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‘The best antidote to hate,’ Heated Rivalry showrunner Jacob Tierney on the importance of Queer joy and representation

At Departure Honours, showrunner Jacob Tierney and star Ksenia Kharlamova discuss why Heated Rivalry’s joyful queer love story is resonating with audiences and why centring happiness in 2SLGBTQ+ representation matters now more than ever.

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DEVON BANFIELD



Speaking to Queer & Now at the Departure Honours in Toronto, creator Jacob Tierney opened up about the importance of telling Queer stories that centre love, happiness and hope. (Courtesy: Now Toronto)



Joyful Queer love stories are still rarer on television than they should be — and that’s exactly why *Heated Rivalry* **struck such a chord** with audiences this year. Speaking with Queer & Now at the Departure Honours in Toronto, showrunner Jacob Tierney reflected on the importance of putting Queer joy front and centre, why the series needed a happy ending, and how the hit show resonated far beyond LGBTQ+ audiences.

Departure Festival hit Toronto this week, with talent from across Canada joined by international stars for a week of performances, showcases, panels and all things entertainment industry related. This includes the Departure

Honours, an award ceremony giving flowers to some of the most talented stars in the country. That includes none other than the Heated Rivalry showrunner, [Jacob Tierney](#), who received the Creative Impact Award.

“It’s the most amazing gift that I’ve been given, and it’s my absolute pleasure and honour to be able to be a person who can put not just a Queer storyline, but a joyful Queer story on TV,” the writer told [Queer & Now](#).

He shared that **joy** is the key, because even though we’re seeing more 2SLGBTQ+ representation on screen, that doesn’t equate to seeing the happiness of our communities reflected.

“That’s the most important thing to me, because I think that so many people see our stories and for understandable reasons, there’s a lot of trauma associated with them,” he explained.

“I think, really, the reason I wanted to make *Heated Rivalry* is because it’s a love story with a happy ending, and it’s incredibly meaningful to me to be able to do that.”

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And why is Queer joy so important?

“Because it’s the best. Because we don’t get to see it, and I think joy is the best antidote to hate.”

The highlighting of Queer love and happiness is something that Canadian actress Ksenia Kharlamova, who plays Svetlana Vetrova, the love interest and friend of Ilya Rozanov, also holds dear.



Canadian actress Ksenia Kharlamova plays Svetlana Vetrova. (Courtesy: IMBD)

“I feel like this show has really touched so many different demographics of people, and I feel like there’s something in it that everyone can connect with, which I really, really love,” Kharlamova told [Queer & Now](#).

This is something that she also appreciates from her perspective as a woman of colour.

"I didn't think they would cast me just because I'm not stereotypically Eastern European looking, even though we have, like, a ton of different ethnic groups in Eastern Europe," Kharlamova, who is of Russian-Trinidadian descent, explained.

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"I feel like, often, a lot of casting directors think like, 'Oh, this character has to be this race for us to cast you,' and it's like, why can't they just be like a

person or a character that just fits the story?” she continued, adding that it’s important for audiences to see themselves represented.

“There are so many different faces out there, so many different people, and so many different stories. So I feel like it’s amazing to showcase that as well.”

A moment for my Lesbians in the fanbase

Heated Rivalry is based on the novel of the same name by Canadian author Rachel Reid. Ahead of season two, which is already in production and based on a book in the same collection of novels, this Lesbian columnist had an important question for Tierney: Will my fellow women-loving-women have a moment in season two? Not clear – but he did give us our flowers.

“I want Lesbians to have a moment all the time, most of my heroes are lesbians,” he shared.

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“Unfortunately, I don’t know that there’s a... Lesbian storyline coming up in the show, but I’m so grateful to the Lesbians that formed me, and that made me into the man and the artist that I am today.”



DEVON BANFIELD
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