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# Heated Rivalry Star Nadine Bhabha Is a Fierce Champion of Canadian Talent

By **Annika Lautens**

Nadine Bhabha wants to sit in the sun. We're on set for her *Kit* cover shoot in Toronto, and after hours of Bhabha serving some serious supermodel poses (the athleticism! the dynamism!), it's time to break for lunch.

Bhabha suggests we take our protein bowls out onto the makeshift patio in the parking lot. We sit on two plastic Canadian Tire Muskoka chairs facing a view of asphalt, sidewalk weeds and dirty brick walls, the smell of gasoline lightly wafting in the background. ▲

## THE KIT

"I wouldn't say a lot has changed," the 36-year-old actor says. "I still live in the same apartment. I have all the same friends. I get to go to a few more parties—and that rocks—but I'm kind of doing the exact same thing I would be doing, you know what I mean? I've been on a trajectory for a long time."

Bhabha wears many jerseys: actor, comedian, writer and poet. She's appeared in *Letterkenny* and *Kim's Convenience*, penned punchlines for *This Hour Has 22 Minutes* and even published a collection of poems in 2017. But it's her role as Elena, the ride-or-die best friend of Kip (Robbie G.K.) in *Heated Rivalry*, that earned her a [Canadian Screen Award](#) and launched her into the TV stratosphere.

*Heated Rivalry* creator Jacob Tierney had Bhabha in mind when he was adapting the character from Rachel Reid's bestselling book. "I mean, that's what he says," she says, laughing. The two met on the set of *Letterkenny* and became fast friends. "Jacob and I are very similar. We both joke around, and that's a form of love for us, and I think he wrote Elena in that vein. So, I'm sure I passed through his mind at one point and then he's just like, 'Why can't you be here?'"

Of course, Bhabha is being far too modest. Her wry wit made her an instant fan favourite, but it was her tender delivery of "He deserves sunshine. And so do you," that turned the words into an anthem for romantic hopefuls everywhere.



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"I was just so grateful to get to speak those lines," she's previously said of the viral scene. "And I

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writer on [Yaga](#), a supernatural thriller series, starring Hudson Williams, premiering at the Toronto International Film Festival.

But Bhabha isn't just thinking about what's next for herself (although there is a lot!). She hopes Canadians can continue to make television "for each other and not for profit."

She'd also love to see more women portray "doofuses" on screen. "In the last two or three years, a lot of the female roles are the 'straight man.' They're not given the same attention for humour or growth."

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Bhabha, meanwhile, has never had trouble finding the funny. Off-screen, she's had "an insatiable appetite for making people laugh" since childhood. According to her mother, she's wanted to be an actor since the age of 2, and had her first audition at 9, for *The Lion King* at Mirvish—a quintessential Toronto theatre kid experience.

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“No one really knows what culture I am, which I find fascinating,” she says. “Everyone’s always trying to falsify my connection to a heritage that exists, but it has very little to do with my identity.”

Because of this, she’s been vocal about how there aren’t enough “middle ground” stories about immigrant identity: There’s either the immigrant or the white experience but rarely anything in between.

“We’re not a monolith—there are so many different types of people. So I want to see a show in which [the story] is told through someone like myself who experiences being a person of colour in the world, but it’s not the entire point of the series.”

Bhabha would also like to see the end of the “Canadian shows are bad” narrative, and press tour questions that treat *Heated Rivalry*’s massive success as a fluke.

“I would say it’s just another square in the quilt that is Canadian TV,” she says. To call it a turning point “would be to discount everything that came before.” She mentions *SCTV*, *Twitch City*, *Slings & Arrows*, *Corner Gas* and *Baroness von Sketch* as just a few highlights from our long history of successes.

Bhabha puts this discussion down to an “inferiority complex” that’s limiting the local industry. “It’s doing a disservice because there’s so many talented people here,” she says. “We’re just as funny as the Brits and the Americans, but because no one expects us to have ta’ everyone is just like, ‘What is in the water over there?’”



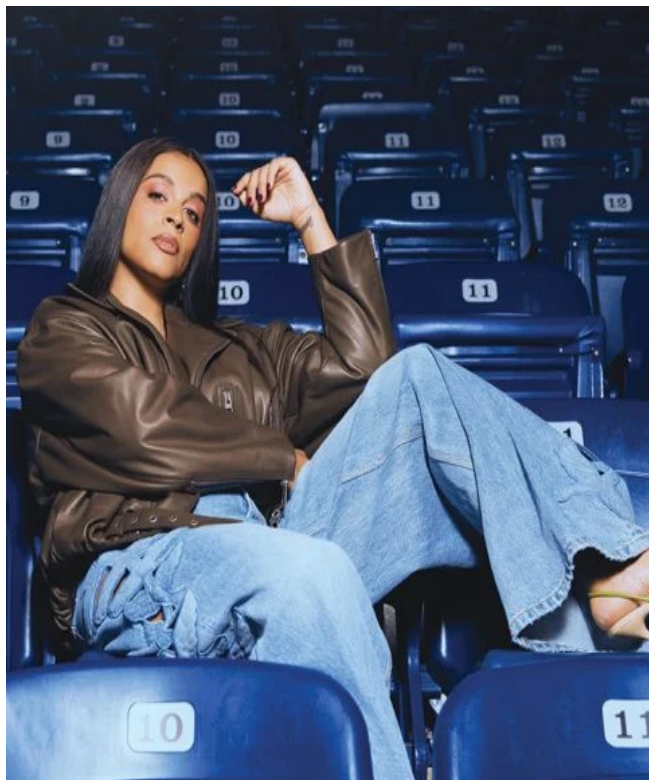
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Until she can reveal more, Bhabha is staying out of the PR penalty box. Right now, it's time to finish our lunch and for her to go back to set. Bhabha's time in the sun isn't over—it's just getting started.

*Photography: Ted Belton. Styling: Christal Williams. Makeup: Simone Otis. Hair: Steph George*

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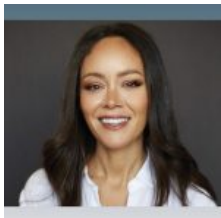
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