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Heated Rivalry is so Quebec-coded

By Toula Drimonis

"Jacob Tierney has honoured the best of what we collectively have here, producing a series that is, in many ways, a very Quebec and Montreal product."

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It's safe to say that three months after *Heated Rivalry* premiered on Crave, most of the world has become obsessed with fictional hockey stars Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov.

I'm just as mesmerized by the series. It's such a needed breath of fresh air in these deeply troubling times. Directed by Montreal's very own Jacob Tierney and adapted from Rosie Scalise-author Rachel Reid's Game Changers book series, this Canadian show has added at least 10 degrees of coziness to our country's reputation.

As someone who often writes on culture and identity politics in Quebec, not to mention the complex and intertwined duality of French and English identities existing as both minorities and majorities in Quebec, *Heated Rivalry* also provides a good opportunity to point out how one of our own harmonious blend of what we collectively have here, producing what is, in many ways, a very Quebec and Montreal product.

Jacob Tierney, Source: Wikipedia

By casting a spotlight on Quebec's anglophone and Francophone culture, the series not only served Canada's profile internationally, but also Quebec's profile inside Canada. As English Quebecer — someone clearly in love with Quebec's French culture, French artists and French music — showcased and successfully exported it nationally and internationally. Why aren't we talking about it more?

The series is unapologetically as, well, *Hot!* Don't just mean the obvious: the music, the soundtrack, the Canadian and Quebec-based film locations (even if most of the series was shot outside of the province), and all the Easter eggs thrown in that only Quebecers would catch.

It's also very Montreal in its sensibilities and lack of taboos with sex and nudity, and the ultimate taboo these days: deep yearning for connection. There's Francoisse and uninhibited queer joy in this sexually, deeply romantic story that feels far more chic now, then any U.S. production could ever be. This show could have never, ever been made in the U.S. — where graphically violent scenes are greenlit in a flash, but throw some hot, consensual gay sex in the mix and moral panic ensues. The U.S. suffers from a cultural prudishness and puritanism that we don't. As a result, *Heated Rivalry* was happily funded by the Canadian Media Fund and benefitted from Quebec tax credits. In return, as Canada's culture minister Marc Miller joked recently, "we got a lot of bang for our buck."

Marc Miller, Source: Wikipedia

In many ways, Tierney's choices represent the evolution of Quebec's English community distinctly different from English speakers in the rest of Canada, and very much influenced by and attached to Quebec's francophone culture. So much of the series is an obvious love letter to Montreal. It's unsurprising that Jacob's dad is Kevin Tierney, "a Francophile" of Quebecois cinema and theatre and the only anglophone to serve as head of the Cinémathèque Québécoise's board of directors,"who co-wrote and produced Bon Cop, Bad Cop 20 years ago, a landmark bilingual film that helped bridge Quebec's two cultural and linguistic divide. Who better suited than a Quebecer? Like his father, Jacob also knows and wants to share our unique culture with the world — not in a condescending, politically driven way, but in the effortless way that anti-depressants work.

The reason why I'm writing about this is simple: Studies show that francophones routinely underestimate the amount of French that anglophones know, as well as the amount of interest that anglophones have in French culture. Quebecers also underestimate the fact that we are not the only francophones and French speakers in Canada. Many Quebecers don't realize that there are 1.2 million francophones living outside Quebec, and that there are 1.6 million anglophones who speak French. Quebecers are rarely subjected to before-per-spit the message that many Quebecois people remain uncomfortable with anglophone and allophone Quebecois-born or know anything about Quebec's French culture?

Here's what irks me, though. The folks who complain that English-speaking Quebecois aren't interested in Quebec's French culture are the same people who willingly ignore them when they are.

While it is true that governments can actively help shape a more regular culture through grants, tax credits and funding, it's really artists who define what a place ultimately feels and sounds like. Primarily because the space they inhabit ultimately influences how they feel and sound like, too. There's a distinct cultural landscape to Montreal, and in so many ways, Tierney has captured much of its magic.

Cinéma Du Parc

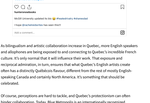
Born and raised in Montreal, Tierney has an obvious attachment to his hometown. Unlike many English-speaking Quebecers who have left Quebec for greener pastures, their in the way he infuses the series with a French soundtrack, French is effectively part of the sonic landscape because who can live here and not be exposed to it daily in major or minor ways? Tierney instinctively understand that he couldn't portray an authentic Montreal without injecting Quebecois elements of Contemporary Quebec French music.

The series soundtrack is representative of today's multilingual and multicultural Quebec, exposing the world to Quebec French artists Dumas, Alle Rosacia and Philippe B, but also Italian Quebecois Michael-ange Ricky Jay and rapper Lou-Phaiye, whose older brother, Kaytranada, has been killing it for years.

Lou-Phaiye, Source: Wikipedia

Monsieur Mr Montreal La Breeze singing "L'arsenic-the-jours heureux" (the soundtrack for popular Quebec series *Le chalet*) when Shane and Ilya were on the way to the cottage is a niche Quebecois reference only we would and could notice. Tierney chose Quebec musician Peter Peter to compose the original score, while Canadian and U.S. musical acts round up the soundtrack, replicating what a typical Montrealer would be exposed to.

Because of Tierney's Montreal roots, the show also features several hometown nostalgic hot spots. The St-Viateur Bagel shop's queer appearance alone helped skyrocket their business sales, while McGill University has also experienced an the hype after Shane proudly mentioned to Ilya that he dad once played hockey for McGill, only for Ilya to quickly respond, "McGill? What the f— is McGill?" Quebec actors François Arnaud and Sophie Nélisse are prominently featured in the series. When Rose asks Shane to meet her at CoC, Montreaders clubbing in the late 1990s and early 2000s immediately knew it was a reference to Sky, a well-known gay bar in the Village.



Lucas Tierney, Source: Wikipedia, Ivy Tierney, Source: Crave, Jacob Tierney, Source: Wikipedia

Yet there continues to be reticence in acknowledging an English Quebec art scene that not only creates Quebecois culture but art in a variety of forms, but supports Quebec's French cultural art scene, which often punches way above its weight.

Regardless, Heated Rivalry's success and the way it showcases and celebrates Quebec and Canadian creativity is just another reminder that it's rarely ever politicians or bureaucrats who inspire love for and interest in a place's culture and language.

It's artists. Always artists. ■

Jacob Tierney, Source: Instagram, Rachel Reid, Source: Wikipedia, Shane Hollander, Source: Instagram

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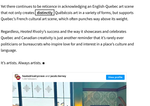

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