

## Q&A: VFS Acting alum Kaden Connors on playing Sasha in Crave’s breakout hit ‘Heated Rivalry’

By VFS, on February 3, 2026

### Key Takeaways

- VFS Acting alum **Kaden Connors** delivers a standout performance as Sasha in *Heated Rivalry*, marking a major milestone in his on-screen career.
- *Heated Rivalry* has become **Crave’s most successful original series**, earning critical acclaim and global attention since its 2025 release.
- Connors’ journey highlights how **Vancouver Film School Acting** alumni are contributing to some of the industry’s most talked-about projects.

By now, you’ve either binged Jacob Tierney’s *Heated Rivalry* (perhaps more than once) or have heard every person you know obsess over it. Starring Hudson Williams, Connor Storrie, and François Arnaud, the groundbreaking LGBTQ+ series has shaken up the industry and the creative world, leaving a lasting impact that still has us talking months after its release.

At **Vancouver Film School**, *Heated Rivalry*’s breakout success feels especially close to home. Among the cast is **VFS Acting for Film & Television** alum Kaden Connors, who delivers a standout performance as Sasha, the former flame of Ilya Rosanov (Storrie). A Canadian actor who launched his career right here in Vancouver, Connors’ role marks a major milestone and is just another example of how VFS alumni are contributing to the industry’s biggest projects across film and television.

### THE UNPRECEDENTED SUCCESS OF HEATED RIVALRY

Talk about a Canadian success story. Since its release in November 2025, *Crave’s* most successful original series to date has become a global phenomenon. With a near-perfect score of 97% on Rotten Tomatoes and a 9/10 rating on IMDb (the show briefly nabbed a perfect 10/10 – gaining the title of IMDb’s highest-rated series), *Heated Rivalry* has logged hundreds of millions of minutes viewed and is beloved by critics and audiences alike (without a doubt my personal favourite of 2025). Based on the *Game Changers* series by author Rachel Reid, the series has already earned an early second season renewal. The bad news – we’ll have to wait until 2027 before season 2 drops.

### ABOUT VFS’S AWARD-WINNING ACTING PROGRAM

Recognized as a **Leading Canadian Acting School by theWorkbook**, Vancouver Film School’s Acting for Film & Television program has trained artists that have performed in *Moana 2*, *Barbie*, *Only Murders in the Building*, *American Horror Story*, *The White Lotus*, *The Last of Us*, and more – on the industry’s top platforms from Netflix to HBO, AppleTV, Prime Video, Disney+, and beyond.

Over 1 short year, **students train hands-on** in VFS’s state-of-the-art facilities – including black box studios, a green screen room, and a massive motion capture volume (something you won’t find at any other school!) – gaining a mastery of feature, sitcom, voice, & motion capture acting and creating a **diverse portfolio** that will attract talent agents. VFS Acting students also benefit from industry partnerships with Artist to Artist, theWorkbook, and Breakdown Services.

If you’re interested in learning more about our Acting program – from start dates to tuition, scholarship opportunities, and more – **book an appointment with our Admissions Advisors**.



### OUR Q&A WITH HEATED RIVALRY ACTOR KADEN CONNORS

**Congratulations on your big role! Did you have any idea while filming that the series would be such a tremendous success?**

Thank you! Yes, and no, is my answer. There were things that made its success evident from the very beginning: a book fanbase, the writing, and Jacob Tierney. Rachel Reid’s best-selling novels already came with a fanbase. And arguably, book fans are the most ‘die-hard’ fans of all fandoms (in my opinion).

As an actor, sometimes we get faux sides for auditions, or even material that isn’t necessarily the strongest piece of writing you’ve ever read. But the scenes we read for our HR auditions were so brilliant. And on top of that, Jacob Tierney was the writer, director and show creator... I remember my agent saying to me, “Everything that man touches succeeds.”

Jacob Tierney, an iconic Canadian actor, filmmaker and artist, came into this project with ART in mind. And he wasn’t about to let any major studio take that away him. This was a story that meant so much to him, and so many of us. When I got to set, the level of skill and professionalism only affirmed my suspicions that this project was going to be something major.

My ‘no’ comes in when we talk about the ‘scale’ of this success... It has been an overnight success we haven’t seen very often in film history. THAT is definitely where we all stand, shocked and overjoyed, at how the world has received our little piece of art. I wake up some days and go, “Wow...that really happened.” And I can’t relay enough how lucky and privileged I feel to be attached to such a work of heART.

**Are there any particular moments from filming that will live rent-free in your head forever?**

Well, I remember as I entered my scene with Connor, before we started rolling, he told me ‘you smell good.’ Which, okay, whatever. I did have some nice cologne on (which was a character choice for me). But when you know the context and content of our scene, to this day I don’t know if it was a throwaway from him or if his devilishly brilliant artist brain was playing with some techniques to usher in our connection for when the cameras started rolling.

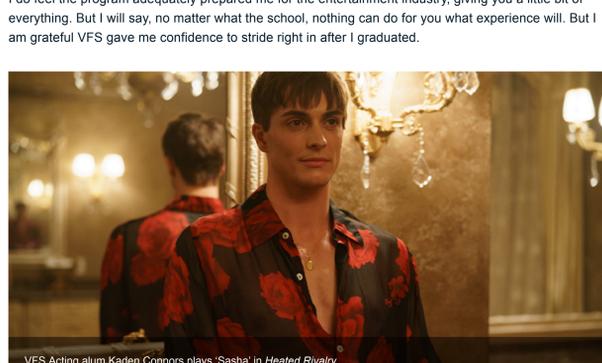
Regardless of what it was, I chose to use it and take it as a gift. Given the nature of my character, my through line was to ‘play.’ As we settled into the scene, that’s exactly what we did. And that wonderful thing happened when actor’s fall into their flow: nothing else existed except us and that space. And this was a sure reminder that everything can be an offer, a gift, for an artist to play with.

**What was your experience like as a VFS Acting student? Do you feel the program adequately prepared you for the entertainment industry?**

It was a well-rounded experience, for sure. I was going through a lot when I attended the program. Religious heartbreak, and queer growing pains. I was rediscovering myself and being in a space full of other artist was perhaps one of the best places I could’ve been. From the ground up, VFS’s Acting for Film and TV program worked for actors of all experience levels. Having come from a theatre background, my aim was to focus my training on Film and TV specifically, keen on pursuing my career in that industry. And the program was thorough, the teachers all different and all dedicated.

Funny enough, one of my teachers I may have “butt heads” with the most, in hindsight, is responsible for my greatest lesson coming out of there. I came to understand that judgment is one of the biggest disconnects as an actor. It is not our job to judge a character we play, but to, no matter how irredeemable they may seem, find the thing that makes them human, and beautiful, and fight for it. Human beings are deeply dynamic, good characters are too.

I do feel the program adequately prepared me for the entertainment industry, giving you a little bit of everything. But I will say, no matter what the school, nothing can do for you what experience will. But I am grateful VFS gave me confidence to stride right in after I graduated.



VFS Acting alum Kaden Connors plays ‘Sasha’ in *Heated Rivalry*.

**What’s next for you? I saw that you’re co-starring in Nick Butler’s upcoming comedy *Lunar Sway*!**

Yes! Well, today, I’m back to auditions! Always back to auditions. But I have a few projects lined up for release over the next bit. *SkyMed* Season 4. A new comedy series with Brooke Shields.

But *Lunar Sway* is another project that stole a piece of my heart in its creation. Another art piece by a Canadian filmmaker, Nick Butler. His second feature, and wow, can I say it does not disappoint! It’s going through festivals as we speak (lots of announcements coming soon).

It’s a quirky, queer coming-of-age indie following a young man in a desert town who goes down a wild road ‘finding love in all the wrong places.’ Starring Liza Weil and Noah Parker, the film explores the tenderness of human connection in a beautiful, cinematic experience. As an actor, it is the most incredible feeling in the world when you step into the shoes of a character with a story that touches your heart. This film is a must watch, so keep an eye out!

**What advice do you have for aspiring actors looking to break into the entertainment industry in 2026?**

Believe in yourself. Confidence isn’t just ‘innate,’ it is taught, it is practiced. If you get squeamish watching yourself on screen, cringe through it until you stop cringing. Conquer that first before you step out into the industry.

Don’t be desperate, be patient. If you really want it, you’ll wait for it. Never stop training, never stop practicing. Get a coach(es), watch films, read books, learn to LOVE auditioning. Because 99% of all your acting will be auditions.

Establish a good relationship to your practice and to your work. Find the joy. Have fun. HAVE FUN. I cannot emphasize this enough. Casting directors, producers, directors—they see who plays with it, and who’s just “getting it done.”

Offer, offer, offer—make strong choices and keep it feeling ‘alive.’ Don’t do a self-tape a hundred times to ‘perfect’ it. No one likes strong. We like authentic. Don’t ‘beat a dead horse,’ AKA keep an audition or scene fresh, reactive, and real.

Talk positively, about yourself and others. Be an advocate of the art you want to be booked for and watch the universe hear you and the creative ways it hands down gifts (it’ll never be in the way you imagined, but that’s what makes it interesting).

And lastly, never stop creating. Resentment can and will build within you as you work your ass off if you do not find an outlet to create art. Write, play in another department, make your own films—whatever it is, don’t wait on a ‘yes.’ There is no one way to do the damn thing, so keep your courage, find your community, thank the people who have faith in you, and reconsider your definition of success to be wider, broader and more collaborative than we’re told to make it. And I promise you, you will experience accomplishment, fulfillment, and joy as an artist in this world.

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