes in French and sort of mastered my French to the best of my ability... One thing led to another and I began as a professional actress [there], as a voiceover actress and a TV/film actress. And that's kind of how it all started.

Are you fluent in French because of your experiences in France?

I am. I am fluent in French and I still work a lot in French. I moved back to America about 15 years ago. But I still have a French passport because when I was younger I married a French man, so France is very much a part of my heart and my own personal culture.

That's so cool. I know you obviously do a lot of voiceover work, so was your experience as a dialect coach how you got into voice acting?

That's a fun story. When I was a dialect coach in France, on Wednesdays the studio I coached for opened up for children of all ages. In France at that time, children didn't go to school on Wednesdays; they went to school on Saturdays. So we would start off and I coached the three to five-year-olds at 10:00 AM and at 11:00 AM I would coach six and seven-year-olds and on

down through the day. There were two women who came in to watch me and my partner animate this workshop. I think I was 20 years old when I had gotten this job; it was so exciting and we were teaching children how to speak English through television and film scenes, very simple ones. Then we would film them and they take it home and watch it.

So these two ladies came in to watch us work, and it turns out they were creating a magazine for French children to learn English and the magazine came along with a cassette tape. They were looking for a few actors to be all the voices for this cassette tape. They hired me and the guy who I was working with at the time. We would go in a couple of times a month and record all of these stories. I got to record all kinds of different characters from Pocahontas to Lady Godiva to old women to chipmunks. It was sort of my imposed master class on voice acting. I learned a lot very quickly and I learned a lot from the two professionals that we were working with and it turned out I was good at it. I got recommended to dub French films into English. That happened very quickly, and I started getting involved dubbing a lot of the young French actresses into English. So at that time, dubbing Juliette Binoche into English, I think Julie Delpy, I mean there was just all these young actresses they needed a voice in English at the time for. And that led into cartoon work... I'm lucky that I was part of this small group of extremely talented actors in France who voiced all of these wonderful original animation series and features out of France. And I really cut my teeth in the business at that time. So when I decided that I wanted to move to Los Angeles to further expand my career here, I already had hundreds of dubbed films and animated shows and all of those things under my belt. That was really, really cool. I felt really lucky.

That's incredible. So going off of that, do you have a bucket list of things you'd still like to accomplish in your career, whether it be like a specific on-camera role or specific voiceover role? And if so, what are

some of the things on there?

One of the major things right now is that I feel like I've spent so much of my career going from this role to this role to the next role. So it would be really fun to settle into a series regular role or a recurring role and really settle into a specific episodic show where you get to show up week after week with an amazingly talented family of creative people who come together day after day to tell a story. It's wonderful to show up on a set for a week or two and dive in and do this character, that character and then come back a couple months later if it's recurring. It's just such a wonderful thing to establish a creative relationship with a cast and crew of people and just consistently evolve the character and the storyline together and evolve the creative relationships with everybody. I really look forward to those opportunities because I just think they're so rich and magical.

In terms of what kind of roles I might be playing, there's so many stories to be told. I think it's less about the specific roles themselves and more about really strong writing and really good storytelling, whether it's a comedy or whether it's a detective story or even a horror flick. I think when a story is really well told and really well written it can be so compelling. I do enjoy playing characters who are struggling to overcome. Like I love playing handicap characters, blind or with a handicap, and people who have a struggle that they are rising above, whether it's a mother with a struggling child or somebody who is struggling with alcoholism or some other kind of disease. I love telling the story and people who have challenges and are able to rise above them, I think it's really inspiring in the world and whenever I watch stories about those people, it gives me so much courage for my smaller challenges in my life.

I want to ask you a few quick questions about your most recent role as Dr. Slotnick on *Preacher*. So I was reading another interview that you

did and you said that the role was originally intended for a man. Is that right?

Yes.

So how did you end up playing that character then?

They had originally written the role for a man. From what I understand, when they got the casting submissions apparently they just didn't find the person that they were looking for. They just didn't get excited about anybody from the submissions. So when my agent sent me the audition for the role, she said, "Listen, this originally went out to men to audition, but they didn't take anybody. I assume they are looking at women now so see what you can do." So I didn't think about the fact it was a man and I just owned it and made it my own. But what I do is... when the audition went out it was a very simple description. It said they were looking for a passionate, impassioned scientist and that can go a lot of ways. So I did that, sort of what it sounded like they were looking for just with my regular American accent. I turned to my friend, who was putting me on tape, and I looked at her and I said, "You know, that was fine and it was fun, but I just have a yearning to do it with a German accent. Even if we don't submit it, let's just record it in a German accent to see what happens because I think it would be fun." And we had so much fun doing that and we looked at it and we thought, "Why not?" I mean they didn't say they wanted an accent, but there certainly are a lot of accents on the show. So I did and I booked the role. I think the big lesson for me with that was I think in life when we are searching for success, we spend a lot of time trying to give people what we think they want as if we can read their minds and I think it was a really good lesson for me to be able to follow my own inspiration, my own sense of play and delight and trust that, because that's what came across.



Karen Strassman as Dr. Louis Slotnick – *Preacher* (S3E8)

I love those kinds of stories. Were you familiar with *Preacher* before you auditioned?

I hadn't watched the series before but I had heard of it. But always when I audition, I watch a bunch of episodes. So as I was researching it, before going in to tape it, I watched a bunch of episodes and really got a sense of it, so I tried to fit what I was offering in my audition into that world

You got to work a lot with Dominic Cooper on the show. What did you enjoy about getting to work with him?

Oh gosh, he's just fantastic. He's just an actor's actor. I mean, he's just so disciplined and so committed as an actor, so focused, so humble and such kind of a guy. It was like this with everybody on the *Preacher* set, but when I

got on set the first thing you do when you arrive, when they call you on set, is you do a “stumble through;” you kind of say your lines and walk through the blocking. So we did the stumble through and I didn’t do it full-out but I did it with the accent and he came up to me right away afterward and he said, “Love, you’re great, that was fantastic. That’s great. That’s really funny,” in the way that British people say “love”, you know [laughs]. But he was immediately just so sweet and kind and right there with me. As all leads do, think he really set the tone and atmosphere on set... I’ve become a huge fan of him and he has my full respect.

One of the next things you’re doing is playing D.D.A Laura Tribe on Amazon Prime’s *Bosch*. Like I said earlier, I love hearing about audition processes, so what was your audition process like for this role?

Oh wow. That was a completely different experience. That was a same-day audition... It was one of those things where I didn’t even have time to really work on it or learn it. I changed my schedule, ran home, printed up my sides, found appropriate clothes and did all I could to make it to the office on time. So because I didn’t have time to completely memorize it, I had my script in my hand and I was just trying to be as present and as authentic as possible to my reader and to what the scene required. It was one of those where I dropped in, did the audition and I left. I certainly never expected to hear anything back; I just thought, “Oh, I wasn’t really that prepared and who knows what I did?” Because often, I don’t even remember [laughs]. It was a lovely experience and the people were lovely, but it was a real surprise when I got the call that I was [cast] for the show. It all happened so quickly and I’m very grateful for that.

There’s not a ton of details out yet surrounding the show’s new season, so I don’t know if there is anything you can tease about how Laura is going to fit into the story.

I've got to be really careful about that. So just to be safe, I don't want to give anything at all away. But I can say that *Bosch*, from the viewer's point of view, it's one of my favorite shows. It's so intelligent and so compelling, but being on-set you really see the inner workings of it. They are so committed to having everything be so true to real life experiences of that world. When I was on set, they had a D.D.A. there who I could talk to who does that kind of work. I walked on and introduced me to her and she said, "So I do what you are tasked to do and please ask me any questions at all." And I said, "Well, that's fantastic. Please tell me if you had this kind of case that I have, how would you handle it?" She talked a lot about empathy for the client and making the client feel safe. I think in my audition I was a little bit more business and a little bit more technical because I know they do this job every day. But she said, "No. With this one, you can afford to be a bit more empathetic so that your client feels comfortable in this difficult situation." She gave me a lot of tips from the real world that made a big difference and really helped me be able to feel that I was representing it accurately because as an actor, for me, that's really important.

That's awesome. I'm excited to see it whenever it comes out. So I just have one last question — our website is called Talk Nerdy With Us because we all have an inner-nerd. So what is something you nerd out about?

One of my big nerdy factors is accents. Because as a dialect coach, I completely nerd out about accents to the point where if I go to a restaurant and I'll hear somebody at another table speaking in an accent I'll listen with one ear and try to figure out what it is, to the point where I sometimes need to go over to their table and be like, "Your accent is really beautiful. Is it Polish or Bulgarian?" And they'll be like, "It's Bulgarian," And I'll be like, "Wow, I thought it was Bulgarian but I wasn't sure." Recently, I can't say what it was for and who knows if I'll get it or not, but I just did an on-camera

audition for a TV series where I got to audition with a Scottish accent. So I just spent all this past weekend nerding out listening to people on YouTube, just talking to friends who are Scottish and really jumping into the most realistic and best Scottish accent that I could muster over the weekend. That was super, super fun. So that's my current nerd tidbit right now.

Make sure you follow Karen on [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), and [Facebook](#).

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.