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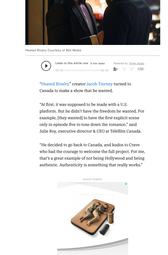
'Heated Rivalry' Was Supposed to Be Made With a U.S. Platform but Jacob Tierney 'Didn't Have the Freedom He Wanted': 'Great Example of Not Being Hollywood – and Being Authentic'

By Rocío Aranda



Heated Rivalry Courtesy of Bell Media

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"Heated Rivalry" creator Jacob Tierney turned to Canada to make a show that he wanted.

"At first, it was supposed to be made with a U.S. platform, but he didn't have the freedom he wanted. For example, they wanted to have the first explicit scene only in the episode directed by Yoann Lemoine," said Julie Roy, executive director & CEO at Telefilm Canada.

"He decided to go back to Canada, and kudos to Crave who had the courage to welcome the full project. For me, that's a great example of not being Hollywood and being authentic. Authenticity is something that really works."

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"Heated Rivalry" became a global phenomenon, thanks to its explosive combination of hockey, romance and explicit scenes.

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"This example is also interesting in terms of audience engagement. A high number of people just watched this series for the fifth time! It's insane."

Apart from Tierney's hit, Roy listed other recent Canadian successes: "Empathy" and "North of North," taking on local stories.

"The diversity of Canada, the richness of its perspective and storytellers is such a great asset," she said. But it's also an industry. "It's important to highlight that as well. In Canada, the economic impact of the creative industry is equivalent to aerospace industry, and it's more than fisheries and automobile industry."

Talking during Series Mania Forum's panel about Global Audiovisual Alliances, Roy admitted that many Europeans want to collaborate with Canada. "I'll be curious to see if this new convention would be open to welcome Canada in it."

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"We have 37 treaties of co-production, which is the highest number in the world. I think it's quite an indicator that we really like to collaborate and co-produce and find international partnership."

Gaëtan Brunel, CNC president, underlined: many people still believe in the future of creation.

"We [need to] keep true to our values, as John just mentioned, and the idea that creativity, taking risks and supporting the independent producers, these core principles and values, stay at the heart of what we do."

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He added: "The crisis in Hollywood may be a sort of gold mine, if we think less of who is the new 'superior leader' of cinema and creation and more about how can we build together a new global governance for the moving image: a new multilateralism in which we don't rely only on what is thought to Hollywood. There's really a diversity at heart in Europe that really can be perhaps the new superpower."

Klaus Zimmermann, managing partner at Lex Production Dynamics, observed that for every U.S. success, there have "10 failures."

"I think that for the amount we have, we're doing pretty well. With the streamers coming to Europe and investing, there's an opportunity to create more shows, but also local shows. I don't think this is a threat, but there needs to be courage and storytelling."

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Coming from Spain, which already established powerful relationships with Latin America, some producers aren't dependent on Hollywood financing, noted Marida Benisovsky (Tornasol Media).

"It's true that the opportunities and windows that have opened are very big, and that also drives us to think in another way about the storytelling. I like what you said about 'Heated Rivalry': You have to find your own way and really believe that what you are telling and how you are telling it is going to communicate with the audience."

According to Brunel, the real competition is no longer between national industries.

"Worldwide, we see audiences, especially the younger ones, shifting faster than expected toward free, low-cost content, of course more and more generated by AI. It's an economical challenge for the creators, the producers, the broadcasters. It's also, and perhaps above all, a sanitary catastrophe. This is a sanitary catastrophe," he said, pointing at his phone.

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"Our kids' relationship with screens is becoming a health world problem, but also a democratic one. We have been decreasing and forging alliances for a long time, but today we are facing a moment that is so important and so fascinating as the invention of cinema itself. The first revolution was led by the creators and the entrepreneurs. Today, it's quite different. Today, we need policymakers, non-profit organizations and those who really care about the interest of the public."

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The rise of Korea has also been notable over the past few years, with Hyun Suk Yoo, Acting President of Korea, talking about recent BTS comeback and the Korean wave. Hallyu, that brought about popular K-dramas.

"Rather than the government leading the success from the front, in order for the content ecosystem to function effectively, it would be more accurate to say that it played a supporting part from behind. From planning to production and distribution, in order to reduce the challenges faced by the industry, we are continuing to communicate with the stakeholders on the ground," he said.

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Benisovsky added that because of the changing rules of streamers, more deals are needed – also to gap finance new productions. "I feel that the co-production laws were established many of years ago and they are moving more slowly than the changes we have been facing. It's time to think in a more flexible way, but we cannot lose the regulatory framework that gives us security."

Brunel mentioned TF1 and Netflix, which announced the first very strategic distribution deal.

"It was a way for them to meet halfway," he said. "We believe, more than ever, that we need to think differently about how we can work together. We have a lot to learn from the streamers and they say they have a lot to learn from other models."

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