

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

***Heated Rivalry* to Close 26th Annual Kingston Canadian Film Festival, March 1**

- Jacob Tierney’s smash sensation heads to hockey’s home after his film *The Trotsky* wins audience award at KCFF10 –
 - “Beyond the Cottage: Inside the *Heated Rivalry* Revolution” features panelists Lori Fischburg, Elamin Abdelmahmoud, Angie Fazekus, and Kyle Rich with moderator Liz Duff –
 - Tickets now on sale –
-

KINGSTON, ON (February 12, 2026) – One of the biggest TV shows in the world right now has been selected as the closing event at the 26th annual [Kingston Canadian Film Festival](#), it was announced today. A fan-favourite episode of pop-culture phenomenon ***Heated Rivalry*** will be presented on the big screen on **Sunday, March 1** followed by the panel “**Beyond the Cottage: Inside the *Heated Rivalry* Revolution.**” Presented in association with [Crave](#), the panel features *Heated Rivalry* producer **Lori Fischburg**, cultural experts, and moderator [Liz Duff](#). The premier all-Canadian film and cultural festival in the world, KCFF26 runs **Feb. 25 – March 1**, with tickets [available now](#) for the *Heated Rivalry* event.

Created by award-winning Canadian writer/director/producer **Jacob Tierney** (*The Trotsky*, winner of the Audience Award at KCFF2010, *Letterkenny*, *Shoresy*) and based on the best-selling Canadian book series *Game Changers* by **Rachel Reid**, the six-episode, one-hour Crave Original series follows the fierce rivalry-turned-romance between two professional hockey players. Since its November 2025 premiere, *Heated Rivalry* has become an overnight sensation for its electric chemistry, emotional depth, and groundbreaking portrayal of queer love in the world of elite sport. Wildly addictive, the drama has captured audiences worldwide and is quickly establishing itself as one of the most talked-about Canadian series of all time. With momentum continuing to rise, *Heated Rivalry* is poised to become one of the country’s most culturally impactful exports.



“Closing out the 2026 Kingston Canadian Film Festival with *Heated Rivalry* feels like the perfect fit for an event honouring excellence in Canadian screen content,” said Fischburg. “I’m thrilled to celebrate the show and the cultural impact it has had in Canada and around the world with audiences at KCFF.”

“KCFF is a cultural festival where cinema intersects with music, comedy, and the conversations shaping our world,” said KCFF Executive Director Marc Garniss. “*Heated Rivalry* is one of those rare series that breaks out beyond the screen and becomes a true cultural moment, so closing the festival with it is perfectly aligned with what KCFF represents.”

“We’re also thrilled to have it bookend our [opening night hockey feature](#), *Youngblood*, creating a full-circle celebration of sport and storytelling,” continued Garniss. “In a city with such deep ties to hockey’s history, from early games on Lake Ontario to helping forge the rules of the game, it’s fitting that we’re presenting two groundbreaking hockey stories that honour the sport’s legacy while pushing it forward.”

The *Heated Rivalry* screening in Kingston — long recognized as the birthplace of organized hockey — creates a powerful dialogue between the sport’s historic roots and its modern cultural impact, reflecting how hockey continues to shape identity, passion, and community across generations. And in a city famous for divided hockey loyalties, audiences may find themselves picking sides once again — this time between Ottawa and the Montréal Métros.

The event features a special big-screen presentation of a fan-favourite episode from the series, followed by the must-see panel *Beyond the Cottage: Inside the Heated Rivalry Revolution*. Moderated by super-fan and podcaster **Liz Duff**, the panel traces how *Heated Rivalry* has sparked change across multiple corners of contemporary culture, including how the series is changing the game for independent Canadian producers and broadcasters with *Heated Rivalry* producer **Lori Fischburg**; how the music featured in the series has launched emerging artists into the spotlight while reigniting attention around established acts with CBC host **Elamin Abdelmahmoud**; how modern fandom helped propel its rapid international ascent from beloved underground novels into the TV stratosphere with University of Toronto pop culture professor **Angie Fazekus**; and its influence on LGBTQ+ athletes and the game itself with sports professor **Kyle Rich** of Brock University.

As a global breakout hit, *Heated Rivalry* has delivered extraordinary viewership growth across platforms and markets. The series now averages 10.6 million viewers per episode in the U.S., more than doubling its audience following the season finale, while becoming Crave’s most-watched original series ever in Canada, with viewership surging nearly 400% during its initial run. On HBO Max, it stands as the platform’s highest performing acquired, non-animated debut, ranking among the top scripted launches of the year and entering global Top 10 charts across multiple regions. Unusually for a limited series, momentum accelerated post-finale, fueled by word-of-mouth and high rewatch rates, with roughly one-third of viewers returning for repeat viewings—a rare indicator of cultural stickiness in streaming television.

Critically, the series has been hailed as a landmark success in contemporary television storytelling, earning a 96% Rotten Tomatoes critics score, strong Metacritic ratings, and a place among IMDb’s Top 250 TV Shows. Reviewers praised its emotional depth, breakout performances, and authentic representation, while Episode 5 achieved a historic perfect 10/10 IMDb rating, tying one of television’s most acclaimed episodes of all time. With organic global growth, breakout stardom for its leads, and record-setting platform performance, *Heated Rivalry* has evolved from a niche adaptation into one of the most successful and talked-about series launches of the streaming era.

The series transformed previously unknown actors Hudson Williams and Connor Storrie into breakout stars who carried the Olympic torch at the 2026 Winter Olympic Games and presented at the Golden Globe Awards, while Storrie guests stars on *Saturday Night Live* the same weekend as KCFF. Their performances were hailed as "the strongest break-out performances of the year," while the show's soundtrack drove massive streaming increases for featured artists including t.A.T.u, Feist, Wolf Parade, and Wet Leg. Now streaming globally via HBO Max, Sky, and other platforms, the series has been renewed for a second season, with *Variety* calling it proof that "stories about sex, romance and underrepresented communities lead to success in Hollywood."

Beyond the Cottage: Inside the Heated Rivalry Revolution features special guests:

- **[Elamin Abdelmahmoud](#)** - is the host of CBC's daily arts, entertainment, and pop culture show *Commotion*. He is an award-winning culture writer who has written for the *New York Times*, *BuzzFeed News*, *The Globe and Mail*, and others. Elamin is the author of the #1 best-selling memoir *Son of Elsewhere*, a *New York Times* notable book and a *Globe and Mail* 100 book.
- **[Liz Duff](#)** – is a Canadian pop-culture expert, comedian and host of [Late Night Scrolling](#), the only Gen-Z, Canadian pop culture podcast. A staple on red carpets and a favourite on press tours across the country, Liz's signature East Coast hospitality and wit resonates with pop culture fanatics around the world. Since 2022, when Liz appeared on *Time* magazine's Most Viral of 2022 list for her coverage of the film *Don't Worry Darling*, Liz has quickly become one of Canada's leading pop culture voices as she seamlessly blends insight, humour, and cultural relevance.
- **Angie Fazekas** – is an assistant professor at the Women and Gender Studies Institute at the University of Toronto. Their research focus is queer adolescent online engagement and behavior, fandom and fanfiction, social media, sex education, and popular culture. In their doctoral dissertation, they considered how teenaged fans interact with fanfiction as a mechanism for exploring their sexuality, identity, and desires.
- **Lori Fischburg** – is a Canadian line producer with extensive experience across scripted television and film in both Canada and the U.S. Her work centres on building sustainable productions that balance creative goals, budgets, and schedules. Lori was the Line Producer for *Heated Rivalry* Season 1 and returns to the "cottage" for Season 2.
- **[Kyle Rich](#)** – is an associate professor in the Department of Sport Management at Brock University. Kyle's research looks at the impact of policy, community, inclusion, and exclusion on experiences in sport, recreation, and physical activity programs. His most recent work is focused on the role of queer sport organizations in driving change in sport and their broader communities.

As [previously announced](#), KCFF is proud to present [opening night film](#) ***Youngblood***. Also previously announced are an extensive lineup of music-focused programming as part of the [Amherst Island Radio Music Series](#), and engaging comedy programming as part of the [ShozerTV Comedy Showcase](#). A total of 15 short films from filmmakers across the country are featured in KCFF's Canadian Shorts program. Additionally, KCFF is proud to showcase local Kingston filmmakers in its [Doc Factory](#), [18MM](#) and [Slaight Music Video](#) programs, as well as KCFF's [Local Shorts](#) program, featuring eight short-form films from Kingston-based talent.

In all, the festival presents more than 100 individual films over more than five dozen screenings. The festival also programs more than 30 non-film events, including live music concerts and stand-up comedy. Performing this year at KCFFF26 are recently announced musical artists **Arkells** along with **Bif Naked**, **July Talk**, **Born Ruffians**, and **Julianna Riolino**, as well as comedians **Shaun Majumder**, **Mark Forward**, **K. Trevor Wilson**, and **Guled Abdi**. A full list of the dozens creative talent expected to attend KCFF can be found [here](#).

KCFF26 wraps up **Sunday, March 1** with a closing night event featuring the awarding of nine awards, including the [Playback Prize for Best Canadian Feature](#) (\$5,000) and the **Visual Menace Best First Feature Award** (\$2,500), as determined by the festival jury.

The 2026 Kingston Canadian Film Festival is presented by TD Bank Group. Premier partners are the Slight Family Foundation, Amherst Island Radio, and Cogeco. Major supporters are ACFOMI, Delta Hotels Kingston Waterfront, Downtown Kingston BIA, Kingston Community Credit Union, Homestead, Marriott Kingston, Pattison Outdoor Advertising, Shaftesbury, and Tourism Kingston. KCFF benefits from the patronage of Diane Blake & Stephen Smith, the Norman & Margaret Jewison Charitable Foundation, the McLean Smits Family Foundation, and the Catherine & Maxwell Meighen Foundation. Join the KCFF Circle of Supporters [here](#) or learn about sponsorship opportunities [here](#).

About the Kingston Canadian Film Festival

The Kingston Canadian Film Festival (KCFF) is Canada's premier all-Canadian film festival and the largest of its kind in the world. For more than a quarter century, KCFF has celebrated the diversity, creativity, and vitality of Canadian screen-based storytelling, presenting feature films, documentaries, shorts, and music videos that bring filmmakers, artists, and audiences together each year in a dynamic festival setting. More than a film festival, KCFF is a multi-disciplinary, intersectional cultural event that transforms traditional and unconventional venues across historic downtown Kingston into a vibrant, walkable festival hub, featuring live comedy and music, exhibitions, industry conversations, workshops, networking events, and community gatherings.

With nearly 100% of films screening at KCFF accompanied by live post-screening Q&As with visiting talent, the festival has welcomed leading Canadian filmmakers and performers including Atom Egoyan, Deepa Mehta, Alanis Obomsawin, Don McKellar, Mina Shum, Matt Johnson, Jay Baruchel, Brigitte Berman, Jim Cuddy and Greg Keelor, Jeff Barnaby, Gerry Dee, Cathy Jones, Jeremy Hotz, Bif Naked, Donovan Woods, Gordon Pinsent, and casts from *The Kids in the Hall*, *Letterkenny*, *Trailer Park Boys*, *Baroness von Sketch Show*, *This Hour Has 22 Minutes*, among others.

- KCFF -

For more information:
scott@hendersonpr.com

Follow on Instagram:
[@kingcanfilmfestival](#)
[@cravecanada](#)
[@heatedrivalrycrave](#)
[@visitkingstonca](#)