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Arts · **Holding Space**

From Heated Rivalry to KPop Demon Hunters, let's celebrate the Canadian culture makers who defined 2025

Anne T. Donahue and Peter Knegt fête the homegrown talent that lit up their years

 Peter Knegt, Anne T. Donahue · CBC Arts · Posted: Dec 11, 2025 1:10 PM EST | Last Updated: 2 hours ago

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Connor Storie (left) and Hudson Williams in Heated Rivalry. (Crave)

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Holding Space is a joint column by Anne T. Donahue and Peter Knegt that "holds space" for something or someone in popular culture.

Peter: 2025 is almost over, Anne! Which means we have officially been holding space for various things together for an entire year. It also means we should probably use this December column to do something...year-end-y? And I was thinking since Canadian pride was so in fashion this year (thanks America!), maybe we celebrate some of our many fellow Canadians who killed it in arts and culture in 2025? Which I'll admit upfront is partially just an excuse for me to talk about how obsessed I am with both *Heated Rivalry* and the fact it's essentially a global sensation.

Anne: Well then by all means let's please start there!

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All hail Jacob Tierney! Bless our fellow Canadian who directed what I can only surmise is the most interesting series on television right now. Have I seen it? No, because it's the end of my semester and my soul belongs to academia right now, but I have *absolutely* seen any and all clips and screengrabs shared on TikTok and Instagram, and my question remains: why did a gay hockey story take so long to hit the mainstream? The people clearly wanted it. And if they didn't, they're now very aware that they actually did!

For my fellow members of the "I don't really engage with rom-coms because I am the worst" population — we are a very annoying brand of people, but alas, we are who we are — you'll likely know Tierney from *Letterkenny* (which he writes, directs, executive produces) and from *Are You Afraid of the Dark?* which is maybe one of the most important TV franchises in Canadian history.

Peter, talk to me about what you love about *Heated Rivalry* and also what you hope it means for Canadian culture en masse.

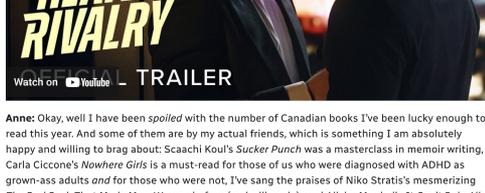
- **Now, more than ever, let's come together as a country and hold space for Canadian movies**

Peter: What Tierney — who has also made some fantastic films: check out *The Trotsky* and *Good Neighbours*, among others — and his *Heated* team have pulled off with this series feels kinda unprecedented. At least in terms of how I've never felt more Canadian pride than seeing all my social feeds completely taken over by the truly astounding butts of the show's two lead actors. We *also* that! It must be how the general population feels when actual Canadian hockey players win the Olympics.

Almost as elevated as those butts is the show itself, which is many times more elevated than it ever needed to be. I did not read the source material (Rachel Reid's book series *Game Changers*) nor am I particularly well versed in horny lit, but I have seen *Red*, *White and Royal Blue*, so I certainly know how bad their adaptations can be. And *Heated Rivalry* is far from bad! The writing, the actors — and the chemistry between them — and the filmmaking are essentially a full-fledged hat trick (sorry) compared to its competition. And how lucky are we that we get this raunchy dish served to us weekly for the first half of winter? It has basically single handedly cured my seasonal depression... for now, at least.

But while *Heated Rivalry* seems to be the grand finale of notable Canadian contributions to the 2025 culture at large, it's far from the only one. I have a little list, but first I want to know the Canadians (or works by Canadians) that made you proud this year, Anne?

WATCH | The trailer for Heated Rivalry:



Anne: Okay, well I have been *spoiled* with the number of Canadian books I've been lucky enough to read this year. And some of them are by my actual friends, which is something I am absolutely happy and willing to brag about: Scaachi Koul's *Sucker Punch* was a masterpiece in memoir writing, Carla Ciccone's *Nowhere Girls* is a must-read for those of us who were diagnosed with ADHD as grown-ass adults *and* for those who were not, I've sang the praises of Niko Stratis's mesmerizing *The Dad Rock That Made Me a Woman* before (and will again), and Alisha Mughal's *It Can't Rain All the Time* was a beautiful reading of *The Crow* that I had no idea I even needed.

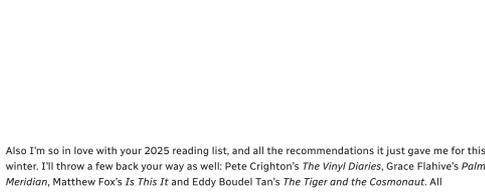
What else? Georgia Toews' *Nobody Asked For This* is devastating, clever, *funny*, and a reminder that I really do need to read more fiction. Emily Austin's *We Could Be Rats* — her third novel! — is a testament to storytelling. Oh! And *As If!* by Veronica Litt is a Pop Classics book on *Clueless* was exactly the deep dive I needed about a movie I can quote verbatim. I read it after an especially heavy text for school, and it was a palette cleanser and a joy.

But I'm not even finished! Omar El Akkad's *One Day Everyone Will Have Always Been Against This*, Tanya Talaga's *The Knowing*, and my dear pal Chantal Braganza's *The Story of Your Mother* are all books we owe it to ourselves to read and own and borrow out to friends.

I could go on, but that would be extremely only child of me, and I want to go into 2026 being less obvious about my particular birth order. Peter! Did you read anything great? Watch anything great? Listen to anything great? Did you, like me, ask your friends from Alberta if they've ever met Tate McRae?

Peter: I did not ask any Albertan this, but I did listen to "Sports Car" a hundred times in a row the day it came out.

WATCH | The video for "Sports Car":



Also I'm so in love with your 2025 reading list, and all the recommendations it just gave me for this winter. I'll throw a few back your way as well: Pete Crighton's *The Vinyl Diaries*, Grace Flahive's *Palm Meridian*, Matthew Fox's *Is This It* and Eddy Boudel Tan's *The Tiger and the Cosmonaut*. All incredible new editions to the queer Canadian lit canon. As is the published playscript for Jordan Tannahill's Off Broadway sensation *Prince Faggot*, which I was lucky enough to see on stage in October. Which I realize is openly admitting that I travelled to the U.S. this year, but it was for the one reason I think that is still entirely acceptable: going to New York City to support great queer theatre. I also took in Kevin Zak's *Ginger Twinsies* while I was there, which is a wildly hilarious parody of *The Parent Trap* that stars, among many others, Toronto's very own Mitch Wood.

You certainly did not need to cross the border to see great theatre, either. I could go on and on, and Makram Ayache's *The Green Line* at Buddies in Bad Times, Chris Abraham and Cameron Carver's take on Octet at Crow's and Brendan Healy's staging of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* at Canadian Stage were among my personal highlights. While we're on the topic of in-person experiences in Toronto, let me also add two totally astounding art shows: Christopher Sherman's *Your Shame Bores Me* at Yabu Pushelberg and Jeremy Laing's *Mutuality* at Susan Hobbs Gallery (and still running until Jan. 10).

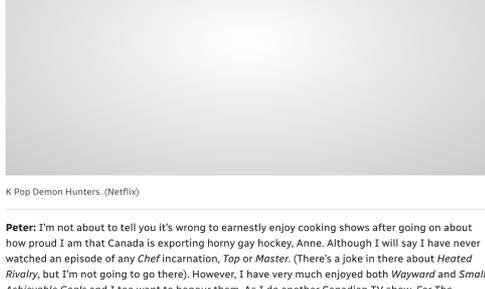
Now I'm getting hyper-local, and I do want to also talk about Canadians who exploded into the mainstream zeitgeist, and not just Tate McCrae and *Heated Rivalry*. Obviously there's James Cameron directing a third round of *Avatar* and Seth Rogen winning a boatload of Emmys for *The Studio*, but did you know a Canadian co-directed *K-Pop: Demon Hunters*, Anne? Maggie Kang, who was born in South Korea and moved to Toronto when she was 5-years-old. She went on to study animation at Sheridan College, which gave her the tools to create what was inarguably the cultural sensation of 2025. If it wasn't for her, we wouldn't have "Golden!" and she's almost certainly going to win the Oscar for Best Animated Feature for her efforts come March.

- **How Toronto's Maggie Kang created the Netflix smash hit 'KPop Demon Hunters'**

Anne: I did not know Maggie Kang was Canadian, but I'm going to start being very obnoxious about it when anybody mentions *K-Pop: Demon Hunters* going forward!

Speaking of film and/or television, let us please honour Mae Martin and their series *Wayward* that was delightfully weird (and currently available on Netflix). Also, *Small Achievable Goals* just got another season, and I love that it tackled the controversial topic of — pause for effect — menopausal women. It only took until 2025, but we got there, everybody! And if we're going to talk about funny women, which I am always happy to do, can we hold space for Veronika Slowikowska? She debuted on *SNL* this season after winning everybody on the internet over with her excellent sketches, and she is so goddamn solid every week.

And look, I know reality and competition TV isn't exactly highbrow, but *Top Chef Canada* impressed me big time this season, and I'm obsessed with the latest incarnation of *Master Chef Canada*. I want to watch people cook food and get super earnest about it! Is that so wrong, Peter? IS IT?



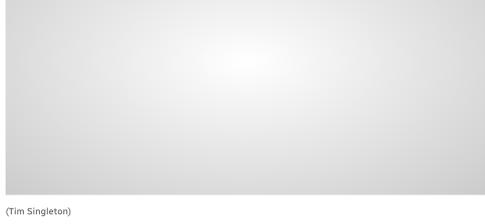
K Pop Demon Hunters. (Netflix)

Peter: I'm not about to tell you it's wrong to earnestly enjoy cooking shows after going on about how proud I am that Canada is exporting horny gay hockey, Anne. Although I will say I have never watched an episode of any *Chef* incarnation, *Top* or *Master*. (There's a joke in there about *Heated Rivalry*, but I'm not going to go there). However, I have very much enjoyed both *Wayward* and *Small Achievable Goals* and I too want to honour them. As I do another Canadian TV show, *Far The Culture* with Amanda Parris, which just premiered on CBC Gem a few weeks ago and is just such an extraordinarily thoughtful and well-made exploration of Black culture here and around the world.

Before we go, I also just want to shout a few Canadian films that I saw in 2025 but have not been released properly in theatres so please look out for them next year because they are all wonderful: Sophy Romvari's *Blue Heron*, Bretten Hannam's *At The Place of Ghosts* and Nicole Bazouin's *Modern Where*. And if you're looking for a great movie to watch right now, may I suggest one that was notably directed by a still practicing medical doctor from Calgary, Alberta: Roshan Sethi's incredibly charming rom com *A Nice Indian Boy*.

Anne: Yet another testament to the cultural bounty hailing from Alberta. Bless us everyone! (I'm saying that in the *Muppet Christmas Carol* way, clearly.)

Peter: And that's exactly how I heard it.



(Tim Singleton)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

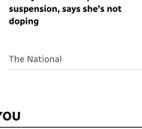


Peter Knegt (he/him) hosts the Canadian Screen Award-winning talk series *Here & Queer*, produces the essay series *Emerging Queer Voices* and co-writes the column *Holding Space* with Anne T. Donahue. His previous work at CBC Arts included writing the LGBTQ+ culture column *Queeries* (winner of the Digital Publishing Award for best digital column in Canada) and spearheading the launch and production of series *Canada's a Drag*, variety special *Queer Pride Inside*, and interactive projects *Superqueeros* and *The 2010s: The Decade Canadian Artists Stopped Saying Sorry*. Beyond CBC, Knegt is also the filmmaker of numerous short films, the author of the book *About Canada: Queer Rights and the curator and host of the monthly film series *Queer Cinema Club* at Toronto's Paradise Theatre.*

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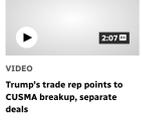
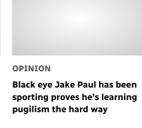
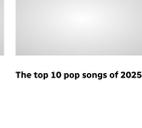
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