

'Heated Rivalry' creator Jacob Tierney resisted using 'shady' t.A.T.u song at first

Alex Nino Gheciu, The Canadian Press
about 10 hours ago



Jacob Tierney, co-creator of the TV series "Heated Rivalry", speaks at the Prime Time screen and media industry conference in Ottawa, on Thursday, January 29, 2026. THE CANADIAN PRESS/ Patrick Doyle

TORONTO — While t. A.T.u's early-2000s hit "All The Things She Said" now feels synonymous with "Heated Rivalry," creator Jacob Tierney says he initially "resisted" including it in the hit Crave series.

"That song is shady," Tierney said during a panel discussion at Toronto's Departure Festival on Thursday.

"It is deeply complicated. It's unpleasant in a lot of ways."

But the writer-director said the track by the Russian duo was hard to resist using for a pivotal nightclub sequence in the drama about two rival male hockey players who fall in love.

He explained that using the queer-presenting song was also a way of sticking it to the Russian government, which has effectively banned his show under laws targeting what it deems LGBTQ+ propaganda.

"Like it or not, this is a big gay song, and I'm going to make it even gayer right now."

Released in 2002, "All The Things She Said" became a global smash for t.A.T.u., whose music video depicting a sapphic kiss between members Lena Katina and Julia Volkova was later accused of queerbaiting audiences.

In the 2003 documentary "Anatomy of t.A.T.u.," the duo confirmed neither identified as lesbian at the time they made the song, with Katina saying she tried to pray away what she called their "sinful" public image.

Volkova later came out as bisexual, but drew backlash in a 2014 interview after describing gay men as "unmanly" and saying she would disapprove of having a gay son. Katina responded on social media with a pro-LGBTQ+ message, while Volkova later apologized for her remarks.

Tierney said he struggled with the baggage of "All The Things She Said" before deciding to use it.

"We wanted Russian music," Tierney told the audience. "I, of course, wanted queer stuff whenever I could get it. And I was like, 'Frankly, there's only one big hit in this department.'"

The tune plays during a nightclub staredown between Russian sniper Ilya Rozanov and Canadian forward Shane Hollander, before morphing into a dance cover by U.K. artist-producer Harrison.

Tierney added that he wanted to acknowledge Russia's audiences and cultural influence despite the country's anti-LGBTQ+ politics.

"Of course (t.A.T.u.) disavowed the song, look at where they live," he said.

"It's a place where we were never going to be releasing this show, obviously. But the show is a massive underground success there, too. And I kind of wanted to do right by the humans that live in Russia, and acknowledge this is a country with a massive cultural footprint, especially in music."

The panel offered a behind-the-scenes look at how music became central to the identity of "Heated Rivalry."

Elsewhere, Tierney noted the drama's second season will include an episode set almost entirely to Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's "Requiem."

However, when asked about money for Season 2, Tierney said he'll be working with "the same budget" as the first season.

While he declined to reveal the exact figure, he joked that each episode cost about "half a Taylor Swift song."

The filmmaker said the series' popularity has nonetheless made it easier to secure music, with artists increasingly approaching the production directly.

"The music is being sent to us," said Tierney, who also received the creative impact award at the Departure Honours gala on Thursday.

"The artists who have reached out have been like, 'Please use my song.'"

He added that musicians have seen streaming boosts after appearing in the series, pointing to artists including Wolf Parade and Feist.

"Look at these songs that are 20 years old in some cases and are at the top of the streaming charts," Tierney said.

"People watch the show, and they like the music, so it is a bigger platform... But we don't have more money."

This report by The Canadian Press was first published May 9, 2026.

Alex Nino Gheciu, The Canadian Press
