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SIMU LIU

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C21's DRAMA QUARTERLY

Building character

By Michael Pickard
June 23, 2021

Kim's Convenience star Simu Liu talks about becoming the first Asian 'title superhero' in the Marvel Cinematic Universe and discusses how minority actors should be better utilised to shape their characters and stories on screen.

It might seem like a bold move for an actor to audition for a role via Twitter, with seemingly little chance of success. But Simu Liu has been lobbying Marvel to play a superhero since 2014, when he first Tweeted: "Hey Marvel, great job with Cpt America and Thor. Now how about an Asian American hero?"

It wasn't until late 2018, however, with a film based on comic book character Shang-Chi long in development, that the production started to ramp up – as did Liu's Twitter-based

efforts to the land the lead part. “OK @Marvel, are we gonna talk or what #ShangChi,” he Tweeted that December.

Fast-forward another seven months to June 2019 and Liu stepped out on stage during Marvel’s presentation at Comic-Con to announce he would be starring in the upcoming blockbuster Shang-Chi & the Legend of the Ten Rings, marking the first time an Asian superhero will be a title character in the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU). Filming took place in Australia during 2020 and the movie is now set to hit cinemas in September as part of Phase Four of the MCU.

While securing the role may still feel like a dream to Liu, he’s now got the action figures to prove it’s very much reality. “It’s a little crazy,” he tells DQ. “I remember the first time I actually looked at my Marvel Legends figure and held it in my hand. I have this beauty mark right next to my left eye and I looked at the action figure and I looked right beside his left eye and I saw the beauty mark. I was like, ‘This is insane.’



Simu Liu in Marvel’s Shang-Chi & the Legend of the Ten Rings

“When I was little, I remember playing with the He-Man action figures and they looked kind of cartoony. Now they’re based on 3D scans of the characters. There are moments

where I look at the light as it hits the figure at a certain angle and I'll be like, 'Oh, that's creepy. That's weird how much that looks like looking in a mirror.'

"But I also think it's really cool because obviously, as far as being the first Asian superhero in the MCU to get a title movie and to get this attention, it means millions of children will get what I never did growing up, which is an action figure that looks like them."

Liu isn't the only star of Shang-Chi to be remade as a six-inch figure, with Awkwafina's Katy, Meng'er Zhang's Xialing and Tony Leung's Wenwu also available in stores.

"That is one of the amazing things about this project: there is no one token character," the actor continues. "There's just such a plethora of different kinds of Asian or Asian-American experiences coming together and converging. That's how you get more nuanced conversations, rather than being just one in a group – and we've all seen those movies where there's one guy that sticks out and you know why he's there and he dies maybe like a quarter of the way in to the movie. But it's a different ball game altogether to have a movie like this, which is a total celebration of our culture and our faces."

Increasing diversity in front of and behind the camera has been a talking point within the film and television business over the last few years, and the launch of Shang-Chi comes at a time when hate crimes against Asian Americans are on the rise.



The film also stars Awkwafina (right) and Meng'er Zhang

"I do think it's a benchmark moment," Chinese-Canadian actor Liu says. "Our community doesn't have that many wins, representationally, to celebrate. We recently had our first Asian Oscar nominee in many years – Steven Yeun for Minari – but it just goes to show you how slow the gates have been opening and how gradual that process has been.

"We're still at a place where everything is a 'first' of something, and it's almost become a running joke within our community, like, 'OK, what's this the first of now? Crazy Rich Asians: the first romantic comedy [feature film] featuring an all-Asian cast. And this is the first of this thing.' We're really looking forward to the time when all of the firsts are out of the way and you start to go into the second, the third and the fourth. While it's important to celebrate those benchmarks, that's when you're really going to start to drill deeper into these stories that will hopefully shed some light into our identity, our stories and our culture."

To that end, Liu is now an ambassador for MADE|NOUS, an initiative that aims to shine a spotlight on Canadian talent in film, TV, gaming and digital entertainment, backed by the Canada Media Fund, Telefilm Canada and more than 30 broadcasters, distributors and producers in a bid to celebrate homegrown storytellers.

Its latest campaign, Seek More, is designed to amplify the range of diverse voices in Canada and recognise and celebrate their work, from global superstars like Ryan Gosling and Ryan Reynolds to up-and-coming local talents.

Liu spoke about the campaign and the importance of championing inclusion and diversity at this year's Banff World Media Festival, where he collected the Canadian Award of Distinction after being named among the 2021 Rockie Award Gala recipients. But it was not so long ago that Liu himself was still trying to break into the industry, before roles in Canadian dramas Omega and Blood & Water led to him appearing in series such as Taken, Fresh off the Boat and The Expanse. Then, in 2016, he joined the cast of comedy Kim's Convenience, about the misadventures of a Korean-Canadian family running a Toronto convenience store.



Liu (far left) starred in all five seasons of Kim's Convenience

"If you spend any time in Canada, what we really pride ourselves on is our commitment to multiculturalism and diversity and making every Canadian feel welcome," Liu said at the event. "It's not perfect. Like any country, we have a lot of work to do, both systemically and personally. But I would say that shows like Kim's Convenience are a big part of that kind of multicultural fabric."

However, the cancellation of Kim's Convenience earlier this year led to a row over just how representative the show had been of the Asian-Canadian experience. The series

had originally been renewed for fifth and sixth seasons in 2020, but broadcaster the CBC then confirmed in March this year it would end after S5.

“Authenticity of storytelling is at the centre of the success of Kim’s Convenience. At the end of production on season five, our two co-creators confirmed they were moving on to other projects,” a statement posted on the show’s Instagram feed said. “Given their departure from the series, we have come to the difficult conclusion that we cannot deliver another season of the same heart and quality that has made the show so special.”

Then earlier this month, Liu, who played Jung in the series, published an extensive Facebook post criticising the decision not to extend the show and outlining some issues that played out behind the scenes. These included his increasing frustrations at the way his character was shaped by producers who were “overwhelmingly white” and the lack of involvement the Asian-Canadian cast had in developing storylines with a writing team that “lacked both East Asian and female representation, and also lacked a pipeline to introduce diverse talents.” Apart from Ins Choi, who created the series with Kevin White based on his own play of the same name, there were no other Korean voices in the room, Liu said.

Fellow Kim’s Convenience star Jean Yoon later backed up Liu’s comments, Tweeting that “the lack of Asian female, especially Korean, writers in the writers room of Kim’s made my life very difficult and the experience of working on the show painful.”



Actors including Jean Yoon (left) have criticised the show's behind-the-scenes setup

In a statement issued in response, the CBC said: "Respectfully, it's not our place to speak on behalf of the producers or cast members of Kim's Convenience." The pubcaster is now working with Liu on Hello (Again), an original series for streaming platform CBC Gem that the actor co-created with Nathalie Younglai. Kim's Convenience producer Thunderbird Entertainment has declined to comment on the issues highlighted by the show's stars.

After Yoon's comments, the Kim's Convenience Twitter page reposted Tweets from Anita Kapila, a South Asian writer and a co-executive producer who worked on the show and presented a list of other women and people of colour who worked on the series.

Liu says his complaints stem from the imbalance of power in productions where the actors often have a greater lived experience of their characters than those in the writers room.

"I don't want to point any fingers or call any names, but I remember feeling like I didn't have a voice and I shouldn't have a voice, that I should just be grateful and not be difficult," he says. "And that kind of overarching feeling is an age-old narrative of the relationship between people in power and those without. Those without power are being

told to constantly be grateful for what they have and to not ask for more. But we're here to ask for more. We're here to seek more, in fact, and that's certainly what I hope people who follow Kim's Convenience do."

The actor envisions a world where actors "are not simply props or things to direct or a meat puppet," especially leading actors, whom he equates to heads of department for their respective characters. "They should be a steward of that character. They should be an advocate of that character. What they have to say ought to be respected, especially in circumstances where that character represents a visible minority and the actor identifies as that visible minority and is able to provide that additional perspective into the psyche of that character," he says.

His experience working on Kim's Convenience, which is available around the world on Netflix, could not have been further from his role on Shang-Chi & the Legend of the Ten Rings, where he was "invited to the table" to give his thoughts on the story and the characters in what will be the 25th entry in the MCU.

"For [Marvel Studios president] Kevin Feige or Jonathan Schwartz, our creative producer, to defer to Dave Callaham, our Asian-American screenwriter, Destin Daniel Cretin, our Asian-American director, or myself, an Asian-Canadian actor, and for them to listen to what we have to say and what our thoughts are on the story, it takes real foresight and real intelligence," Liu says. "Everyone will agree it made the project better. We were able to give notes, whether it was on character or story or structure; we were able to make the project better."

That's how collaborative Liu believes filmmaking should be. "I just feel like on Kim's Convenience we kind of fell short of that in some instances," he says.

VARIETY

From Simu Liu to Network TV, How Diversity Talk Can Shift From Cancellation to Cooperation

Behind-the-scenes tensions on shows like 'The Neighborhood' and 'All Rise' spotlight the struggle toward meaningful representation

By Elaine Low



Jasin Boland / Courtesy of Marvel Studios

"Kim's Convenience" star Simu Liu asks himself "every day" whether he should've spoken out last month on social media about his experience on the set of the hit CBC series, when he noted in a Facebook post the "overwhelmingly white" producers and lack of Korean voices in the writers' room after creator Ins Choi departed. But Liu remembers watching what wound up being the anticlimactic series finale at the end of the fifth season, which had just been released on Netflix, and reflecting on the global impact of the show about an Asian Canadian family.

"It made me really sad [for] what could have been, and made me angry, in a lot of ways, that we weren't able to pull things together to figure out our differences," he told *Variety* in mid-June, shortly after being presented with the Canadian Award of Distinction at the 2021 Banff Rockie Awards. His co-star Jean Yoon echoed his initial sentiment on Twitter, decrying allegedly "overtly racist" storylines that the cast pushed back against. And this week's Entertainment Weekly cover story featuring Liu, now the star of the upcoming Marvel Studios tentpole "Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings," reveals he protested a line in a script in which he refers to himself as "Egg Foo Jung."

“In the spirit of speaking out about these issues, I really wanted — more than to cancel anybody or call anybody out — I wanted to make sure that future productions learn from our shortcomings and mistakes,” he continued. “And I outlined a lot of things that we as a cast didn’t do correctly. I think we were subject to a lot of infighting and kind of missed the bigger picture of what was happening, which is that we felt like creative control was being wrestled away from us and that we were becoming less and less relevant than our own show.” (In response to Liu’s public comments, a CBC spokesperson directed *Variety* back to a March statement from the show’s producers that explained they were ending the show following the departure of its co-creators.)

Liu and Yoon’s experiences perhaps speak to the juncture that much of the entertainment industry finds itself parked at: more diversity and representation on camera, but a great deal of work left to do behind the scenes.

“It’s come to a point where you can see that diversity in front of the camera has improved, and [diversity initiative] efforts have yielded some more representation,” said Dr. Ana-Christina Ramon, UCLA’s director of research and civic engagement at the social sciences division and co-author of the annual Hollywood Diversity Report. “Quantitatively, you see that the representation is there in terms of having more people of color overall on screen, but when you look at the writers and directors and creators, you still see this severe underrepresentation across all the major racial and ethnic groups.”

That lack of meaningful representation translates to “white people writing about these characters [that are] cast as people of color, but there’s never a match in terms of the writers talking about their personal experience.”

That was the case for one former scribe on CBS’ “The Neighborhood,” the Cedric the Entertainer and Max Greenfield series about a white family who moves into a predominantly Black neighborhood, based on the personal experience of creator and now-former showrunner Jim Reynolds. Reynolds departed after three seasons following

complaints over his leadership style and cultural issues, including from two Black writers who had left the show, as *Variety* previously reported.

The writer, who wishes to remain anonymous due to concerns about professional retaliation, felt that Reynolds had hired him and other writers for their perspective as African Americans but did not incorporate their experiences in a meaningful way.

"I was there for the fluff, for spicing up jokes and making it feel authentic, but my ideas as a Black man weren't particularly valued," the writer told *Variety*. "This is a white show pretending to be a Black show."

"The Neighborhood" has since brought on Meg DeLoatch, an African-American woman, as its showrunner for Season 4. The assembled writers' room is "70% diverse," according to a source close to production, which the network sees as a step forward toward meaningful representation and believes will be reflected in the fourth's season's storylines. (CBS declined to comment.)

Separately, another CBS show, "All Rise," saw five of its seven original staff writers leave the courtroom drama series over creator showrunner Greg Spottiswood's reported approach to race and gender in the writers' room, according to a New York Times report.

Part of the challenge for the industry as a whole is in creating long-term change, and going beyond short-term programming such as one-time bias training for executives, Ramon said.

"Things like that don't create the kind of structural change that's necessary," she said. "And so what's happened is that a lot of it has been performative, and a lot of it has been just a very general level of just saying a proclamation and saying that we're going to make an effort, but not really doing a thorough analysis of what is necessary because what is necessary would be a strategic implementation."

For Liu, who has partnered up with Made/Nous to become an ambassador of its Seek More campaign, which promotes Canadian talent from a wide range of backgrounds and cultures, believes that it's also important for showrunners and producers to foster an environment in which everyone is able to contribute to the creative conversation.

"I look even at my experience working with Marvel, and you have industry giants like Kevin Feige and then I think about how collaborative he was every step of the way, and how willing he was to hear my thoughts and Destin [Daniel Cretton's] thoughts and Dave Callaham's thoughts," said Liu, referring to the film's Asian-American director and writer.

While Liu can't go into specifics about what feedback he offered — as is the top-secret Marvel way — he did say there were "little tidbits that we were able to offer that really resulted in real tangible change within this screenplay and pointed the story to a better place."

The origins of the Shang-Chi character in Marvel comics are certainly fraught; when the character debuted, he was the son of Fu Manchu, an offensive 20th century relic who embodied a suite of pernicious anti-Asian stereotypes. In 2019, right before he started filming, Cretton told BuzzFeed News that he first approached Marvel about the "Shang-Chi" movie specifically to "explain some of the things that would be offensive to me" from the comics — and he was pleasantly surprised when Marvel ended up hiring him to direct it.

"I'm so incredibly excited for people to watch the movie because it really is such a celebration of Asian-ness through all of its characters," said Liu. "We were really happy to have evolved past the source material that we were given."

Being "very, very lucky" to be a Marvel superhero — significantly, its first theatrical Asian American superhero — has put Liu in a position from which he feels he can speak out.

“I really don’t feel like I was just speaking out for the cast of ‘Kim’s Convenience,’” he said. “In a lot of ways I was speaking for a lot of actors and creatives who have just never felt the safety to be able to do so. It’s all in the spirit of being able to effect change long-term.”

Adam B. Vary contributed to this report.

TRANSPLANT

Ahmad Meree
eTalk (completed July 5th)

Joseph Kay
eTalk (completed July 5th)

C21 Drama Quarterly

Transplant’s heart

By Michael Pickard
July 20, 2021

Transplant showrunner Joseph Kay previews the second season of the Canadian medical drama and explains how it finds authenticity in the story of a Syrian doctor and refugee working in a Toronto hospital.

When it came to developing the second season of breakout Canadian medical drama Transplant, a key question for creator and showrunner Joseph Kay was whether to reflect real life with a nod to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

The show, which became the biggest new Canadian drama since 2015 when it launched on CTV in February last year, tells the story of Dr Bashir ‘Bash’ Hamed (Hamza Haq), a talented doctor and Syrian refugee who fled to Canada with his

younger sister and gets the chance to practice emergency medicine at York Memorial Hospital in Toronto.

Filming is now underway in Montreal on season two, later than planned thanks to Covid-19, but it was that delay that actually determined why the show will ultimately not feature the pandemic when it returns to screens.

“When we figured out what our broadcast schedule might be, we took a gamble,” says Kay, speaking to DQ while episodes nine and 10 of the 13-part season are in production. “We knew the earliest we’d be back on the air was going to be September 2021, so we decided collectively to be optimistic that we would on the other side of this [pandemic]. And if we are, I just don’t think people are going to want to go back to watching a show that toils in the nitty-gritty of it.”



Transplant centres on Dr Bashir ‘Bash’ Hamed, played by Hamza Haq

Kay also felt that putting the characters against the backdrop of Covid would shift the focus of the show away from its premise – how Bashir is adapting to and overcoming the challenges he faces living and working in a new country. What

the show does end up doing, however, is tackling themes associated with the pandemic through the stories of characters who feature in the series.

“Instead, we asked ourselves, how can we look at Covid themes with a little bit of distance to try to explore it in the show?” Kay explains. “So there are stories we tell about not being able to be there when a loved one passes. There’s been so much written about access to ventilators, so we found ways to tell stories about resources, or themes about how we think our lives are totally fine and then suddenly they’re not. We just tried to incorporate that into the storytelling while ignoring the virus.”

Kay’s writing and producing career has included work on shows such as legal drama This is Wonderland, cop series The Line, Second World War-set Bomb Girls, family saga This Life and hostage thriller Ransom. Transplant marks the first time he has worked on a medical show, but he says the genre is “an amazing playground for drama,” complete with built-in high stakes and human, relatable stories behind every medic or patient.

It’s Bashir’s story that runs through the heart of Transplant, however, with each episode focusing on this unorthodox, instinctive doctor, where he is in his life and how the opportunities or challenges he faces can be mirrored thematically by the experiences of his patients. There’s also a medical story for the deeply empathetic Bashir to become involved with in each episode, while the lives of his colleagues working at the hospital are explored as well.

“I’m proud to say we explore a family of themes – adaptation, assimilation, people feeling like they don’t belong, people learning to understand how they do, themes of starting over – that fall into the category of what Bashir is facing,” Kay notes. “On the medical side, the writers and I love that part. We have doctors on staff, which is incredibly fortunate.



Scottish actor John Hannah plays Dr Jed Bishop, chief of emergency medicine

“I grew up watching ER and I still think it’s just phenomenal. I don’t know how they did it before the internet, because right now you could name a medical procedural and I can find it on YouTube. There are ways to write it without the doctors, but you just dream up some crazy stuff that would happen and then get them to weigh in. Crafting that side of it is really fun, but the medical story only works if it’s an emotional story.”

Transplant’s origins can be traced back to autumn 2016 in the run-up to Donald Trump’s election as US president, when the topic of immigration had become a “weaponised, corrosive” issue that Kay found hard to escape thanks to the prevalence of US media in Canada. At the same time, there were local reports of Canada taking in a number of Syrian refugees, and Kay and his partners were interested in putting a human face on that story and wrapping it in the structure of a network procedural that could appeal to a wide, mainstream audience.

“It just came from wanting to contribute to that conversation, but not in a political way,” says the showrunner, who took part in a masterclass session focusing on Transplant during the Banff World Media Festival earlier this month.

“It’s different in every country but I started reading in Canada about the challenges that international medical graduates face when coming here. It turns out Canada has labyrinthine barriers to entry for medical students trained abroad, so it becomes a really dramatic underdog story that’s universally relatable. Then it becomes a question of how you can portray his story with as much honesty as possible. That’s the part we’ve always taken really seriously, really carefully and really deliberately in how we unfold the narrative.”

Behind the show is a diverse writers room that includes Mark Ellis, Stephanie Morgenstern, Adam Barken (EP), Rachel Langer, Julie Puckrin, Tamara Moulin, Anusree Roy, Sami Khan and Carmine Pierre Dufour. They are also backed by a team of cultural consultants – among them Dr Khaled Almilaji, Ahmad Meree, Manar Chabouk, Dr Yusra Ahmad and Muzna Dureid – who ensure Transplant remains authentic to Bashir’s story, from the script stage to being on set.



Ayisha Issa (left) is Dr June Curtis, while Laurence Leboeuf plays Dr Magalie ‘Mags’ Leblanc

Haq, who plays the character, is a Canadian immigrant himself, born to Pakistani parents in Saudi Arabia, and has worked closely with Kay to build Bashir’s life from the early conception of the show.

“We never dramatise anything personal, cultural or religious in his life without taking the opinion of all of our contributors who can speak to it from personal experience,” says Kay. “Sometimes people from similar backgrounds end up having different ideas of what constitutes authenticity, and we want to foster these conversations in an effort to depict things in a manner that stays true and honest. It’s the number-one focus of ours. We put the capital ‘C’ in collaboration.”

The numerous story and production elements that make up Transplant mean producing the series “is quite a task,” the showrunner admits, though the development of each episode always begins with a discussion on where Bashir is in his life at that moment and what that could mean thematically for that instalment. The focus on the central character also lends itself to the visual style of the show: the camera is always with Bashir, either standing with him or filming from his perspective.

The size of the task continues to grow for season two as the world of the show opens up. “It becomes quite an orchestra, honestly, to marry the medical with the personal,” Kay says. “What that really means is 11 drafts of a script and then extensive meetings with the directors and everybody. But it’s what makes it fun, too.”

When the scripts for Transplant become a production reality, an inherent challenge of the genre emerges: how to film the medical scenes. “We put on lots of stuff on the page, such as people doing compressions on other people. But you learn right away that you can’t compress a live actor, you can’t intubate a live actor,” Kay continues.



Transplant is produced by Sphere Media

“All of this stuff requires extensive prosthetics and lots of money spent on building dummies of duplicated people. For the writers and me, when you’re going to do something like that, it has to be earned dramatically. It takes money and a lot of people just to plan one medical sequence, so you learn to really earn the things you put in the script dramatically. If it’s not telling an emotional story or a human story, we don’t do it.”

With returning cast members including Laurence Leboeuf (Dr Magalie ‘Mags’ Leblanc), Ayisha Issa (Dr June Curtis) and Jim Watson (Dr Theo Hunter), season two picks up with Bashir, who is still finding his footing at the place he was starting to consider home until life was destabilised by events at the end of season one, when the hospital’s chief of emergency medicine (played by John Hannah) suffered a possible stroke. Unexpected faces from the past are also set

to leave Bashir doubting whether his new life can be successful, despite his hard work, compassion and hopefulness to survive and thrive in new circumstances.

“I feel like it will always be his show,” Kay says of the lead character. “Will we take a diversion here or there and spotlight another character who winds up maybe getting more scenes? Yeah, that’s possible. But I still really want the audience, after every episode, to feel first and foremost that they saw a little piece of his journey, which also really informed the rest of the stories. He was a fully trained doctor at home. He’s come to Canada, where he’s starting his career off again. He’s at the beginning of a long, slow journey with lots of ups and downs. I feel like we can anchor that for as long as possible.”

Produced by Sphere Media and distributed by NBCUniversal Global Distribution, Transplant has won fans around the world after being picked up by NBC in the US, SBS in Australia and the UK’s Sky Witness, among other networks. Kay believes the show’s universal themes help it stand out, as does the unfamiliar protagonist at the centre of the medical drama.

“It allows audiences to look at it with fresh eyes from a fresh perspective that they haven’t seen before,” he says. “And although the specifics in his background are unique and different from many of us, what he wants and feels is relatable to all of us. That combination makes for an audience-friendly show around the world, and we’ve been really excited to see to see that happen.”

ALENA SMITH
AwardsWatch.com (completed 6/23, requested for link)

EMILY ANDRAS
CBC’s “The Home Stretch” (completed 6/18, requested for clip)

JENN KUZMYK

CALGARY HERALD

Continued from A1

BANFF WORLD MEDIA FEST

Pivot to online includes panels, chats, classes

ERIC VOLMERS The Banff World Media Festival runs online from June 14 to July 16. Visit banffmediafestival.playbackonline.ca for more details.

"If last year was about the quick pivot and flying the plane while we were building it in creating a virtual event, this year it's about building a better plane," says Kuzmyk, executive director of the festival.

When COVID -19 put the brakes on the June 2020 festival, Kuzmyk admits that few thought they would be forced to go online again for 2021. But as it became clear this was going to be the case, it was all hands on deck for the transformation.

The trick was trying to at least partially replicate online what is a particularly singular experience of actually attending the festival, which has been one of the world's foremost gatherings for the industry for more than 30 years. It has always been about connection: through panels, through keynote talks from the industry's most powerful and influential figures and through four days of intense and occasionally boozy networking. It is about brokering deals face-to-face, whether it be through carefully constructed pitches or chance meetings. It's even occasionally about star-watching, as famous honourees could be spotted wandering through the Fairmont Banff Springs Hotel during the June festival.

As Banff begins Year 2 as an online-only entity, Kuzmyk admits that nothing can quite compare with in-person attendance. But through a specially designed online platform, which has been a work-in-progress for nearly a year now, it offers delegates access to keynotes, panels, master classes, chatrooms and networking opportunities. Those looking to connect or make deals can use the platform to message each other in real-time or set up face-to-face meetings.

The festival has even set up a virtual delegate lounge.

"Not at the heart of the Fairmont Banff Springs Hotel with that beautiful view where it normally is," Kuzmyk says. "But it's a delegate lounge with tables, where you can pull out a chair, virtually, and meet with people in a happenstance kind of way."



Actress Kaley Cuoco, left, will participate in a talk about HBO'S The Flight Attendant, while Kim's Convenience star Simu Liu will receive the Canadian Award of Distinction at the Banff World Media Festival.



The festival itself is officially much longer in its virtual guise. It usually lasts four days but is now stretched out over a month from Monday to July 16. But the festival will still offer its usual cross-section of the powerful and the creative. That includes its usual supply of high-profile showrunners and creators for master classes. This year, that includes one for the acclaimed drama It's a Sin, with showrunner Russell T. Davies and actor Nathaniel Curtis, and the Peabody Award-winning David Makes Man, featuring showrunner Dee Harris-lawrence and actor Kwame Patterson. Actress Kaley Cuoco will participate in a talk about HBO'S The Flight Attendant, which she stars in and executive produces.

Meanwhile, heavy-hitters such as Marvel Studios president Kevin Feige and a number of high-ranking executives from Netflix, including CO-CEO Ted Sarandos, will be giving virtual



talks as well. The panel discussion What it Means to Run a Public Broadcaster in 2021 (and beyond) will feature the heads of BBC, PBS, ABC Australia and the CBC.

Honourees for this year's Rockie Awards Gala will include Saturday Night Live veteran Kenan Thompson, who will receive the Sir Peter Ustinov Award and will give a talk hosted by SNL alumni Seth Meyers; actress Danielle Brooks from Mahalia and Orange Is the New Black will receive the A&E Inclusion Award; Simu Liu, star of Kim's Convenience and the upcoming high-budget Marvel extravaganza Shang-chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings, will receive the Canadian Award of Distinction; while the team from the non-profit ARRAY, which includes filmmaker Ava Duvernay, will receive the Hollywood Reporter Impact Award for its non-profit database that focuses on women, people of colour and other under-represented film professionals.

As in past years, the panels and talks will often reflect pressing concerns of the industry. In 2021, that obviously includes the impact COVID -19 has had on all sectors of the industry, both immediate and long-term. While Kuzmyk says the festival has always been about the business side of the industry, it has also always explored broader concerns about the environment, diversity and inclusion and democracy. These concerns will be a "through-line for almost every single panel."



Heavy-hitters such as Marvel Studios president Kevin Feige will give virtual talks at the Banff World Media Festival, which runs June 14-16 in an online format that includes master classes, panels, chatrooms and a virtual delegate lounge.

"Our heart and soul is around what the power and the responsibility of the entertainment and media industry (are) to a great society," Kuzmyk says. "What is the responsibility? What is being done, what can be done, to further social change, to further policy, to make good in the world?"

VARIETY

Banff World Media Festival Check-In: Year Two of Doing Things Remotely, But Even Bigger



Normally this would be the time of year where producers, executives and talent from all over the world would be gathering at the Fairmont Banff Springs Hotel in Banff, Alberta, Canada, for the annual Banff World Media Festival. Located in the breathtaking Canadian Rocky Mountains, the Banff festival is the perfect way to kick off the summer, connect with others and celebrate the TV business. Banff has gone virtual again this year, and I caught up with executive director Jenn Kuzmyk to fill me in on this year's festival, as well as this week's Rockie Award Gala.

This year's Banff World Media Festival will once again be held virtually, online between June 14 and July 16, 2021, and feature Marvel Studios president/Marvel chief creative officer Kevin Feige; "Friends'/"Grace & Frankie" exec producer Marta Kauffman; "Fresh Off the Boat"/"Young Rock" exec producer Nahnatchka Khan; Netflix co-CEO/chief creative officer Ted Sarandos; Warner Bros. TV Group chairman Channing Dungey; megaproducer Greg Berlanti; "The Flight Attendant" star and exec producer Kaley Cuoco; and more.

"I've sort of been saying that if 2020 was about building the plane while we were flying it, 2021 was about building a better plane," Kuzmyk says. "So we very quickly threw everything that we had into building an entirely new conference platform for Banff. What we've created I think is unique and second-to-none, and focused 100% around bringing people together in real time for virtual and video meetings.

Kuzmyk and her team say one unexpected benefit was the ability to attract more participation and attendees from all over the world: "I'm not going to lie, when we first had to cancel the festival, I didn't know how it was going to turn out," she says. "But I can truly say that at this point the festival has grown in stature, we have grown the international

participation, We have grown the caliber of attendees." Two big programs at the Banff fest is "Diversity of Voices" (partnered with Netflix), in which more than 300 entrepreneurs, producers, creators, and writers from underrepresented groups have been brought to the festival. "They are not newbies, they're accomplished, exciting talent that is coming to the festival, and we're really thrilled to be able to bring them together with the other delegates at the festival and hopefully be that ignition point for new projects," she says. The other is Banff Spark, a program for women-owned media companies.

Banff's Masterclass lineup will include creative team members of major global programs including “It’s a Sin,” hosted by creator Russel T. Davies, director Peter Hoar and actor Nathaniel Curtis; Warner Bros. Television’s Peabody-winning series “David Makes Man,” led by creator Tarell Alvin McCraney; “Transplant” with creator and showrunner Joseph Kay; and a previously announced presentation from the creative team behind FX’s new series “Reservation Dogs.”

Rockie Award Gala recipients include Kenan Thompson, Danielle Brooks, Simu Liu, Sinking Ship Entertainment and the team from Ava DuVernay's ARRAY.

As for the 2021 Rockie Awards International Program Competition, in the English comedy category, contenders include FX’s “Better Things,” HBO Max’s “The Flight Attendant,” Hulu’s “The Great,” FX’s “What We Do In The Shadows,” Hulu’s “Woke” and Sky One’s “Brassic.” English-lingo drama nominees include AMC’s “Gangs of London,” HBO/BBC’s “His Dark Materials,” BBC America’s “Killing Eve,” BBC’s “Noughts + Crosses” and Bell Media’s “Transplant.”

"Going to a virtual Rockie awards allowed us to stream it live to a global audience," Kuzmyk says. "It is aligned very well with the voting period for nominations for the Emmys and we have seen that people realize that that is a certain benefit to being part of the awards."

Comedian Jasmeet Raina is host. Go here to watch on June 15 at noon PT.

THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER

Backlot

Innovators, Events, Honors



Banff Fest Adapts to Lockdown Limbo

Lingering COVID-19 uncertainty in Canada has led organizers to innovate for the second straight year

By Etan Vlessing

1 The Banff Springs Hotel in Alberta, Canada.
2 WandaVision's Matt Shakman will participate in a forum called From the Director's Chair.
3 The Umbrella Academy's Steve Blackman will participate in Banff's Showrunner Screen Time forum.
4 Dickinson's Alena Smith also will take part in the Showrunner event.







A year ago, when the Banff World Media Festival went all-virtual because of COVID-19, organizers figured the event, nestled high in the Canadian Rockies, would be back to normal by 2021.

They thought wrong.

A year later, the province of Alberta — home to Banff — is still awash in uncertainty thanks to inconsistent lockdown protocols and a vaccine drive that lags behind the U.S., leading the festival to go virtual again this month.

Other international festivals also are grappling with the effects of COVID more than a year later.



Sarandos

The Cannes Film Festival — the biggest in the world — is struggling to pull off its planned in-person event, with travel restrictions and COVID protocols seemingly changing by the day. In Canada, however, the situation is unique in that, after initial success at containing the virus, the country of late has suffered from a less-than-ideal vaccine rollout as well as backlash to both lockdowns and vaccinations.

Banff executive director **Jenn Kuzmyk** says that while the prospect of European fests moving forward as in-person or hybrid events bodes well for the global events business, safety concerns led Banff organizers to err on the side of caution.



DuVernay

"It's so exciting to see parts of the rest of the world starting to open up," she says. "But there are vast parts of the world still in crisis."

Doug Schweitzer, Alberta's minister of jobs, economy and innovation, predicts a triumphant post-COVID physical return for Banff in 2022. "Vaccines are working. We'll be able to reopen," he says.

Banff World Media Festival
June 14-17
Banff Springs Hotel

While that might be true, the uncertainty up north has forced several other Canadian festivals to cancel on-site industry gatherings this year.

Mitch Davis, director of the Fantasia Film Festival (Aug. 5-25) in Montreal says his genre film market will forgo in-person industry events again in 2021. "Until the majority of Canadians have been fully vaccinated, organizing three weeks of huge indoor gatherings would be reckless and irresponsible," he says.

Lockdown limbo also has led organizers of the Toronto Film Festival to weigh whether their September event will be virtual or in-person, and **Laine Slater**, spokesman for the Vancouver Film Festival (Sept. 30-Oct. 10), says the West Coast event will host international guests only "if the health restrictions allow."

Meanwhile, the show in Banff will go on. To remain an incubator for new TV series — the fest is devoted primarily to the small screen — Banff will offer virtual access to multiple showrunners and directors, including **Matt Shakman** (*WandaVision*), **Steve Blackman** (*The Umbrella Academy*) and **Alena Smith** (*Dickinson*). To help ensure that these virtual talks are fully functional, organizers built a bespoke digital platform called BANFFXchange, which promises virtual pavilions with multiple meeting spaces as well as private videoconferencing rooms for delegates, and tools for both messaging and scheduling.

"What we created is definitely unique for the global landscape of events," explains Kuzmyk. "It's comprehensive [and] it's user-friendly."

Other new initiatives include a virtual communal delegate lounge that has been designed to be as interactive as possible. "There's [virtual] tables where you can pull out a chair and see who's there and message them," Kuzmyk says.

Even without in-person attendance, the fest will not lack in star power. In addition to industry talks with the likes of Netflix's **Ted Sarandos** and Marvel Studios head **Kevin Feige**, the Banff Rockie Awards on June 15 will honor *SNL*'s **Kenan Thompson**, **Danielle Brooks** (*Robin Roberts Presents: Mahalia*), *Kim's Convenience* star **Simu Liu** and **Ava DuVernay**'s distribution outfit, Array.



Feige

And because Banff is a global event, nothing is being left to chance as organizers iron out myriad logistical challenges.

Says Kuzmyk, "Whatever we can do to facilitate people getting together and meeting across time zones, and across the internet, we're doing that."

TELLYCAST PODCAST

TellyCast: The TV industry news review / Episode 60 - True Royalty TV's Gregor Angus, Banff World Media Festival's Jenn Kuzmyk & Fasttrack to Fearless's Tracy Forsyth



Episode 60 - True Royalty TV's Gregor Angus, Banff World Media Festival's Jenn Kuzmyk & Fasttrack to Fearless's Tracy Forsyth

TellyCast: The TV industry news review

00:00 56:59

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CBC's The Homestretch



Banff World Media Festival

Play Segment 7:24 Share Segment

For the second year in a row, the Banff World Media Festival is going online. The annual event starts on Monday and will run until July 16th. It will bring hundreds of actors, writer, producer and executives together virtually to network, workshop and pitch ideas. Jenn Kuzmyk is the executive director of the festival.

Aired: June 11, 2021

MONIKA ILLE

CBC's The Homestretch



Banff World Media Festival International Indigenous Screen Industry Summit

Play Segment 7:24 Share Segment

The stories of Indigenous peoples and those involved in broadcasting have played a growing role in today's media landscape. But the question of resources, systemic obstacles and technology remain a barrier for some. Ways to increase that accessibility will be part of an upcoming discussion at the Banff World Media Festival. Monika Ille is the CEO of A-P-T-N. She'll be moderating a panel discussion called "A cultural conversation: the future of Indigenous broadcasting and streaming" on Monday June 21st.

Aired: June 15, 2021

KARI SKOGLAND

CBC's The Homestretch



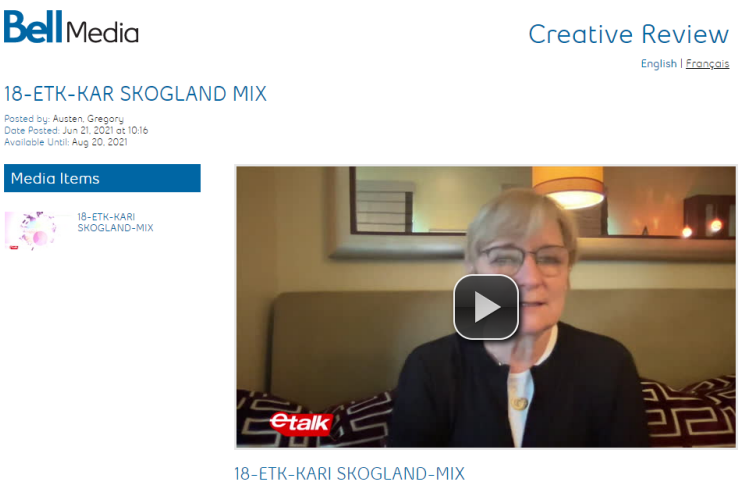
Kari Skogland at Banff World Media Festival

Play Segment 9:35 Share Segment

There is no question Marvel haS been a heavy hitter in the entertainment industry in recent years. And two of the biggest names in the Marvel universe will be taking part in the Banff World Media Festival this week. Delegates of the festival will get to take part in a conservation tomorrow with Marvel Studios President Kevin Feige and the Director of The Falcon and The Winter Soldier series-- Kari Skogland

Aired: June 16, 2021

eTalk



AwardsWatch

Interview: Kari Skogland goes deep into ‘Falcon and The Winter Soldier,’ the changing landscape of entertainment, and whether or not she’s a part of ‘Captain America 4’

Dewey Singleton June 25, 2021



When Marvel goes searching for the next director to helm a project, they tend to look in places that surprise most fans. Certainly, Kari Skogland may not have had much experience with the big set pieces and major action sequences which are trademarks of the MCU, Skogland was brought for a bigger purpose. As we head into Phase 4, the depth of these characters seems to be a focus, and that something that Skogland has been able to bring out of her actors in every project she’s tackled.

It's no longer just about flashy technology and massive explosions, we are now digging deep into what makes these characters who they are. Skogland certainly got the best of her entire cast while managing to still tackle some pretty tough themes in *Falcon and The Winter Soldier*. That's not to say that this series was devoid of action, quite the opposite, in fact, Skogland's series is one of the most balanced entries into the MCU to date.

We were lucky enough to speak with her about his experiences working on *Falcon and The Winter Soldier* just after she had spoken at the 2021 BANFF World Media Festival, which has attracted some of the biggest names in entertainment. We also discussed the changing landscape of entertainment and the biggest challenges she had when filming *Falcon and The Winter Soldier.*

Dewey Singleton: With BANFF, what attracted you to want to be a part of it?

Kari Skogland: Well, it's a great forum for creative exchange, and particularly, I think this year of all years is kind of the first of the, well, I guess it isn't, but it's certainly one of them, as the beginning of the year is rolling out and things are now changing quite dramatically. It seemed like a really great place to talk about the various things that they're talking about streaming and creative change. And what's happened over the last year, all of which, *Falcon and the Winter Soldier*, are very much a part of, we were very proud and pleased with the relevance of the show which is about the first black Captain America. So particularly after this last year and some of the themes within the show and some of them, I guess the topics that we were tackling seemed to be even more relevant as a result of the year. So I guess BANFF being a place, we could actually talk about that because we had just finished streaming it on Disney+, it seemed like a really great place.

DS: The landscape is definitely changing, you're absolutely right. Is there anything that you've taken from this event that kind of enlightened you in some way or just the whole discourse as what invigorates you from the other creators?

KS: I think it was a combination of the whole discourse. I watched a couple of… What is great about what's happening now with the festivals of it is that you can be remote and you can… Arguably being in person is better, but for the panels of it, the stuff where you're not really interacting directly with people, you're listening to them talk about stuff, we've become so used to the Zoom experience, I guess, that it actually feels very interactive. And you do feel like even if you haven't been there, physically, you feel like you've had an exchange of ideas and you've watched some sort of cutting edge information come out of the event, and what you've been a part of. What is missing, of course, is that that sort of cocktail atmosphere where you meet people anecdotally and you exchange ideas in a much more ad hoc way and less formal, that is hard to do in a Zoom environment. So it's going to be a hybrid of that in the future, how in particular BANFF has navigated that terrain and has managed to pivot and go fully digital. And I'm sure next year it'll be some kind of a hybrid so that you can attend without attending, it used to be, you had to physically be there, which wasn't always possible. Particularly if

I'm shooting or if I'm in another country on a project prepping, I can't necessarily get there.

So we've opened up the doors to much more, I think, interaction. And that's how the business has to run because we only are as good as the information that we have. And the information we have is changing minute by minute. And we rely heavily on an anecdotal conversation about, "Oh, they're buying that, oh that deal's happening." We look at industry newsletters and such. We talk to people and it's these forums that allow us to get sort of the latest, greatest news, which can inform a decision that we're making on whether we option a book, or whether we talk to that person about a project that we know that we suddenly find out, "Oh, they're looking for something in this space." So, that's what these forums are so important for. And then on the creative side, to hear the creative mindsets of people who are doing cutting edge work, I think is really interesting because, as a creator myself, I often feel kind of isolated, and so it's very, I think, empowering to hear other people talk about the same insecurities, the same issues, the same walls that they were having to climb so that you feel a little bit more a part of a community. And you also feel like, "Okay, it's not just me, they're experiencing something similar", or in the anxiety of it, "Oh yeah, we all have a very similar story." So, that, I think is also a community.

DS: I find it hard to believe that you're looking for these new ideas, when I'm looking at the person who came up with the best opening action sequence of anything I've seen this year in the first few minutes of *Falcon and The Winter Soldier*.

KS: Wow! Well, thank you for that. It's a wonderful team at Marvel and the stunt coordinators and fight coordinators and the v-effects folks, they all weigh into making a sequence it is that terrific. And I think we all can learn… We exchanged ideas. I learned from them, they learned from me. One of the goals of that particular sequence, which, from the beginning, I said, "You know what? I looked at a lot of extreme videos on", wherever you could find them YouTube and places like that and wanted to have the experiential feeling that we were really… These new cameras, little go pro's and such, you slap all over and they're very lightweight, and so if you're jumping out of a plane or you're kiting through the mountains or whatever it is, you can feel really like you're right with the person because there's a new aesthetic. I think once we all embraced that aesthetic, and so that's learning for everybody, because at the same time, as we are getting hopefully better at what we do, technology is offering up so many other new things, new toys, new ways to perceive.

It's also important for us, I think, as creators, whether it be in the writing or the visualization or the actualization to be very aware of what the popular culture and what people are getting used to aesthetically, because if we can mirror that, then we can be ahead of the curve and that we can feel with them, we can be up to date with how they're looking at things. So, in that case, it was looking at extreme videos to inform us, "Oh, okay, this is the aesthetic of what they're looking at. So let's capture that within how we're going to do this", which then meant a whole new… We had a team that jumped out of planes. We put cameras all over them and nobody had done that before. So I think it's fair to say, no matter what you're doing, whether it's stunted, whether it's in the

writing, whether it's set design, you're always learning. And that's the exciting thing about this business and why we are all so hooked on it is because that's kind of an adrenaline rush every time. When you pick up the new book on something go, "Oh, I can use that. I've never done that before."

So I think, again, the BANFF is a great forum for hearing how people have done certain things. And you sort of put that in your little toolkit of references. "Oh, I remember they were talking about this", and I've gone so far as to call people up and go, "Okay, so I saw this amazing sequence. How did you do it?" Just shamelessly just ask for it for info so that I can capitalize on something that they've learned.

DS: How did your paths cross with Kevin Feige leading to you helming this series?

KS – Well, the first project they came to me, they'd come to me for another project earlier on. And so I pitched on that project and what you do, they come to you with the idea of a project. You don't have a script necessarily because they're very careful with releasing scripts because often they're a work in progress and various things. And so you come in and give them your ideas on how you're looking at the snippet of the creative that they presented to you. So, I came in on that project and didn't land that one. And then this one came along and they asked me, so I was actually working in New York and classic thing, your batphone rings. My Avenger phone rang. And they said, "Would you be interested in coming in to give us your ideas, and thoughts on this one that we're doing, which is a mini-series, and it's our first mini-series."

So I was thrilled to come in and do that. So I put together a presentation and flew in and went into the Avengers hallway, which is fabulous. It's full of all these suits, all the different, I mean, it's really quite something. You feel the history of this universe. And I was terrified of course, but meeting Kevin he's terrific and the team the whole gang is unbelievably welcoming. And they're just very welcoming and collaborative as well. So I think I can say that the experience from top-down is really super positive. And so I think that's what I was also able to… It always flows from the top mountain down.

DS: I know you're not going to tell me, and I don't expect you to tell me, but I could certainly guess that they wanted you to pitch *Eternals*.

KS: No, I can tell you, it was *Black Widow.*

DS: I have a feeling you're not done with Marvel.

KS: I certainly hope not. I hope my Avengers phone will ring again, but you never know.

DS: If they come to you and they say, are you ready to do *Captain America* 4, what is your answer?

KS: Yes, yes, and yes.

DS: What was the toughest part of putting this whole series together for you? Was it the story, making sure you hit the tones right at the tone of the story or was it making sure to, for lack of a better word, those action sequences were kick ass?

DS: Well, I think it was all of the above, and I don't want to say it from a tough place because it was a very… I tackle every, I want to say challenge, with the same kind of a methodology that is kind of breaks it down so that I don't get overwhelmed with the vastness of it. So with the tone of it, most importantly, that was to make sure that we were leaving no stone unturned and particularly as the year went on and we were, first of all, we shut down for a little while because of COVID and then the world was going through some very interesting and important movement, which we were already into with the story. And it only made us recognize how relevant we were and how long overdue the conversation we were having within the narrative was. So that just meant us really making sure that we were getting not only at right but pushing the envelope as much as possible and making sure that these themes and topics that were big, important themes and topics they were going to land, even within the sort of light-hearted comedy of it, that we were still tackling them with and pulling no punches. That, I think, was a constant ongoing heart check as we were doing post-production and even shooting.

I would calibrate stuff as well because we would go a little more fun with a take, and then we pull it back because, in post, you get to look at it again in sort of in the cold light of day, without the pressures of time in the onset, which is a very pressurized place because time is money and you only have so much time to get everything done. So, you're able to look at it and post and kind of recalibrate, and you want to be able to have the toolset with you, like a slightly funnier line or a look over here, or all that stuff. So, you're able to in post-mix it up a little bit. And then the action sequences in and of itself was a huge challenge because first of all, I wanted each sequence to have its own story and character story. It had to be driven by character. If it wasn't going to be driven by character, then you've just got a bunch of people punching each other and who cares. And they also want it to have unique settings so that they looked really different and felt very different. So, there was the opening, which had to be kick-ass and like we've never seen Falcon fly before. And then there were the truck tops, which I regretted terribly because it was the hardest sequence to pull off.

DS: Why?

KS: We managed, Oh, it was hard. A bunch of people on trucks hitting each other, oh, my God. It was complicated. And it took us a long time to… And it's seven people, no eight, what was it?

DS: Eight People.

KS: Eight people coming and going, and keeping track of where they were and what physically was happening. And what's happening over there while they're over here. And so that was a very complex sequence to pull off. And then each one of them wanted to have its own thing. So then we called the one, we knew the big one in that square that public decapitation. But prior to that, there'd been a big sort of confrontation

between all of them who wanted to but didn't want to repeat what we'd already done. So, I was like, "Oh, let's make it a horror story. Let's make it", so we're in a creepy place and we don't know where anybody is and it's got its eerie noises and what's going on here and there. So that had its own. And then we had the big one at the end, which was this sort of denouement between our three major characters who had it had to feel like a *Clash of the Titans* and that had to have its own look and feel and emotion mostly. So, if we started with the truck tops, which was a bit irreverent or in terms of the Bucky and Sam of it fighting with each other to the final, where they were like much more of a well-oiled machine and they were together. That became the spectrum. So just the challenge of keeping track of all of that was quite complex in a good way. But that was, I would say the two biggest challenges.

DS: I am now convinced even more and in fact, I would bet money you're going to be involved in *Captain America 4*, or maybe you already are and you can't tell me because of some paper you had to sign.

KS: (laughs) I know nothing. I know nothing!

DS: Oh, I've heard that before.

KS: Let me put it this way, if I did know something, I wouldn't tell you. (laughs)

DS: This has been very enlightening and was a brilliant time.

KS: Thank you.

The first season of *Falcon and The Winter Soldier* is currently available to stream on Disney+. Kari Skogland is Emmy eligible for Outstanding Directing for a Drama Series for the episode "One World, One People."

LUCY TULUGARJUK

L'Aquilon

Articles de l'Arctique, 25 juin 2021 : Rencontre virtuelle des médias autochtones à Banff

24 juin 2021 Nelly Guidici



Lucy Tulugarjuk, directrice générale d'Uvagut TV au Nunavut a participé au Festival des médias du monde de Banff en Alberta. Lors de la rencontre virtuelle entre plusieurs acteurs de la scène médiatique autochtone internationale, la question de l'accès à l'espace médiatique dans une langue autochtone a été abordée. (Courtoisie : Nancy Angilirq)

Le festival des médias du monde de Banff a organisé, pour la première fois, une conférence virtuelle sur le dynamisme du paysage médiatique autochtone au Canada et à l'étranger. Cette table ronde qui a réuni Monika Ille, directrice générale du Réseau de télévision des peuples autochtones (APTN), Lucy Tulugarjuk, directrice générale de NITV au Nunavut ou encore Maramena Roderick, directeur du contenu à Maori TV, a eu lieu le 21 juin 2021 pour la Journée nationale des peuples autochtones du Canada.

La création de cette rencontre virtuelle, le jour du solstice d'été, évoque une symbolique forte. En effet, la radiodiffusion autochtone joue un rôle croissant dans le paysage médiatique international et contribue à la souveraineté narrative décrite dans l'article 16 de la Déclaration des Nations Unies sur les droits des peuples autochtones : « Les peuples autochtones ont le droit d'établir leurs propres médias dans leurs propres langues et d'accéder à toutes les formes de médias non autochtones sans discrimination aucune. »

« Bien que nous travaillions tous dans des contextes différents, nous sommes confrontés à des défis similaires pour revendiquer un espace et accéder aux ressources pour créer et diffuser des médias dans nos propres langues, explique Mme Tulugarjuk, notre langue est au cœur de qui nous sommes, donc cette question d'accès est d'une importance vitale. »

Créé il y a 42 ans, ce festival a réuni virtuellement 280 intervenants originaires de 52 pays en 2020. L'édition de cette année, qui a débuté le 14 juin, se tiendra jusqu'au 16 juillet 2021.

MARTA KAUFFMAN

eTalk

Marta Kauffman on etalk

Posted by: Gillis, Chris
Date Posted: Jun 30, 2021 at 22:06
Available Until: Aug 29, 2021

Media Items

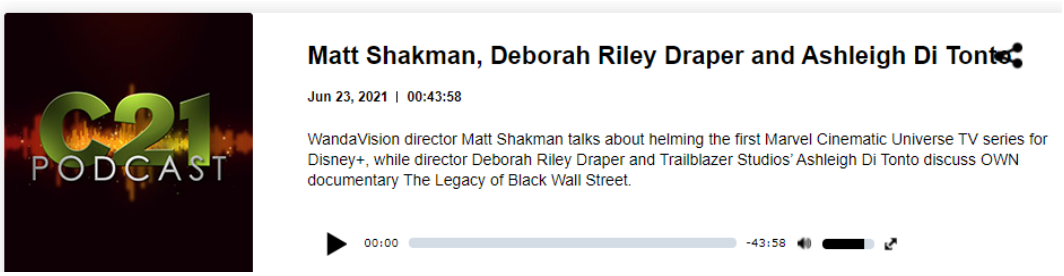


Marta Kauffman on etalk



MATT SHAKMAN

C21 PODCAST



C21 FM RADIO

Tune in to C21FM today from 10am

Today we hear from WandaVision director Matt Shakman about helming the first Marvel Cinematic Universe TV series for Disney+, while director Deborah Riley Draper and Trailblazer Studios' Ashleigh Di Tonto discuss OWN documentary The Legacy of Black Wall Street.

Tune in to C21FM by CLICKING HERE.



With credits including Mad Men and Game of Thrones, director Matt Shakman was entrusted with helming Marvel Studio's first television entry into its Marvel Cinematic Universe.

Debuting on Disney+ earlier this year, WandaVision picked up the story of characters Wanda and Vision in the wake of Avengers: Endgame, in a series that played with genre conventions, paid homage to classic comedies and still found room to include Marvel's trademark action set-pieces.

Speaking ahead of his appearance at the BANFF World Media Festival this week, Shakman spoke to Michael Pickard about how he was involved in developing the series, working with stars Elizabeth Olsen and Paul Bettany and how the rise of streaming is changing the creative landscape.

The Legacy of Black Wall Street is a two-part special released earlier this month in the US through OWN: Oprah Winfrey Network, telling the story of the rise of Oklahoma's Greenwood district up until its destruction 100 years ago in the Tulsa race massacre.

Director Deboray Riley Draper and Ashleigh Di Tonto, senior VP of development at producer Trailblazer Studios, spoke to Clive Whittingham about the documentary, how the project was overlooked by TV networks prior to last year's rise of the Black Lives Matters movement, and how the positive moves the industry has made since can become permanent reforms.

C21FM is live 24/7, with a block of interviews starting at 10am BST every day at c21fmradio.com. You can download the audio from the C21 Podcast by CLICKING HERE.

C21 DRAMA QUARTERLY

Magic Wanda

By Michael Pickard
June 25, 2021

WandaVision director Matt Shakman tells DQ about bringing the Marvel Cinematic Universe to television, rewatching old sitcoms and why limited series might be the best format for small-screen stories.

For more than three years, Marvel Studios had been plotting how its army of superheroes could conquer television the same way they had dominated the box office ever since Iron Man burst onto cinema screens in 2008 to herald the start of the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU).

The company had previously ventured into TV with series such as Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D., Inhumans and the Netflix collection featuring Daredevil, Jessica Jones, Luke Cage and Iron Fist, who first appeared in standalone series before uniting in crossover event The Defenders.

But this would be the first time Marvel Studios had transplanted characters from The Avengers onto TV – and on a streaming platform, no less, with these new limited series destined for Disney+.

 *Matt Shakman*

Then when the first series launched in January this year, it was like nothing ever seen before from the MCU. Blending Marvel's trademark action with America's heritage of classic sitcoms, WandaVision introduced Wanda Maximoff and Vision as two superpowered beings living idealised suburban lives, with the first episode placing them – without explanation – in a world inspired by 1950s and 60s comedies such as I Love Lucy and The Dick Van Dyke Show.

Episode two then moves further into the 1960s with I Dream of Jeannie and Bewitched, while The Brady Bunch, The Mary Tyler Moore Show, Family Ties, Full House, Malcolm in the Middle, Modern Family and more then influence later episodes as the show arrives in the present day.

But as the story plays out, newlyweds Wanda and Vision begin to suspect that everything is not as it seems in their home town of Westview, with outside forces soon emerging to upset their domestic bliss.

At a time when audiences around the world were struggling through lockdowns, WandaVision proved to be a show the whole family could watch, while Marvel fanatics rallied together to uncover its secrets and debate how the story might unfold – and how these new events might relate to the wider MCU.

Matt Shakman, who directed all nine episodes, says it was “an incredible honour” to helm the first MCU series to land on Disney+, with The Falcon & the Winter Soldier following in March and Loki launching earlier this month. “We never expected the show would come out in the middle of a worldwide pandemic,” he tells DQ. “Who could have predicted that? But a show that was a meditation about grief and loss and, ultimately, about love and about family seemed to be well timed for a world that was wrestling with issues of grief and loss as well.

“The timing of it ended up being interesting and surprising. But I’m really proud of the show and proud of the cast and the crew and the incredible artistic collaborators I had. It was a wonderful two years bringing it to life.”



The early episodes of WandaVision take their lead from sitcoms of the 1950s and 60s

Shakman joined the project in mid-2019, several months after creator and head writer Jac Schaeffer (Black Widow) first came on board and began to assemble a team of writers to bring the story to the screen.

“They were busy dreaming about what the series could be and building on the original concept from [Marvel Studios president] Kevin Feige – this idea of taking Wanda and Vision and putting them in a suburban setting and putting it in the world of sitcoms,” the

director says. “Jac and her team were busy fleshing that out when I joined up. It was a wonderful conversation and collaboration that went on for several years as we shaped this thing together.”

Wanda, played by Elizabeth Olsen, was first introduced to the MCU in Captain America: The Winter Soldier (2014), while ‘synthezoid’ Vision was created in Avengers: Age of Ultron (2015). But despite the characters’ close connection and burgeoning romance, it’s notable how little screen time they had actually shared before headlining a series together.

“They have been in these films with so many other vibrant and amazing characters, and they’ve had, I think, just about 10 minutes of screen time together to establish who they are and this relationship,” Shakman admits. “Somehow, because of the magic of those characters, the writing, but maybe most of all the chemistry between the actors, they managed to make an indelible mark in that 10 minutes that meant we were rooting for them. So when Vision dies in Avengers: Infinity War, our hearts are broken and we wonder what will happen and how [Wanda] will pick up the pieces of that.”

That question directly informs events in WandaVision, which takes a deep dive into Wanda’s grief as the story explores the circumstances behind the new life she has created for herself and Vision.



Shakman (left) on set with stars Elizabeth Olsen and Paul Bettany

“They both have a rich comic book history separately and together, but to spend six hours, nine episodes, focusing on their love story, which is really one of the most important love stories in the MCU and in the Marvel comics canon, and to have two amazing actors like Paul and Lizzie to bring those characters to life, it was just an undeniably wonderful idea to explore that,” Shakman says.

Despite having the MCU films to lean on, the director says every episode of WandaVision felt like creating a brand new world, with the sitcom stylings of each part informing every aspect – from the camerawork and performance to costume and production design. From the beginning, blending the MCU with classic sitcoms gave Shakman and his team the chance to push boundaries and take some experimental leaps.

“But all that stuff works because you have this powerful spine, this love story and this idea of how you can overcome loss and the question of [whether you actually can]. That’s really what held it all together,” he says. “My job as a director was mostly focused on storytelling and how best to tell that story. Peppering Easter eggs throughout definitely was something that happened. Sometimes that was the writer, sometimes that was me, sometimes that was an actor. Sometimes that would be the prop designer who was having fun putting a label on a wine bottle that sent the world crazy because it said ‘House of M’ [in reference to a Wanda comic book series].

“The chief goal is always to tell the best story possible. We are building on these amazing stories that have existed, and that’s what super fun. It’s out there. There are all these wonderful comic book runs that we looked at and studied carefully. But what I’ve loved about the Marvel Studios approach to the MCU is that they aren’t just adapting one comic book. They look at it as the opportunity to create a new comic book run that builds on what’s come before and launch something new. So we osmosed all the stuff that was out there and then tried to make something new that we felt was tailored to this moment.”



Olsen's Wanda was first introduced on screen in Captain America: The Winter Soldier

Rooting the show in the world of sitcoms gave Shakman "a professional excuse" to spend hours watching classic series, which he says makes working on WandaVision "the best job ever." But the key to recreating the sitcoms' spirit was authenticity, with the director keen for it not to appear like WandaVision is trying to spoof or mimic these shows.

"This was Wanda's show and, ultimately, it's revealed that this is Wanda's way of dealing with her trauma and that she has the power of creation," he explains. "She's an incredibly powerful witch, so the show we were creating had to have so much integrity. To that end, no detail was too small. We looked at the original prints of episodes of Bewitched and I Dream of Jeannie. We wanted to really understand what The Brady Bunch looked like. What were the palette colours involved in that show? And we studied performance; we studied how comedy changed through the era as we studied how people walked, talked and moved, and their clothing."

Though the early episodes are presented almost wholly as episodes of classic black-and-white sitcoms, elements of the wider story slowly start to infiltrate Wanda and Vision's world, with out-of-place props, pops of colour and even other characters – including neighbours Agnes (Kathryn Hahn) and Herb (David Payton) – hinting at the bigger picture.

“There’s always something hiding under the surface in WandaVision that is threatening to creep its way in,” says Shakman, who compares the show to series such as The Twilight Zone or Jordan Peele film Get Out, with a feeling that people around Wanda are perhaps being controlled against their will or where viewers can sense a “lake of trauma” is bubbling beneath the surface.

Finding that balance between the authentic recreation of numerous sitcoms and Wanda’s path in the story was one of the great challenges the director had in making the show. “It really was a great opportunity, as a director, to play around with styles and to throw it all into the pot, mix it up and add different spices and ingredients and see what we could create,” he says.



Bettany is ‘synthezoid’ Vision, who made his debut in Avengers: Age of Ultron

“Then, of course, once you get into the universe outside Westview, then you are in more of a traditional Marvel universe. But even then, we wanted to give it our own spin and make sure there was a real tension between the sitcom world, the real world and what happens when the barrier between them starts to break down. We had a great deal of fun playing with aspect ratios and filters and all the tricks of the trade, because playing around with form was ultimately playing around with narrative. It was a way to tell a story about what was really happening.”

Working with “fearless” stars Olsen and Bettany, Shakman was also putting two established characters in a completely new environment. “There was a lot of risk, and the opportunity to feel silly was there every day, but they are so smart, so well prepared and so playful that we had the best time,” he says of working with the stars. “This show

was one of the best experiences I've ever had as a director, just working with this team and also being able to do such different stuff. You're never coming back to the same thing. You're doing a witches' coven in old Salem one day and you're doing a 1950s sitcom in front of a live audience the next. It was a lot of fun for all of us to continually adjust to the new challenges."

While Shakman's "day job" is that of artistic director at Geffen Playhouse in LA, his screen credits include Six Feet Under, Ugly Betty, House, Mad Men and Fargo. But it is his work on season seven of Game of Thrones, helming episodes The Spoils of War and Eastwatch, that provides the best parallel to WandaVision in terms of creating something "truly cinematic" for the small screen. Working on the mega-hit HBO fantasy series gave him the chance to "dream big" in a way he hadn't been able to do up to that point, even though the budget for an hour of Game of Thrones still paled in comparison to that for an Avengers movie.

On WandaVision, "we're doing six hours of a Marvel show, whereas an Avengers film will only be two hours and change. There definitely was a scale difference [between film and television budgets], but Marvel wanted to deliver something that felt like a continuation of the brand that they'd built in the movie theatre," Shakman says. "I always felt supported by them and we did the best we could. But of course, with filmmaking, even at the highest studio level, you always feel like you never have enough money."



The series also stars Randall Park as FBI agent Jimmy Woo

Sets for WandaVision were often designed in instances where costs meant they couldn't be built from scratch. One example is the SWORD facility where Vision is disassembled.

These scenes were actually shot at an old building in Atlanta that had an open courtyard, which the design team transformed into an operating theatre.

“That’s one of my favourite sets in the whole show,” says Shakman. “Even at big levels of filmmaking, when you feel like you’re making an indie film, a student film or those films you made as a kid on your camcorder at home, that’s when you really feel the joy of filmmaking. Sometimes it’s more fun to have limitations.”

Further MCU series such as Ms Marvel and Hawkeye are now expected to arrive on Disney+ later this year, while Moonknight, She-Hulk and Secret Invasion are among several others in the pipeline. In a post-pandemic world where it remains to be seen how cinemas will bounce back, Marvel’s plans for the small screen are further blurring the boundaries between television and film by taking advantage of the rising popularity of limited series.

With shows such as Netflix’s The Queen’s Gambit, for example, “you can invest in characters for six, seven or eight episodes and you don’t have to take all the shortcuts in a movie,” says Shakman, speaking to DQ during the Banff World Media Festival, where he joined a directors panel.

“In a limited series, you can take that little extra time for the character moments, but still deliver wonderfully big set pieces. For me, that feels like reading a great book, and now movies almost feel a little too fast. Yet at the same time, I can’t imagine watching 22 episodes of a show for an entire season either; it feels like too much. Maybe we’re finally settling into what the proper format is for our narrative. Six to eight episodes is a pretty perfect way to digest something.”

AWARDSWATCH

Interview: Matt Shakman explains how his work on ‘Webster,’ ‘Just the Ten of Us’ and

‘Game Thrones’ made him uniquely qualified to take on ‘WandaVision’

Dewey Singleton June 25, 2021



From the very beginning, it seems director Matt Shakman was destined to helm *WandaVision.* His acting resume began in the mid 80’s with appearances on such shows as the *Saved By The Bell* prequel *Good Morning Miss Bliss, Just the Ten of Us, Highway to Heaven, and Webster.* Mix in a directorial resume which spans such television shows as, *The Great* (for which he received Emmy and DGA nominations in directing), *It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia,* and *Game of Thrones,* there isn’t an individual working today who was this qualified to tackle the variety of tones and themes presented in *WandaVision.*

We were lucky enough to speak with Matt about his experiences working on *WandaVision* and hearing how meticulous the process was behind this critically acclaimed Disney+ series was an amazing experience. Matt also discussed how his theater background prepared him for this challenge and whether or not Marvel let him on what’s to come moving forward in Phase 4.

Dewey Singleton: All right. Let’s start at the beginning. What was more daunting sir, meeting Kevin Feige for the first time or being in *Just the Ten of Us* or *Webster*?

Matt Shakman: (laughs) Well, as a little kid, I don't know that I was aware of the situation as much. Being on those shows, was just a part of my life. I started as a child actor at three and a half years old, and it was just the rhythms of my everyday existence. Meeting Kevin Feige was a huge honor. I'm a big fan of the work that he's done and of the MCU in general. Yeah, going in there and meeting him first just generally was a super highlight for me of my career thus far, and then getting a chance to work with him on WandaVision was absolutely the dream of my directing career. It was great.

DS: See I thought maybe *Good Morning, Miss Bliss* would be a bit more daunting than all of them combined.

MS: (Laughs) It's funny, you mentioned *Good Morning, Miss Bliss* because there was some more pressure on that because we were all told that that was the passion project of Brandon Tartikoff and that it was based on a teacher that he had growing up. He came to the set a lot. He was the big president of NBC at the time, which was maybe arguably the biggest position in entertainment at that moment. Yeah, he was around. We didn't want to let him down, so yeah, I'd say that was one of my more stressful jobs as a kid.

DS: Do you think your eclectic television background as a child actor might have in a roundabout way prepared you for this moment?

MS: Without a doubt. The goal of this show was always authenticity. We wanted to bring to life these different eras of television in a genuine way. We didn't want a spoof or parody and so the fact that I have, in my body, basically '80s and '90s television as something that I experienced firsthand and lived through, definitely impacted how we built those different eras. In the earlier era, I had seen in syndication as a kiddo watching, but didn't know them firsthand so that required a lot of research and talking to people who had worked on those shows but when we got into the '80s or '90s, that was definitely my sweet spot.

DS: You worked with Michael Landon, for crying out loud. That's amazing stuff. Not many people can say they worked with a cast member of *Bonanza*. You could pull from that experience, all sorts of experiences, to bring the show to life. You can literally not find another director out there that comes with your background. Crazy coincidence or good luck?

MS: I think it was lucky, for sure, but in some ways, it also felt like destiny. This was a show about destiny. Where was Wanda Maximoff headed? She was destined to become the Scarlet Witch, even though she was resisting it and fighting it until in the final episode, she accepts it, and that final episode is about accepting grief, accepting loss, but also accepting destiny. For me, it felt like destiny too. Here I was having lived through so much of these eras that we were going to bring to life, but then also having focused as a director on comedy and drama, as well as large-scale action and visual effects, and here is this show that drew on my own personal experience and also drew

all the different skills that I had as a filmmaker. Which is rare. Usually, you're working in one bucket at a time. This was a really exciting challenge because no day was the same and every day you're doing a live '50s sitcom taping or the next day you're doing a big Marvel action set piece. It was really a joy.

DS: The *ABC Wide World of Sports* opening back in the day would say, "Spanning the globe." Your career has certainly spanned the globe, sir, from acting to directing. Did you take something from each of those moments to get you in the right mindset for this daunting challenge of *WandaVision*?

MS – Definitely. I've traveled along these television roads and pulled whatever I think is valuable from a stylistic standpoint, a tonal standpoint, a technical standpoint, and I put it in my tool kit, and then when it comes time to bring something to life like WandaVision, I'm able to draw on that and fall back on all those different experiences. But I will say to you, I come from the theater. I direct a lot of plays and that's where I spent my time in between my child actor days and when I came back to directing film and television. The theater is something that is so tonally complex. A great play is by its nature, not just a comedy or a drama. It is something that is more like life that has all of these things wrapped up. I ultimately think that my experience in theater is the most helpful thing as we are able to tackle, in entertainment now, more and more of these complicated stories. I think streaming has really hit a wonderful place where I May Destroy You and WandaVision and Queen's Gambit and all these different kinds of shows that are playing with genre mashup and tonal complexity, they're more like life, and so it's really fun as a director to try to balance all of those things.

DS: Is there a play that you directed in your career that you can say that that experience prepared you the most for what you went through making *WandaVision*?

MS: Oh my goodness. Probably all of them, although, if I was going to be cheeky and take the easy way out, I'd say Shakespeare because he gets you ready for anything really. *The Tempest* was a play that I always loved and that was a tough one when I directed it. But yeah, Shakespeare started writing comedies and dramas and history plays and by the end of his career, he was writing The Tempest, which was essentially all of those things all in one, which becomes the template for a lot of what I feel like is on streaming now. Things that are just constantly surprising and taking left turns and right turns in unexpected ways. I worked on this show called *The Great* right before *WandaVision*. It's another one where it's ostensibly this drama with comedic elements, but then it makes these surprising turns into horror really or into broad comedy and all of it is you're just trying to figure out how to knit it together and keep that tonal balance going. It's no surprise that was based on a play. That started as a play that Tony McNamara wrote for Sydney Theater Company in Australia. Yeah, making things that are closer to life is definitely the challenge, but also the fun of it.

DS: When you're summoned to meet with Kevin Feige, is it either akin to being brought to Avengers Campus, and you're probably blindfolded when you go there, since you're not allowed to know the on the location, or you're brought in a pseudo Batcave where you've got to go through the waterfall and there's Kevin sitting with the Infinity Gauntlet,

but that's just in my twisted mind. I guess my question is, were you summoned? Did you do the pitch? How did you get into this position to direct *WandaVision*?

MS: I wish there were a bat cave. Well, I guess it would have to be a Marvel equivalent of whatever.

DS: I'd want Avengers Campus because I knew who I was talking to. (Laughs)

MS: Yeah, exactly. Yeah. I do. Marvel does feel a little bit like Avengers Campus. You show up there, and you're surrounded by movie props and costumes, and giant Iron Men loom over everything and look down. It's really exciting and there's just a ton of artwork everywhere, and it's a wonderful sandbox. I enjoyed my time prepping *WandaVision* from those offices more than any other prep period I've ever had, just because you feel like you're a part of this large continuum of great stories. Stories that I've loved since I was a kid reading comic books. Then, of course, through watching the MCU films. It just was osmosing all of that excitement and all of those great stories and all the great work of storytellers who have come before in the MCU, so I was excited about that. But my first meeting with Kevin came about because of *Game of Thrones*. I was actually nervous. I had left my wife and very young child to go to Belfast for six months to make *Game of Thrones*, and my wife had been incredibly understanding, but I of course had been guilt-ridden by this, but it was such a huge opportunity and a show that I loved and a really big moment professionally for me to tackle. I came back and I was nervous. I was nervous. Will the fans like the episodes and also was it worth it? Was it worth leaving my wife, and I was fretting in my neurotic way and my wife who's very practical said, "What would make it worth it? Quantify what would make it worth it?" I was like, "Ah, well, I don't know. If Kevin Feige calls tomorrow." Then after the episode aired, The Spoils of War, Kevin's office reached out, and I got a meeting to come meet with him, which was exciting. He was a fan of that show and liked that episode. We talked and that was the first time I met him. It's hardly being summoned. He is the nicest person in Hollywood and a joy to collaborate with and so when WandaVision was coming together, I gather, he remembered my strange history and varied interests, and it felt like a good fit. So I came in and had a chance to meet with Jac Schaeffer and Mary Livanos, who had just started putting together the ideas of the show and was blown away by what they were cooking up and had just nothing but excitement about jumping in and joining with them, and then it was a wonderful two-year collaboration after that.

DS: How do you assemble a team for this?

MS: We talked about how we needed people who were Swiss army knives, who had every tool contained within. That they could do any style, any genre, any tone, and so I specifically went after designers, cinematographers, costume designers, who had a breadth of experience that mirrored my own, eclectic background. Mark Worthington, the production designer, I met working on *Ugly Betty* years ago, but then he's since gone on to *Watchmen* and *American Horror Story* and *Star Trek* and so many different things that require a million different skill sets. I knew he could handle vintage sitcoms as well as contemporary Marvel. Jess Hall, whose work I loved on Hot Fuzz, which is

incredibly funny, but also a really good action film, has done some beautiful crafted dramatic indies, as well as *Ghost in the Shell* and large studio films. Here was someone who is comfortable in all of those different potential worlds. Mayes Rubeo, the costume designer, had done Apocalypto and Avatar and Thor Ragnarok but then on the other side, she's done *Jojo Rabbit* and other indie films. And so she, again, could do period and could do contemporary Marvel and could do anything in between. It was assembling a group like that across the board and, again, with the actors the same way. That's why I was so excited to go after Kathryn Hahn, who is an actor who can do anything, can turn on a dime, can terrify you, can make you laugh, can make your heartbreak. Can do a sitcom in a '50s style and can also do something very subtle in contemporary dramatic performance. And that was true of Lizzie Olsen and Paul Bettany of course, but I did not cast them. They of course came with it already, but they are Swiss army knives themselves, and so it was bringing together a group of people who could all twist and turn and bring this world to life.

DS: In terms of casting Agatha, was it Kathryn Hahn or bust?

MS: It was Kathryn all along. (laughs)

DS: Yes ! (laughs)

MS: It was one of those things we were like, we want to get Kathryn Hahn. Oh, she's not available. Okay. Now we want someone like Kathryn Hahn, and then we were trying to figure out who that might be. Then it was like oh look, Kathryn Hahn's available, and then it was like let's try to get Kathryn Hahn. It was one of those where she was always the paradigm of what we wanted.

DS: It's a strong ensemble.

MS: It was a dream. It was also just a daily joy to work with everybody because not only were they super talented, you couldn't find a nicer, kinder group. Paul Bettany, Lizzie Olsen, set the tone. They are the loveliest. They're also the hardest working. They care more than anybody. Teyonah Parris who I met years ago working on *Mad Men* who's incredible. Who's another theater actor, Juilliard grad who can do anything and was so brilliant in those sitcom scenes, as well as in the Marvel world, who had this character who was really breaking under the strain of grief in the same way that Wanda was. She did such a beautiful job. Randall, Kat Dennings, and then, Evan Peters who was flying back and forth between doing *Mare of Easttown* and living in these two completely schizophrenic worlds, somehow managed to bring his wonderful Pietro/Ralph to life while also juggling Philadelphia murder. It was just a wonderful group across the board.

DS: Were you told the what the "big picture" Marvel was heading towards in this phase when you took on *WandaVision*?

MS: We were just really focused on making our story, our nine episodes, our six hours really work to the best that we could possibly make it. It was a story that we always knew what we wanted to do, and it ended obviously with Wanda accepting Vision's loss and accepting this destiny that was awaiting her. I think of it really as like a relay race

and the baton is passed to us as a group, to me, Jack, Mary, and we ran with it as hard as we could. Then we handed that baton off to Sam Raimi and his group on *Dr. Strange* and to *The Marvels* Nia DaCosta on her side, and so various stories continue, and they'll build on what we did, and we built on what came before us. It's really just a lovely continuum. I'm sure there are a few things. Kevin's really the spinner of the place and so if there's anything that he really thinks he needs for down the road, he'll let us know and seed it in, but it's a much more organic process, which I think is why it succeeds. It's not some sort of chess game that he's working out. He's actually really focused on telling the best emotionally satisfying complex stories as possible, and then handing those stories off to the next set of filmmakers, and that's what's happening across the MCU and why I think it's so surprising and ultimately satisfying.

DS: Sir, it was a thrill to speak with you. it's a thrill to talk to you.

MS: Thank you very much for taking the time.

WandaVision is currently available to stream on Disney+. Matt Shakman is Emmy eligible for Outstanding Limited Series/Anthology Series and Outstanding Directing for a Limited Series, Anthology Series or Movie.

SESSIONS

KEVIN FEIGE AND KARI SKOGLAND

C21 DRAMA QUARTERLY

Comic marvels

By DQ
June 28, 2021

Marvel Studios president Kevin Feige joins The Falcon & the Winter Soldier director Kari Skogland to look back on making the six-part series and discuss the work that goes into bringing a comic book series to the screen.


Kevin Feige

While WandaVision had the prestige of becoming Marvel Studios' first series, bringing the box office Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) to the small screen for the first time when it launched on Disney+ in January, that wasn't the original plan.

In fact, it was another show, The Falcon & the Winter Soldier, that was originally scheduled to bring all the thrills and action of the MCU to Disney+ at the head of what is becoming a very long list of titles due to air over the coming months and years.

The series centres on Sam Wilson (Anthony Mackie), aka Falcon, and Bucky Barnes (Sebastian Stan), or The Winter Soldier, as they team up in the wake of the events of feature film Avengers: Endgame to fight a new foe, as Sam faces up to a new future and Bucky must atone for the mistakes of his past.

Speaking during a session at the 2021 BANFF World Media Festival, Marvel Studios president Kevin Feige and Kari Skogland, director of The Falcon & the Winter Soldier, discussed some of the key themes in the six-part series, the process of adapting the original comic books and why Marvel isn't just about superhero stories.

 *Kari Skogland*

Marvel Studios was adding the finishing touches to its last two Avengers films, Infinity War and Endgame, and Spider-Man: Far From Home – which concluded the 23-movie Infinity Saga – when thoughts first turned to creating series for Disney+.

Feige: It was a case of perfect timing, which I've been very lucky has happened a number of times for us at Marvel Studios over my now 20-plus years here. I had spent a lot of time wondering what was next for me personally, what was next for our stories and for our studio. Around that time, Bob Iger [former Walt Disney Company CEO and now executive chairman] brought me into his office and told us about the streaming service that Disney was doing. He had asked us, Marvel Studios, to make shows for it and that really came at the perfect time because it helped us answer a question, which was what's next and where do we go from here? Can we keep exploring the further stories of characters we've already introduced and hadn't had a chance to see as much of as

we wanted? Or could we introduce new characters? Thanks to Disney+ we could do both. That's really what set us on the path.

When she first pitched to be the director of The Falcon & the Winter Soldier, Kari Skogland didn't know much about the overall storyline, but the fact it was about the first black Captain America was all she needed to sign on.

Skogland: Not only did I feel honoured to be part of the team telling that story, because it was long overdue, but it also was going to look at what it was to be a hero today, because the original comic was born of a very different time and the world was in a very different place. It was really interesting to dive into the discussion of the evolution of it, because it had gone from a soldier/warrior paradigm into being much more about a first responder and frontline worker. And even more this last year than ever, the whole idea of who and what a hero is to the world is very different. It ticked so many boxes of topics. I knew we were going to be talking about imperialism and racism, obviously, but within that wheelhouse, we were going to be able to explore some very interesting topics, all within a very easy-to-absorb method. I did a presentation and, thankfully, they responded to my thoughts.



Anthony Mackie as Falcon and Sebastian Stan as The Winter Soldier

Of the first three series made by Marvel Studios, The Falcon & the Winter Soldier was the first to be put into development, although WandaVision would eventually become the first to air, earlier this year.

Feige: The Falcon & the Winter Soldier was the first show, so Kari had to experience all of our growing pains as a studio entering TV for the first time – of which there were many. The real answer [to why we wanted to follow these characters] is Anthony Mackie and Sebastian Stan. We have these great actors. They're great apart, great together, great in an ensemble. Every time they shared the screen, which they had done in a handful of our films, it was electric. We kept saying from the first time that they were together – they fought in Captain America: The Winter Soldier [2014] and then they had a bit of banter in Captain America: Civil War [2016] – how can we see more of that? Disney+ allowed us to do it, so it was the very first show we conceived and moved forward with.

In the final episode of The Falcon & the Winter Soldier, Wilson (Falcon) steps into the role of Captain America and delivers an impassioned speech about changing the world and tackling institutional racism.

Feige: We didn't want it to be preachy. We didn't want it to be cornball. Some people think anybody talking about anything important in a 'comic book project' is cornball, but we don't. It really is a testament to Malcolm [Spellman, showrunner] and Mr Mackie that they landed on something very powerful that spoke not just to today, because everything that happened in 2020 [with the Black Lives Matters movement] was after we'd already written and shot the show. But the issues are not contemporary. The issues are 400 years old, and that's what Sam Wilson is speaking to.



Loki was originally set to be the third Marvel series

Skogland: What was important to us was that it was not going to be tied up in a nice, neat bow. What Malcolm and Anthony really worked on was that idea of opening doors

and not closing them, unlike many movies – particularly superhero movies – where it's all kind of done and we're fixed and we got the villain and they're dead or put in jail or whatever it is, so problem solved. What was brilliant about what Malcolm and Anthony did was it was not about 'problem solved.' It was about what are you going to do? That made the speech particularly unique.

Another key storyline was the introduction of Isaiah Bradley, a veteran who was unwillingly subjected to the Super Soldier programme – which had earlier turned Steve Rogers into Captain America – in the 1950s. But unlike Rogers, who became a poster boy for the US, Bradley was put in jail for 30 years and subjected to numerous tests.

Feige: Isaiah Bradley was in a comic series called Truth: Red, White & Black and it revealed in the Marvel universe there had already been a successful super soldier in the comics prior to Steve Rogers and in our show it was after. But he was a black man and he was not put on USO tours and not had posters, comics and T-shirts made of him. He was shunned and forgotten, and worse. It was always a very powerful storyline we wanted to do someday as we explored the legacy of Captain America. It wasn't initially in this series; I thought it was too big a storyline to wedge into The Falcon & the Winter Soldier. Malcolm very much believed it was the soul of Sam's journey in the story, and Malcolm was correct. He kept pushing for it and the only note from us was to do it justice; just make sure we're not just cramming him in there.

Between the way Malcolm wrote it, the way Kari directed all of his beautiful scenes and that great actor Carl Lumbly, he's so powerful and so amazing. Carl was one of the highlights for me.



WandaVision made it to the small screen first

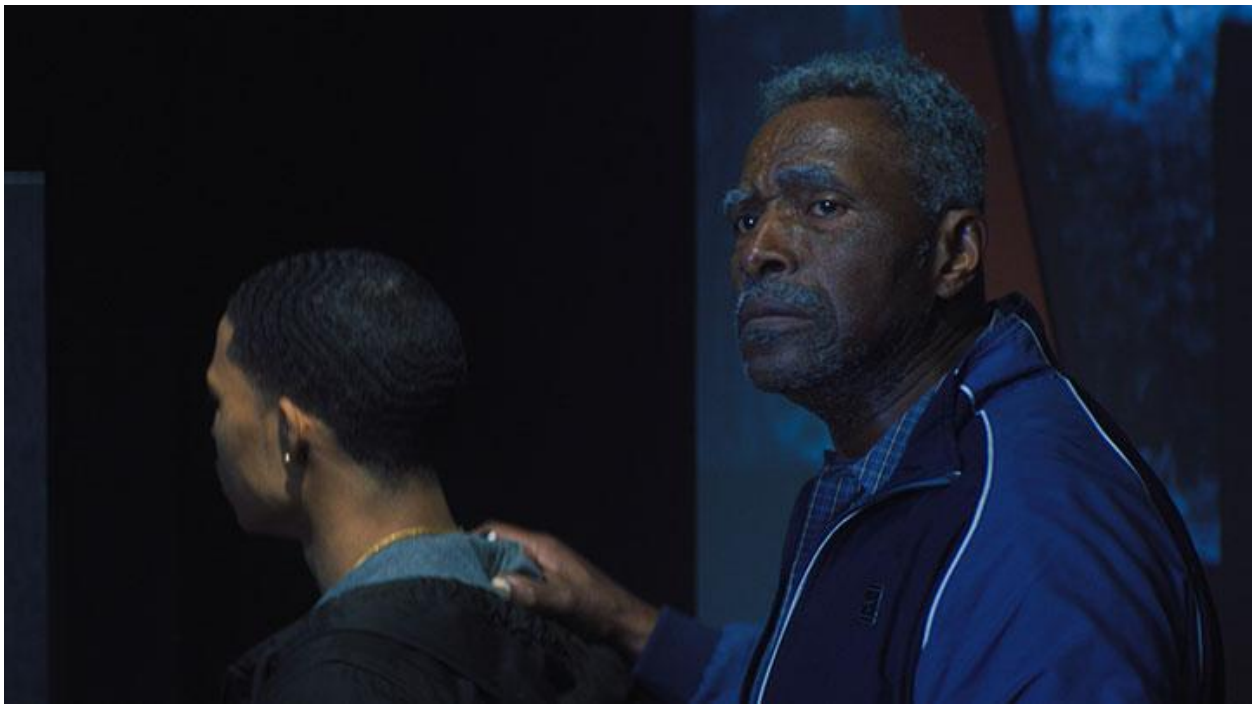
When it comes to adapting source material for the screen, Feige believes authenticity is key.

Feige: Particularly when we're translating source material, which is obviously what we do at Marvel Studios, it is about staying true, at the very least, to the spirit of the characters and of the storyline, if not the specific hairstyle or costume design, although I like to stick close to those as well. But it really is about the spirit of who these amazingly well-rounded characters from the comics are and believing and trusting in them.

One of the aspects of making The Falcon & the Winter Soldier that Skogland most enjoyed was the continuous evolution of the creative process behind the scenes.

Skogland: With Marvel, you never stop writing, ever. That is always a plus because if you're with the right group of people, you are constantly pushing the envelope, making it better, trying stuff and being open to experimentation. I was saying to the actors, and I say it to the writers as well, 'If it sucks, it won't be in the movie. So let's try.' That is an important part of a process that is unique to Marvel, where Kevin, in particular, is fantastic at being very inclusive of people's ideas and thoughts and then cherry-picking the ones that work and letting them percolate his own ideas. It makes for a very collaborative, very supportive environment, out of which come success after success. They hit the ball out of the park every time.

Feige: The Falcon & the Winter Soldier was our first series [in development] and after asking Kari to direct all six of these colossally gigantic episodes, it was only in hindsight, now we're on our sixth and seventh shows, that I realise what a giant ask that was of her. She delivered above and beyond, not just these six giant episodes but working under extremely difficult circumstances, not just changing scripts but changing locations and shutting down for the pandemic. It really was, safe to say, the most difficult production we'd ever had at Marvel Studios.



Carl Lumbly (right) plays the key role of Isaiah Bradley

When it comes to identifying new creative collaborators, Marvel looks for storytelling talent at any level.

Feige: We've always looked for the same thing and that is being able to pull off what you set out to achieve, whether that's a short film, a low-budget film or whether that's a great episode of television. The example we always go to is Joe and Anthony Russo [Avengers: Infinity War and Endgame], who now direct the biggest movies in the world. They really got on our radar from cool episodes of a sitcom. It isn't about size or spectacle, it's about achieving a vision. Jon Watts [Spider-Man: Homecoming] did a small film called Cop Car that got our attention. Cate Shortland, who directed the upcoming Black Widow, did three or four smaller but extremely well done features. That's it. Then there are a number of meetings leading into it – which, frankly, is as much about will we all be able to get along for the next intensive two or three years and collaborate together and find something special.

While Marvel's new series are a showcase for the way the studio tells stories, the company is still working out the technical details.

Feige: The Falcon & the Winter Soldier was extremely expensive from a TV point of view. It was not expensive from a feature point of view, and yet it's two or three times longer than a feature. Are there efficiencies [we can find] other than just Kari working

non-stop 1,000 hours a day and 100 pages a day? Maybe that's just the answer! But it's about figuring out our production process between those two things. Black Widow looks giant and amazing. The Falcon & the Winter Soldier looks giant and amazing. There's a cost discrepancy between those that we can learn from someday.



Anthony Mackie becomes the new Captain America

These new series also allow Marvel to introduce new stories and characters to the MCU that will, in turn, affect the stories that play out on the big screen.

Feige: What we've always wanted to do is different types of stories each and every time with different genres and different styles. That's why The Falcon & the Winter Soldier, WandaVision and Loki were initially going to be our first three and Falcon was the first out of the gate, in large part to show that what Marvel Studios is going to deliver is what you would expect to see on the big screen. Then WandaVision was going to say, 'Left turn, here's something very different' and it ended up being first, which, of course, worked out very well anyway.

As the MCU enters Phase Four, the clues as to what will come next are always on screen.

Feige: We go out of our way to try to produce each show or film in a way that even if you haven't seen any of the other ones, you will have a good time watching it. That's very important. But the clues [about what might come next] are in the content. Clearly, Anthony Mackie as Captain America was not one and done in this series. There is a future for Captain America in the MCU. There are other characters and little phrases, like Joaqúin Torres [in The Falcon & the Winter Soldier] saying, 'What do you want me to do with these the old shattered wings?' and Sam goes, 'Keep them.' Well, that's probably heading somewhere. The clues are there and it's fun to watch people theorise about it.

IT'S A SIN

C21

Russell T Davies condemns C4 sell-off

Award-winning British writer Russell T Davies has attacked UK government plans to privatise Channel 4, describing the move as a "great crime" and one that would stifle opportunities for diverse stories and creators.



Russell T Davies

This week the UK's Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport confirmed it was moving forward with its latest plans to sell off the commercially funded public broadcaster, launching a consultation over the move that is opposed by C4 itself. Privatisation of the channel was last discussed in 2016.

C4 aired Davies' groundbreaking drama Queer as Folk in 1999, and the Doctor Who and Years & Years writer's most recent hit, It's a Sin, also aired on the network earlier this year. It's a Sin tells the story of five friends living in London under the shadow of the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s.

"It's been responsible for my entire career," Davies said of C4 during an It's a Sin master class yesterday at Canada's Banff World Media Festival.

"I started with Queer as Folk, I did a very gay programme called Cucumber and Banana in 2015 and now It's a Sin today and I don't think these programmes would have got made by other mainstream channels. Now that channel [is being] privatised, which is a great crime and it's inevitable and unstoppable and will mean the stifling of queer voices and of diverse voices in age, disability and race."

The writer said "dark days" were ahead as he believes the government will be forced to change C4's remit to produce innovative, creative programming from across the country to make it profitable.

"Channel 4's remit is to make shows like It's a Sin," he said. "It exists to make this kind of drama and that's going to fall away now. Come back in 10 years and you'll see. I can't promise we'll be here to talk about this sort of programme on Channel 4 for much longer because the government is gutting it.

"In this country, Cadbury's, Britain's favourite chocolate [brand], was sold and they promised us the taste wouldn't change, and now Cadbury's tastes like a cheap bin bag. In this modern world, we all put up with it. We all go, 'It's not as nice as it was,' and we don't riot in the streets, we give up because we're too busy staring at our screens. That's what they've done, they've 'Cadburyed' it. They're going to Cadbury the entire channel."

During the session, Davies also spoke about how the BBC and ITV had both turned down It's a Sin before it eventually landed at C4. "I'm very lucky to have a history there," he said. "It is the channel that made Queer as Folk. If you think back to 1999, that was a revolution. No other channel would have made that then.

"In some ways, literally the remit of Channel 4 is to look for different voices, different stories and part of the government's thinking in selling it off is we now have more choice because we have streamers, we have Netflix, we have Amazon. We have more choice, but that means more choice of zombies, ghosts and detectives. They certainly don't make this kind of stuff."

UK digital secretary Oliver Dowden has said C4's privatisation would allow it to "access new capital, create strategic partnerships and reach president/ onal markets only available through the private sector."

BROADCAST

Russell T Davies: selling C4 will stifle queer voices

By Hannah Bowler24 June 2021

Claims It's A Sin would not have been ordered by any other broadcaster.

Russell T Davies has warned selling Channel 4 would "stifle" queer and diverse voices and called the government's proposals a "rigged crime".

Davies used an It's a Sin masterclass session at the Banff World Media Festival to attack the forthcoming consultation into C4's ownership, which he predicted would result in an "inevitable and unstoppable" privatisation.

"We are looking at very dark days here," he said. "In order to sell Channel 4 and make it profitable [the government] would have to change C4's remit which is to make shows like It's a Sin."

Davies' Covid-delayed five-parter It's A Sin drew a high of 4.5m viewers and became All 4's biggest-ever boxset with 63% of its audience agreeing that it was the sort of drama that would only be found on C4. It followed a host of C4 series created by Davies including Queer as Folk, Cucumber and its spin-off Banana.



“None of these shows would have been made by the other mainstream channels,” said Davies. “Channel 4 has been responsible for my entire career.”

Davies compared the anticipated sell-off to the acquisition of Cadbury’s by American multinational Modelez International.

“When they sold Cadbury’s, they promised the taste wouldn’t change,” he said. “Now Cadbury’s tastes like a cheap beer”.

He was also dismissive of the rationale behind the decision.

“Part of the government’s reasoning for selling is that there is now more choice now because of the streamers,” he said. “That means more choice of zombies, ghosts, detectives - they certainly don’t make shows like this [It’s a Sin].”

Davies’ criticism of the process follows Sir David Attenborough’s decision to sign an open letter which asked ‘what’s changed’ since the government opted against a sale in 2017 and called for greater transparency surrounding the process.

RADIO TIMES

Russell T Davies says Channel 4 privatisation would “stifle” queer and diverse voices

“We are looking at very dark days here."



By Flora Carr

Published: Friday, 25th June 2021 at 3:12 pm

Russell T Davies, who created the recent 1980s AIDS drama It's A Sin, has suggested that the privatisation of Channel 4 could "stifle" queer and diverse voices.

Speaking during a masterclass session at the Banff World Media Festival, Davies claimed that his Channel 4 dramas, like It's A Sin and Queer as Folk, would never have been made by another broadcaster.

"We are looking at very dark days here," he said. "In order to sell Channel 4 and make it profitable [the government] would have to change C4's remit which is to make shows like It's A Sin."

He continued, "None of these shows would have been made by the other mainstream channels… Channel 4 has been responsible for my entire career."



Olly Alexander as Ritchie and Lydia West as Jill in It's a Sin (Channel 4)

“Part of the government’s reasoning for selling is that there is now more choice now because of the streamers,” he said (via Broadcast). “That means more choice of zombies, ghosts, detectives -–they certainly don’t make shows like this [It’s A Sin].”

Earlier this week it was announced that the government was set to launch a consultation into the privatisation of the broadcaster.

Culture secretary Oliver Dowden said, “Technology has transformed broadcasting but the rules protecting viewers and helping our traditional channels compete are from an analogue age.

“The time has come to look at how we can unleash the potential of our public service broadcasters while also making sure viewers and listeners consuming content on new formats are served by a fair and well-functioning system.

“So we’ll now be looking at how we can help make sure Channel 4 keeps its place at the heart of British broadcasting and level the playing field between broadcasters and video-on-demand services.”

It’s A Sin debuted on Channel 4 in January and has been a runaway hit for the broadcaster, breaking records on its streaming and catch-up service, All 4.

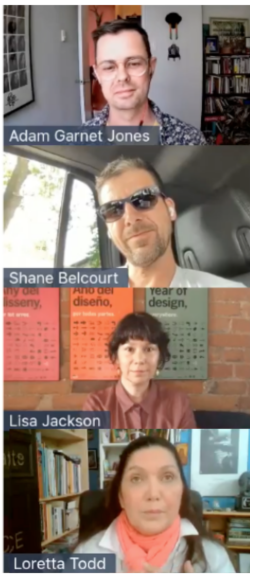
INTERNATIONAL INDIGENOUS SCREEN INDUSTRY SUMMIT

PLAYBACK

BANFF ’21: Indigenous creators see growing opportunities in global marketplace

BY JORDAN PINTO





Banff World Media Festival's International Indigenous Screen Industry Summit brought together creatives and media leaders from across the world to discuss the future of Indigenous storytelling.

While myriad challenges persist for Indigenous storytellers in the screen-based industries, opportunities in the international marketplace are beginning to become more plentiful.

That was one of the key takeaways from Banff World Media Festival’s (BANFF) International Indigenous Screen Industry Summit, a one-day event geared toward facilitating important discussions and connecting Indigenous storytellers from across the globe. It was timed to coincide with the 25th annual National Indigenous Peoples Day.

The virtual event included two panel discussions, a master class, multiple networking sessions and a private stakeholder session involving nine international Indigenous broadcasters, with Indigenous producers, creators and educators from across Canada.

“I think a lot is changing, even in the last two-to-five years, in terms of international broadcaster interest, as well as interest from streamers and other organizations such as distributors,” said Lisa Jackson, during panel titled “Nations to Nations: Canadian Indigenous stories on a global stage.”

Jackson’s hybrid documentary feature project *Wilfred Buck*, about an expert in Indigenous astronomy lore, won the Canadian Forum Pitch Prize at Hot Docs in May.

“To be honest, I was very happily surprised at the level of attention in the film,” she said. “It’s not conventional in many respects, and I was expecting that it might be a bit of a tough sell at Hot Docs. What I was really happy to discover is that there was quite a lot of international interest in the topic.”

Director, showrunner, producer and writer Loretta Todd, director Shane Belcourt and director JJ Neepin also participated in the panel, which was moderated by APTN’s director of TV content and special events Adam Garnet Jones.

While the opportunities in both the domestic and international marketplace are growing, the challenges that have historically impeded Indigenous storytellers still remain.

When Todd was financing her feature film *Monkey Beach*, she hit roadblocks while on the search for international collaborators. “I would talk to producers outside of Canada and they would say ‘well, when Indigenous feature films make money then we’ll be interested,’” said Todd, who emphasized the importance of taking the time to build connections and find common ground with collaborators.

Meanwhile Neepin, who was selected as one of the 2021 Berlinale Film Festival Talent Lab participants, said she was pleasantly surprised by the level of

knowledge around “Indigenous context” and the challenges faced by Indigenous Peoples globally.

“To my great surprise, almost 90% of people I met already knew what Indigenous Peoples were. They would bring up docs that they’d seen and films they’d seen,” said Neepin. “I thought that was really refreshing and gives a nice glimpse into a potentially positive future.”

Belcourt, whose credits include the docuseries *Amplify*, said he’s most excited about the growth of the Indigenous talent base across Canada.

“Before, you can say there are no Indigenous DPs, [now] I can name you a bunch off the top of my head. Or there’s no Indigenous sound recorders, [now] I can name you a bunch. So we’re in this place where we’re incubating our own talent, we’re incubating our own stories that are authentic and specific,” he said.

In Canada, the future of screen-based Indigenous storytelling is arguably looking brighter than it has done for many years, following the news that the Liberal government will direct $40.1 million to the Indigenous Screen Office (ISO) over a three-year period to fulfil its mandate to ensure Indigenous peoples can see their stories reflected on screen.

The recognition from the Canadian government that more investment is needed to bring Indigenous stories to life, Todd also believes that further steps could be taken if Bill C-10 is passed.

“It’s what I call a transference of wealth,” said Todd. “Can we see that transformation on the level where there’s a sudden opportunity?”

“There should be a transfer of wealth on a scale that we’ve never seen before within media production. That’s where that incredible diversity of voices and diversity of experiences of Indigenous filmmakers, of the people we are, can find expression. That’s something I look forward to and hope we can help promote it and make it happen.”

Earlier in the day, APTN CEO Monika Ille hosted a panel on the future of Indigenous broadcasting and streaming which included representatives from SBS in Australia, KNR Radio/TV in Greenland, Māori TV in New Zealand and Canada's first Inuktut channel, Uvagut TV, which is currently available in 610,000 homes across Canada. Director Sterlin Harjo led a master class on FX's *Reservation Dogs*, co-created with New Zealand's Taika Waititi, which has an entirely-Indigenous cast and crew.

SIMU LIU

THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER

'Shang-Chi' Star Simu Liu Talks Fallout From 'Kim's Convenience' Remarks

"I'm not out to cancel anyone, to end anybody's career," the Canadian actor, enjoying global stardom as part of Marvel Studios' first offering centering an Asian superhero, told the Banff World Media Festival.

BY ETAN VLESSING
JUNE 16, 2021 10:18AM



Simu Liu GEORGE PIMENTEL/GETTY IMAGES FOR DISNEY STUDIOS

Simu Liu, the titular star of Marvel's first Asian superhero offering, *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings*, addressed the fallout from his recent Instagram post about the cancellation of the cult Canadian comedy *Kim's Convenience* during a keynote at the virtual Banff World Media Festival.

"I'm not out to cancel anyone, to end anybody's career by singling any one person out," Liu said. *Kim's Convenience* co-creators Ins Choi and Kevin White have come under a media spotlight following the cancellation and subsequent comments from Liu and other cast members regarding issues of inclusion and representation behind the scenes.

Liu, who has exchanged Canadian celebrity status for global stardom with *Shang-Chi,* said recently that viewing the last episode of *Kim's Convenience* on Netflix filled him with sadness. "To see what our show originally stood for and to see such a Canadian success story snuffed out in such an anti-climactic and almost pathetic way, it did not befit a show of that caliber," he said.

Liu added his Instagram post did not aim to be "incendiary" or overly hostile. But he did want to speak up for more onscreen East Asian representation. "People have been telling me to suck it up and be grateful for my entire career, and certainly during the entire run of the show. I can see how I may have come off as entitled and spoiled. But I built a brand and a career on being outspoken," Liu said.

Liu was born in China and immigrated to Canada when he was 5, growing up in the Toronto suburb of Mississauga. His first screen credit was as an extra in Guillermo del Toro's *Pacific Rim*, but he became known for *Kim's Convenience*, a series about a Korean immigrant family running a Toronto convenience store.

He also co-starred in *Blood and Water,* a Canadian crime drama that mixed English, Cantonese and Mandarin. The part earned him a Canadian Screen Award and ACTRA nominations. Other credits include *Orphan Black, Fresh Off the Boat* and the *Taken* TV series.

Liu was full of praise for the creative contrast between *Kim's Convenience* and *Shang-Chi*, which also stars *Crazy Rich Asians*' Awkwafina and veteran actor Tony Leung. Destin Daniel Cretton directs the stand-alone movie for Marvel Studios, which hopes *Shang-Chi* can be a cultural breakthrough in the same way that *Black Panther* film was in 2018.

Wonder Woman 1984 screenwriter Dave Callaham penned the script for *Shang-Chi* and updated the character for modern audiences.

"What surprised me was, from day one, we were a part of the conversation. As a castmember coming in, I expected to just show up and act. We were able to sit down and have creative conversations about lines, and feedback I gave about the story made it more distinctly Asian American," Liu recalled.

PLAYBACK

BANFF '21: Simu Liu addresses the Kim's Convenience fallout

BY KELLY TOWNSEND

June 17, 2021



The *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings* star spoke about his recent social media comments in a

conversation during the Banff World Media Festival and the importance of behind-the-scenes representation.

Canada's newest superhero has championed representation for the Asian community on and off the screen, sparking global conversations about how diverse characters are written – and who's writing them.

The fallout of the *Kim's Convenience* cancellation came to a new chapter earlier this month when star and MADE | NOUS ambassador Simu Liu – the lead in the upcoming Marvel film *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings* – wrote in a Facebook post that there was no Korean or East Asian representation in the writer's room for the CBC comedy, outside of co-creator Ins Choi. He went on to state that the actors attempted to take part in the room but were ignored, for the most part, which was reiterated this week during the Banff World Media Festival (BANFF).

"In negating our voices they were negating Asian-Canadian perspectives," Liu told multimedia artist Sook-Yin Lee during the Wednesday (June 16) session at BANFF, held as a partner presentation with MADE | NOUS.

Liu – who was honoured by BANFF this week with the Canadian Award of Distinction at the Rockie Awards – emphasized that the social media post was never an attempt to be hostile or incendiary toward the creatives or producers, but to shed light on a systemic issue in the industry. "It became about the bigger picture, which is the relationship between those with power and those without, and how those with power hoard it instead of diversifying it when it could make a project better," he said.

The actor stated how he and other cast members felt their characters were "stifled," particularly his character Jung and Jean Yoon's character Umma, saying that they unsuccessfully fought for the two to have more scenes together. For Jung in particular, according to Liu, his character's ambitions faded with little

reason after the first two seasons. He said the cast had to step in for later seasons to “fix” major problems in the script, stating they “dodged a bullet.”

The series itself came to an “anticlimactic” end, according to Liu, which he said “did not befit a show of that calibre and social reach and social quality.”

“Respectfully, it’s not our place to comment on behalf of Simu Liu or the producers of *Kim’s Convenience*. We’re excited to continue working with Simu on *Hello (Again)*, a new CBC Gem original series co-created by Simu and Nathalie Younglai,” a CBC spokesperson told *Playback Daily* in a statement.

Kim’s Convenience producer Thunderbird Entertainment did not respond to a request for comment as of press time.

The core of the problem was the lack of East Asian or Korean representation in the creative team, according to Liu.

He pointed out how much of the Asian representation that’s written by white creatives contain played out stereotypes, including the “tiger parent” trope and the constant mention of the word “honour.” As well, the way Asian men are emasculated in the media and Asian women are sexualized have become intrinsic to the experience of Asian-Canadians and Asian-Americans growing up.

“When you lack the lived experience of an Asian person, it’s going to be very difficult for you to drill into the nuances of an Asian’s character’s psyche about what motivates him or her and where insecurities stem from,” he said.

His personal experiences and his growing platform have turned him to social activism in recent years, culminating in his work with the MADE | NOUS Seek More campaign, which highlights inequities in Canada’s screen industry.

“My north star through all of this is the belief that this platform can be used to affect great change,” said Liu. “It’s part of an ongoing commitment to push beyond what we know and what the status quo is. To make permanent change is never comfortable in the moment, but it’s important to showcase and nurture representation and inclusivity in front of and behind the camera.”

When it came to his experience with Marvel, Liu says he was part of the creative conversations on *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings* “from day one,” alongside director Destin Daniel Cretton and co-writer David Callaham.

Liu said the fact that the character – the first Asian superhero for Marvel – is one of the more “obscure” superheroes from the Marvel comics made it possible for the team to “start from scratch and build an origin story that we wanted to see for an Asian-American.” Part of that meant doing away with racist Asian archetypes such as the Fu Manchu-type villain and incorporating more modern nuances of Asian-American life.

It remains to be seen how successful the Marvel film will be when it premieres on Sept. 3, considering the volatile state of the North American box office, but Liu has high hopes moving forward.

He added that while *Kim’s Convenience* came to its end a bit too soon, the show remains a success story for Canada.

“I’ve always maintained that we were strongest when we leaned into those family moments, where we found those stories that dug deep into our identity because we found universality in that specificity,” said Liu. “We can be an example of what happens when the gates open, even just a little bit, and hopefully they can open even more.”

BANFF runs from June 14 to July 16.

TED SARANDOS

DEADLINE

Netflix Lands Worldwide Rights To Sci-Fi Sequel ‘Code 8: Part II’

By Anthony D'Alessandro

June 14, 2021 10:10am



Netflix

Netflix Co-CEO and Chief Content Officer Ted Sarandos announced today as part of his keynote speech at Banff World Media Festival that the streamer is taking global rights to Canadian sci-fi movie *Code 8: Part II*.

It's the streamer's first original Canadian English-language feature acquisition.

Deadline first reported on the casting of the sequel with Robbie Amell (*Upload*) and Stephen Amell (*Arrow*) reprising their roles from the first film.

In Part 2, after witnessing the murder of her brother and subsequent cover up, a teenage girl with abnormal abilities seeks the help of an ex-con (Robbie Amell) and his former partner-in-crime (Stephen Amell). Together, they face a unit of corrupt police officers who deploy advanced robotic technology to prevent themselves from being exposed.

Collective Pictures produces a movie directed by Jeff Chan and written by Chris Paré and Jeff Chan, Sherren Lee and Jesse LaVercombe.

Producers are Chan, Robbie Amell, Stephen Amell and Paré. XYZ Films brokered the deal on behalf of the filmmakers and are executive producing as well.

The pic will shoot in Canada and drop on Netflix this year.

***Code 8* raised $2.5 million from more than 35K backers through Indiegogo, making it the second-largest crowdfunded original film of all time. It set the record for the highest-grossing day-and-date release for Elevation Pictures in Canada and for Vertical Entertainment in the U.S. Upon the film's release, Deadline reported that a shortform series adaptation was in the works at the now-defunct Quibi.**

BROADCAST MAGAZINE
Sarandos: Netflix is open to acquisitions
By John Elmes15 June 2021
SVoD's co-chief executive admits streaming trailblazer could hit M&A market



Netflix recently launched third series of US drama Virgin River

Ted Sarandos has indicated Netflix will consider buying rival media companies, as the flurry of recent global M&A deals continues to reshape the content market.

The Netflix co-chief executive admitted the streaming giant “is open to buying” in a digital keynote interview at the Banff World Media Festival yesterday.

“Historically we’ve been builders instead of buyers – we’ve built out this incredible media library from scratch over the last several years – but we’re certainly open to buying,” he said in response to a question from Broadcast.



Ted Sarandos: 'Netflix expected D2C rush'

Netflix has previous acquired companies such as LA-based comic book company Millarworld, but has broadly preferred commissioning and acquiring programming to larger strategic deals.

Sarandos said Netflix would "watch and see" how SVoD rival Amazon's £6bn acquisition of MGM pans out, but noted the move could be beneficial for the Lord of the Rings streamer.

The media market has been further shaken by the unexpected announcement of a merger between WarnerMedia and Discovery.

"If the asset is at the strategic core, media investments can be very successful," said Sarandos. "Generally, you only find that out over time."

He added the recent flurry of entrants into the direct-to-consumer landscape such as Disney+ and WarnerMedia's HBO Max meant that incumbents "can't rest on [their] laurels forever". It was this belief that had initially pushed Netflix into commissioning its own content.

"We were anticipating the moment when studios and networks would go direct-to-consumer," he said. "We started producing our own content because we believed those folks wouldn't be selling us their content when they were D2C."

Canada investment
During his keynote, Sarandos unveiled a series of content investments into Canada, as part of Netflix's ten years operating in the country.

This included Netflix becoming premiere partner of the Women in Animation Vancouver's Animation Career Excelerator programme (ACE), which aims to advance women and those who identify as women into key creative roles in animation.

Sarandos also revealed Netflix was "actively in the process" of hiring a manager for original Canadian series.

PLAYBACK

BANFF '21: Ted Sarandos previews Netflix's growing Canadian strategy

BY KELLY TOWNSEND

June 15, 2021



The Netflix co-CEO and chief content officer spoke of the streamer's global content strategy and post-pandemic trends during the Banff World Media Festival's opening day.

Netflix may be celebrating 10 years in Canada, but the global streaming service is still hitting its stride.

“I think the massive move toward on-demand and subscription will reshape things for decades to come and we’re at the very beginning of that now,” said Ted Sarandos, co-CEO and chief content officer at Netflix on the opening day of the Banff World Media Festival (BANFF).

Speaking with Kirstine Stewart, head of Shaping the Future of Media, Sport and Entertainment at the World Economic Forum, in a keynote conversation, Sarandos delved into how the pandemic has shaped media trends in the last year and the company’s expansion into Canada with its new Toronto base.

Since 2017 the company has continued to invest in production in Canada – its initial promise of $500 million spend within five years has snowballed into $2.5 billion, and the company is making a significant investment into original Canadian content as it searches for a local content executive.

The keynote conversation took place the same day Netflix posted its job listing for a Toronto-based content executive. The role – titled manager, original series, Canada – will see the selected candidate develop and produce scripted content in Canada for the streamer and liaise with established and emerging creative talent.

Sarandos said Netflix wants to be "more aggressive about telling Canadian stories" and are looking for "best in class" ideas from Canadian creatives. "We're looking for that story that you're dying to tell, and no one can tell it as well as you," said Sarandos, noting the streaming is open to any and all genres in scripted and unscripted.

Sarandos also announced the streamer's first English-language Canadian original film with *Code 8 Part II* and a new partnership with Women in Animation Vancouver to take its Animation Career EXCELerator Program global, with a focus on attracting BIPOC talent. "Here in the U.S. only about 5% of producers of animation are women of colour, so we have an opportunity to bring more voices to the table," said Sarandos.

Diversity is a key component of Netflix's global strategy, according to Sarandos, both at the content level and within its ranks. A diverse executive team results in a trickle down effect across its departments, according to Sarandos, since diverse decision-makers are statistically more likely to hire diverse creatives who, in turn, are likely to create and cast diverse roles. "I want my team to look like the world that they're serving," said Sarandos.

He noted that on a content level the pandemic has made viewers more open to stories from foreign countries, stating that, in the U.S., viewership of non-English content is up 50% from the beginning of the year, with Korean-language content up by 100%. As well, series such as *Lupin* from France are among the top-performing series globally. The streamer has also had a positive impact on tourism in countries like Spain.

The hope is that a similar effect will happen for Canadian content.

“We’ve made it a point to come in and be a partner in each of these countries we operate in and put a meaningful investment into the marketplace,” said Sarandos. “Not just export Hollywood to the world, but to actually export content and local stories to everywhere else in the world.”

The service has already had an impact on Canadian acting talent – Sarandos pointed out that Amybeth McNulty, who starred in the hit series *Anne with an E*, is among the new cast members of one of the streamer’s largest success stories, *Stranger Things*.

As for global viewing trends, Sarandos said the pandemic has likely permanently changed how audiences consume content. He pointed to the rise of blockbuster films premiering day and date on streaming platforms and on-demand services as a continuing trend. While he suspects traditionally high-grossing films will continue to perform well theatrically, windows will shrink as consumers become accustomed to at-home access to new releases.

As a result, however, Netflix has had more success negotiating with exhibitors about theatrical releases for some of its films, such as *Army of the Dead*, which had one the streamer’s widest releases to date with approximately 600 screens.

The streamer’s release strategy will likely remain the same, according to Sarandos, who said that, initially, dropping full seasons of original content was a practical decision rather than a conscious choice on their part to disrupt distribution strategies. Now the release strategy is part of their focus on giving consumers as much choice as possible; while streaming services such as Disney+ have followed the weekly release model, Sarandos doesn’t see Netflix’s model changing.

One thing Sarandos does hope will change as the pandemic slows: a return to in-person meetings. While he said video conferencing is a practical solution that will have its place in reducing some unnecessary travel in the future, it won't be a full replacement in all situations. For instance, he expects most writers' rooms will return to in-person – and, of course, hopes that BANFF will return to its namesake in the Rocky Mountains.

BANFF runs from June 14 to July 16.

Pictured (L-R): **Ted Sarandos and Kirstine Stewart**

HUSH HUSH BIZ

NETFLIX & WOMEN IN ANIMATION VANCOUVER ANNOUNCE NATIONAL PARTNERSHIP FOR WIA VANCOUVER'S ACE PROGRAM AT BANFF

ANIMATION VANCOUVER (WIA) BANFF NETFLIX & WOMEN VANCOUVER' WOMEN IN FIKM by Caroline Russo | on June 15, 2021 | 0 comments | in Film News | Like it

Netflix Canada and Women in Animation Vancouver (WIA) announced today the expansion of WIA Vancouver's Animation Career EXCELerator Program (ACE). Netflix co-CEO and Chief Content Officer Ted Sarandos included the news in his keynote speech at the virtual Banff World Media Festival today where he also shared that the company will be acting as the Premiere partner of the 2022-2024 program.

The goal of the ACE program is to advance women and those who identify as women into key creative roles in animation, providing mid-level career professionals targeted and focused mentoring, support and training. Through the program, participants are given the opportunity to develop, create and own original intellectual property.

The new grant will see the current ACE program expand to applicants across Canada and will allow for additional key creative roles to be included in the program's offering. Currently six roles are covered in the program including writer, producer, director, art director, animation director, and composer. The initiative is open to all women, or those identifying as women or non-binary, with a special focus on attracting creators from BIPOC or underrepresented groups.

This collaboration with Netflix is part of the recently announced Netflix Fund for Creative Equity, where Netflix will invest USD $100 million dollars over the next five years in a combination of external organizations with a strong track record of setting underrepresented communities up for success in the TV and film industries, as well as bespoke Netflix programs that will help us to identify, train and provide job placement for up-and-coming talent globally.

"Canada's animation sector is second to none. This partnership will help ensure that the animation industry continues to thrive and include the experiences of Canadian women from diverse backgrounds," says Ted Sarandos, Co-CEO and Chief Content Officer, Netflix.

“WIA’s mission is to promote diversity and gender equity in the animation industry, with the goal of 50/50 by 2025. We are thrilled Netflix has recognized the value of the ACE program and the impact it has had on the animation industry here in BC. We are excited that this new partnership not only allows us to continue the program, but expand it to reach women across the country,” says Rose-Ann Tisserand, WIA Vancouver Board Member & ACE Program Founder/Co-Executive Producer.

Currently in its second term, the ACE program has proven extremely successful as all of the women in the first cohort have gone on to become leaders at Animation Studios across the country.

“ACE was such an amazing experience for my professional and personal growth. The program allowed me to gain confidence, skills and connections that otherwise would have taken me years. Working as the short film’s Art Director helped affirm my career goals, this role was exactly what I wanted to do. As a result of participating in the ACE program, I was promoted several times over and am currently the Design Department Supervisor for a series at Atomic Cartoons. This year I am also thrilled to be mentoring for the ACE program. I cannot wait for the world to see what this year’s talented team has brewing,” says Maisha Moore, 2019 ACE participant.

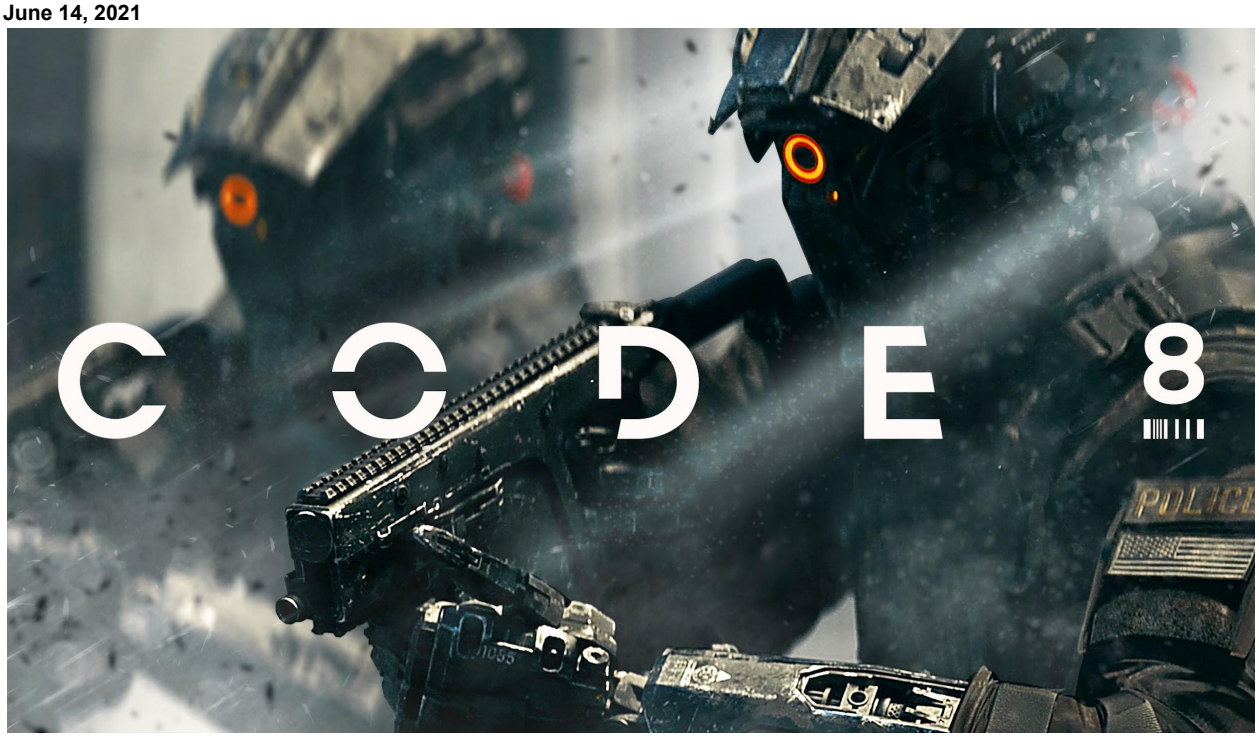
Applications will open at the Spark Animation Festival 2021 for the next iteration of the program and all selected candidates will be announced in March 2022 on International Women’s Day. WIA Vancouver’s ACE Program would like to thank current sponsors for making the ACE Program possible. Current sponsors include Creative BC, Telefilm, Toonboom, Autodesk Foundation, Canadian Media Producers Association – BC Producer’s Branch, Boughton Law, National Film Board, Producer Essentials, Spark CG Society, Pender PR and The Research House Clearance Services.

PLAYBACK

BANFF ’21: Netflix acquires global rights to Code 8 sequel

BY AMBER DOWLING

June 14, 2021



The streaming service has picked up Collective Pictures’ *Code 8: Part II*, marking its first English-language Canadian original.

Netflix has ordered its first original English-language feature from Canada, but the project may sound a little familiar.

The streaming service announced it has acquired the global rights to the *Code 8* sequel, *Code 8: Part II*, at the 42nd Banff World Media Festival today (June 14).

Production on the Collective Pictures project begins later this year in Canada with returning director Jeff Chan. Cousins Robbie Amell and Stephen Amell reprise their roles from the first film. The trio also produces alongside Chris Paré, who wrote the script alongside Chan, Sherren Lee and Jesse LaVercombe.

"After witnessing the murder of her brother and subsequent cover up, a teenage girl with abnormal abilities seeks the help of an ex-con (Robbie Amell) and his former partner-in-crime (Stephen Amell)," reads the official logline. "Together, they face a unit of corrupt police officers who deploy advanced robotic technology to prevent themselves from being exposed."

The deal was negotiated by executive producers XYZ Films.

The announcement comes following the original film's impressive debut on the streaming service outside of Canada in April 2020, when it cracked the then-new Top 10 chart in the U.S. and internationally. At the time *Code 8* had also posted VOD returns of roughly $5 million through Apple, Amazon and Vudu.

The original film was distributed by Elevation Pictures in Canada (it originally streamed on Crave) and XYZ Films internationally. The movie revolves around a group of people born with supernatural abilities, deemed "specials." In order to survive in a world where the other 96% of the population shuns them, the specials are forced into a world of crime and poverty.

Kari Matchett, Lawrence Bayne, Jai Jai Jones, Sung Kang, Alex Mallari Jr. and Aaron Abrams also starred in the first instalment.

Code 8 **began with a 10-minute short for an Indiegogo campaign in 2016 that surged into the largest-ever crowd-funded campaign for a Canadian film after it received $2.4 million in a little over a month. A spinoff series was also developed for the short-lived streaming service Quibi in December 2019, but it never went ahead as the service shut down in December 2020, less than seven months after launch.**

Code 8: Part II **was first announced in early June.**

TBI

BANFF: Netflix details Canadian investment, with originals push and animation grant

By Mark Layton 15th June 2021 @ 12:23



Ted Sarandos

Netflix co-CEO and chief content officer Ted Sarandos has highlighted the streamer's ongoing investment in Canada, with a new original film in the works, the hiring of a Canadian original series exec and a partnership with Women in Animation Vancouver.

Sarandos kicked off his keynote speech at the virtual Banff World Media Festival yesterday with the announcement that Netflix is providing funding to Women in Animation Vancouver to expand its Animation Career EXCELerator Program (ACE).

He revealed that the streamer will act as the premiere partner of the 2022-2024 program, which aims to bring more women, particularly from underrepresented backgrounds, into key creative animation roles.

The grant from Netflix will see the current Vancouver-based ACE program expand nationally to applicants across Canada.

“Our focus is going to be on the BIPOC community, underrepresented voices in a very underrepresented community in animation,” said Sarandos. “Unfortunately, here in the US, by way of example, only about five per cent of producers of animation today are women of colour, so we really have an opportunity to bring more voices to the table in animation.”

The collaboration part of Netflix’s previously announced Netflix Fund for Creative Equity, which will see the streamer invest $100 million over the next five years.

Local originals expansion

It has now been 10 years since Netflix entered Canada and Sarandos further highlighted how the streamer has invested CA$2.5bn on local production, just since 2017. This investment is set to continue this year with the hiring of a Canadian content executive, following the streamer’s recent opening of a Toronto office.

“We’re actively in the process of hiring a manager for original Canadian series, which will in effect move the greenlight for Canadian content to Canada,” said Sarandos.

Meanwhile, Netflix has also handed a greenlight to Collective Pictures for Canadian sci-fi sequel *Code 8: Part II.* Sarandos described this follow-up to the 2019 sci-fi thriller feature as Netflix’s “first English-language Canadian original film”.

Jeff Chan will direct and write alongside Chris Paré, Sherren Lee and Jesse LaVercombe, with Robbie Amell and Stephen Amell set to reprise their roles from the first film. The film will shoot in Canada later this year and be released globally by Netflix.

“We’ve really made it a point to come in and be a partner in each of these countries we operate in and put really meaningful investment into the marketplace and not just export Hollywood to the world, but to actually export content and local stories from around the world to everywhere else in the world” said Sarandos, who further praised Canada as “a great place to produce.”

LOS ANGELES TIMES (referenced Ted Sarandos’ session)

ROYAL TELEVISION SOCIETY (referenced Ted Sarandos’ session)

TECH SPOT

Netflix subscribers turned to more non-English language shows during the pandemic

There's some great Korean content on the service

By Rob Thubron June 15, 2021, 7:45 AM 7 comments



In brief: Has your Netflix viewing habits change this year as a result of the pandemic? In addition to spending more hours on the service, US subscribers have been streaming an increasing amount of non-English language content, with Korean shows and movies proving particularly popular.

Speaking at a virtual keynote address at the Banff World Media Festival (via the Hollywood Reporter), Netflix co-CEO and chief content officer Ted Sarandos revealed that viewership for non-English Netflix content jumped 50 percent since the beginning of 2021, and interest in Korean content jumped 100% in the wake of Parasite's Oscar win.

"People during the pandemic had a lot more time on their hands and were more curious to see things and were denied the ability to travel, so they were more interested to see [content] from around the world," Sarandos said.

Netflix is packed with great shows and movies from Korea, including the "Game of Thrones meets The Walking Dead" Kingdom, Extracurricular, the brilliant Sweet Home (top), and #Alive. There's also plenty of fantastic content from other countries: Dark (Germany), Elite (Spain), Lupin (France), to name just a few.

Sarandos believes that as the vaccine programs continue to roll out and more areas of society open up, film and TV consumption trends will return to "normal" pre-pandemic levels, though not everyone will suddenly stop streaming new releases and return to movie theaters.

"I do think people will be very excited to get back to movie theaters. I'm excited to see that come back as well," Sarandos said. "Sometimes [consumers] will go to the theater and sometimes they will watch the premieres in their homes."

Netflix passed 200 million paid subscribers in January, though April saw its shares fall 13% as subscriber growth slumped in the wake of the pandemic boost.

TECH RADAR

Here's one big way Netflix streaming habits changed in the pandemic

By Samuel Roberts June 15, 2021

Netflix subscribers are more open than ever to non-English shows



(Image credit: Netflix)

Interest in non-English language content has spiked 50% since the beginning of the year among US subscribers, Netflix has revealed. In addition, in the aftermath of Parasite's success at the Oscars last year, the US audience for Korean content on the streamer has increased by a massive 100%.

Netflix's co-CEO and chief content officer Ted Sarandos revealed this at the Banff World Media Festival, per THR. A number of non-English language shows have become a massive deal on the service, like French show Lupin, German sci-fi drama Dark and Spanish series Money Heist, with the streamer investing heavily in local content where it's trying to grow its presence. Another popular Spanish series, Elite, returned for a new season this week.

Sarandos thinks the rapid change in circumstances helped encourage people's interest in shows they might not have normally watched.

"People during the pandemic had a lot more time on their hands and were more curious to see things and were denied the ability to travel, so they were more interested to see [content] from around the world," Sarandos says.

Sarandos also expects the overall hours we spend streaming to return to their pre-pandemic levels, as theaters reopen. “Things will get to normal in how people watch (content)," he said.

"I do think people will be very excited to get back to movie theaters," Sarandos added. "I'm excited to see that come back as well." The executive noted that he expects theatrical windows – that is, the time between movies launching in theaters and hitting streamers – to keep shrinking as a result of the accelerated shift towards streaming we've seen over the past of the year.

Netflix's investment in high-quality international content is definitely commendable, and the audience trends here seem pretty healthy.

At the same time, last year, when Netflix had to shut down many of its most famous originals due to Covid, it found itself having to delay numerous popular series. And as subscribers' time indoors spiked, they were bound to go deeper into the library to find shows they hadn't seen before – including international series.

Sarandos' logic for people discovering these series seems sound. But we suspect it's likely a combination of the restrictions on travel, the overall quality of Netflix's output, and the absence of American series that would normally fill the gap.

That last factor is why Cobra Kai – an acquisition from YouTube's premium service – also exploded in popularity last year. Still, hopefully this just means US viewers are more open to watching non-English series going forwards.

GREG BARLANTI, KALEY CUOCO, CHANNING DUNGEY

C21 Drama Quarterly

Ready for take-off

June 30, 2021

The Big Bang Theory star Kaley Cuoco joins veteran producer Greg Berlanti to discuss the making of HBO Max mystery drama The Flight Attendant, which marked the actor's first project as both star and executive producer.

Across 12 seasons and more than 270 episodes of smash-hit sitcom The Big Bang Theory, US actor Kaley Cuoco rose to international fame as Penny, a waitress and aspiring actress who lives across the hall from a group of socially awkward nerds.

As the CBS show was drawing to its conclusion, Cuoco naturally began to consider where her career could go next after such a long stint in what became a global phenomenon.

The answer came in the form of The Flight Attendant, an eight-part comedic thriller in which she plays Cassie Bowden, an air steward who wakes up one morning in the wrong hotel, in the wrong bed, with a dead man – and no idea what happened. Cassie then embarks on a rollercoaster journey that takes her from Bangkok to New York and Rome to uncover the truth behind what happened and clear her name as a suspect while the FBI closes in.

The HBO Max drama, produced by Cuoco's Yes Norman Productions, Berlanti Productions and Warner Bros Television Studios, is the first series exec produced by the actor, who is now developing a second season with series creator Steve Yockey while also working on a show about the life of Doris Day, in which she is also set to star.

In conversation with Warner Bros Television Group chairman Channing Dungey at the Banff World Media Festival, Cuoco and Berlanti Productions founder Greg Berlanti (The Flash, Arrow, Batwoman) discussed their partnership on The Flight Attendant, building the show's cast and how the actor balanced her duties in front of and behind the camera.



Kaley Cuoco with co-star Johnny Galecki in The Big Bang Theory

As The Big Bang Theory approached its conclusion in 2019, Cuoco's team was encouraging her to think about what she might do next. She began looking at articles and books for potential adaptations and found Chris Bohjalian's novel The Flight Attendant on a list of upcoming releases on Amazon.

Cuoco: I read the little snippet and I know it sounds cheesy but I got this really weird feeling, this chill. First I thought, 'Is this a movie? What is this?' I'd never done this before, it was a new venture for me, so I read the book very quickly. Thank God I loved it and got the rights. Then I was like, now what the hell am I supposed to do? I thought, 'OK, maybe it's a show. Maybe this is my next show.'

The book was actually very dark, which I loved. But I thought maybe we could tweak it into more of my voice. I marched myself into [former Warner Bros Television Group chairman] Peter Roth's office and said, 'I think this is my next show.' He said, 'Are you going to star in it?' I said, 'Yes,' so he read it that weekend and said, 'Let's do it.' He then said I should meet Team Berlanti, so I went in there and basically said, 'Please help me do this.' I did not think they would say yes because they have like 750 shows they're working on right now. They said yes and that was the magic that got me here today.

Cuoco met with a number of writers pitching their take on The Flight Attendant, but early on found a partner in Steve Yockey, whose credits include Scream: The TV Series and Supernatural. It was his idea to have Cassie speak to the dead man, Alex (Michiel Huisman), in a ‘mind palace’ where they could explore theories behind his murder.

Cuoco: You either love this sort of project or you don’t. I didn’t want someone who was a little in the middle, I wanted someone to love it like I did. What got me was his whole pitch was every episode, every detail. He had spent so much time on it. He truly loved Cassie – and what I had been waiting for, the weird thing that was going to make this show what it was, was the ‘mind palace.’ I didn’t want the ghost of Alex haunting Cassie, so how could we tell this in a different way? Steve has a really weird, quirky outlook on things, which makes him so brilliant, and he saw it as crazy as I did.



In The Flight Attendant, Cuoco stars as Cassie

Cuoco then pitched the project to Sarah Schecter, chairman of Berlanti Productions, who was won over by the actor’s passion for the project.

Berlanti: Kaley and Steve had a really clear sense of a vision for what they wanted the show to be. It's like a fizzy Martini of a show that's still grounded in very real things – obviously Cassie's issues with her alcoholism and the inherent mystery in it that drives so much of television these days. But it always had that Hitchcockian vibe for me. Kaley and Steve's passion was so clear and we just tried to be as helpful and useful as possible in helping them achieve what they wanted to achieve.

The project then went to WarnerMedia-owned cable network TNT, where Sarah Aubrey was executive VP of original programming. But when Aubrey was named head of original content for new streaming service HBO Max, she took The Flight Attendant with her.

Cuoco: I really wanted to tell Sarah about the book I had optioned and wanted to make into a series, so she was the first official person I really brought it to. She didn't tell me right then, but she said there might be some changes in the air so to just hold tight. Very soon afterwards, I heard she was heading over to this new service and she said, 'I'd really like to take it with us.' I was like, 'Here you go.'

Throughout the series, The Flight Attendant walks a fine line between comedy and darker topics including alcoholism, emotional abuse and murder. Berlanti wanted the show to "push the envelope" and avoid feeling too safe.

Cuoco: We had to feint our confidence and be like, 'This is the tone we're telling,' and the audience is either going to jump on board with that or not – you have to believe it or they won't. Towards the end, Greg would see the final cuts and every time we would send them, I'd send a text to Sarah and be like, 'Did Greg like it?' That was always my barometer. I always wanted him to be impressed. But it's hard. It did take some belief because the tone was such a challenge, and we really did walk a tightrope on both sides.



The show follows events after Cassie wakes up next to a dead man, with no idea what happened to him

Huisman was the first person to join the cast, playing Alex, who meets Cassie on a flight to Bangkok and then spends the night with her, before she wakes up next to his bloodied body.

Cuoco: After trying to convince ourselves the mind palace wasn't insane, trying to convince an actor coming in that it wasn't insane was also insane. He's like, 'So I'm dead.' I'm like, 'Yes, but it's going to be great.' He eventually was like, 'OK, I'm onboard,' and he was obviously awesome. But the rest of the casting was interesting. I've never been on this side of it. As an actor who's done this process thousands of times and knowing what it feels like, I had a really strange empathy [with the auditionees], and it was almost depressing at moments because I wanted everyone. They were all so good and I have just never been on that side before. I read with a lot of the actors, almost 80% of the main cast, which was a really cool experience, but specifically when Zosia [Mamet] came in to play Ani, there was this magic between us.

Berlanti: When you're piecing a whole dinner party together like that, you want a certain amount of familiarity and a certain amount of people doing a tour de force that people haven't seen them do before. It really felt like a family from the start. The fact they were all doing this light comedic tone in their individual scenes, I would attribute to the casting process, the directors and Steve's writing, but Kaley brought that to everybody. It can go wrong sometimes, having a lead actor as an executive producer on a show. But [this is] an example of how everything can actually go right, to the point where I'm like, maybe we should be doing more lead actors as exec producers. It really helped in so many regards.



Game of Thrones Michiel Huisman plays the man in question

Filming took place in New York, Bangkok and Rome before the Covid-19 pandemic broke out around the world last spring.

Cuoco: It's so wild to me to think we did that before this world changed. It's pretty unbelievable. I can't believe how seamless it was. We shot on the streets of Bangkok and the crews were amazing in Rome. I remember when I was talking to the studio early on, I was very passionate about saying, 'It's international and we have to do it that way. I don't believe this can be on a soundstage. I don't believe we can fake it.' I remember the response was, 'It's going to be expensive.' [When the show was shut down close to the end of production] we had already shot the finale in Rome out of order, which I think is really interesting. If we had not gone out of order, I don't know what would have happened.

The actor says working as an executive producer for the first time was "the most unbelievable experience in my career, hands down."

Cuoco: What I learned the most – and I really attribute this to the Berlanti team – is to ask questions. I learned to speak up and say how I felt, but also to be like, 'I don't know what this is,' which is not who I am. I don't like asking that and saying I'm confused and lost, but I really wanted my hand in everything. I was really immersed in the whole experience, and it's hard work.

Sarah once said if a producer was paid by the hour, they'd be a billionaire. The work my fellow producers did, it is around the clock. They're also therapists; they are so many things to so many people, and I did not know that before. I didn't appreciate that before. I've been an actor for so long and I love it, but I never saw past that and I wish I'd seen it sooner. My appreciation for all these different people and the crew and what they go through to make me look good is really very eye-opening for me.



Huisman's character appears throughout the series via Cassie's 'mind palace'

Following the show's debut on HBO Max in November last year, the streamer confirmed the following month that The Flight Attendant would return, with a second season slated to air in 2022. The writers room is now underway, with production moving from New York to LA.

Cuoco: I don't have much to share in terms of plot but, as for Cassie, she's now 'sober.' She thinks, 'Oh, I'm all healed up, I'm good,' and she's very black and white, but she's going to find out very quickly that it is a lifestyle. It is not a switch. Then alongside trying to be who she was and this new possible little addition to her career as a CIA asset, is she still fun Cassie? Is she the same person without alcohol?

We'll have a new version of the mind palace. Steve has come up with a really interesting way to make it fresh. That's what's so hard – the first season was so fun and unique. We had the book as a roadmap. Now it's exciting because we can do what we want. But I want it to be even better than season one. That's the goal.

The actor's Yes, Norman Productions is now also working with Warner Bros and Berlanti Productions on a limited series about Hollywood icon, singer and animal rights activist Doris Day, based on AE Hotchner's Doris Day: Her Own Story. Cuoco is set to star in the title role.

Cuoco: I've already told Greg and Sarah they are stuck with me for the rest of their lives and I'm not going anywhere. Doris Day, I've always wanted to play her and I've been obsessed with her since I was a little girl. This opportunity came about when I heard the studio was trying to get the rights to her story. Peter Roth called me and said, 'Do you have any interest in playing her?' I couldn't believe it. It took months and we finally got the rights, and then I asked Team Berlanti if they'd be interested in doing this with me. Again, thankfully, they said yes. Now we're in really early development and trying to find the right writer for this. But I'm really excited. It could be something very special.

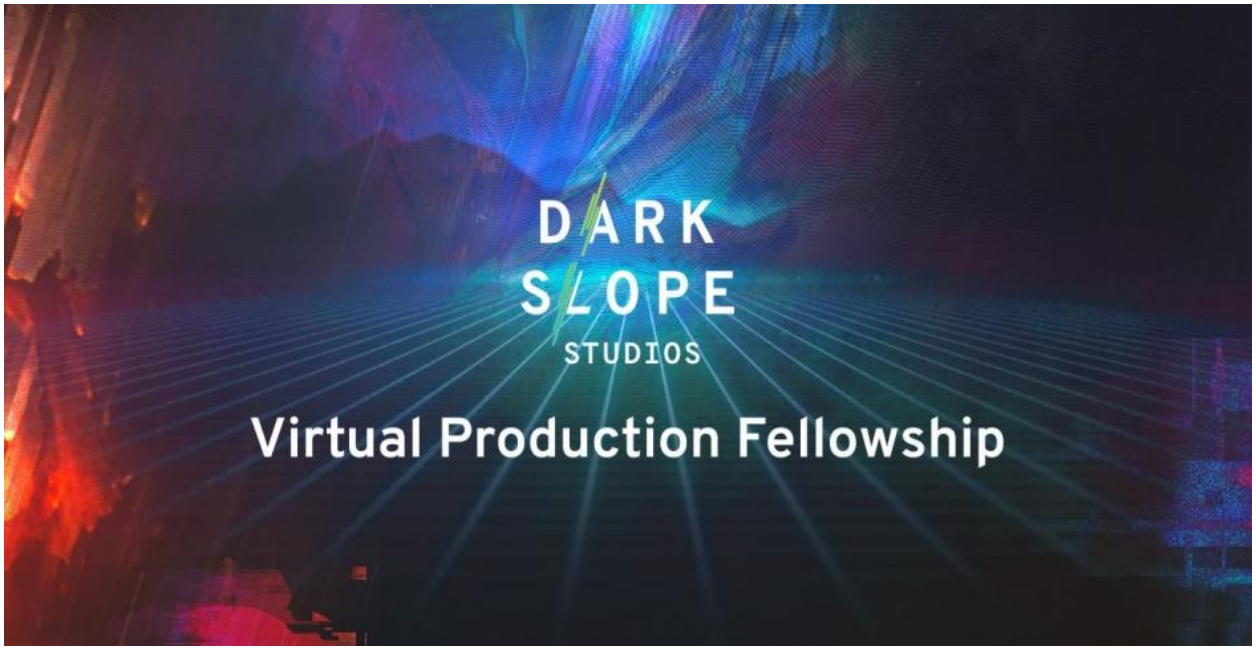
DARK SLOPE

AWN

Dark Slope Studios Launches Paid Virtual Production Fellowship

The studio will provide mentorship, guidance, and $5,000 CAD for up to three applicants with compelling storytelling and visionary series concepts; submissions open July 19.

By AWN Staff Editor | Monday, July 12, 2021 at 1:35pm



In an announcement by CEO Raja Khanna at the Banff World Media Festival, Toronto-based virtual production and metaverse gaming company, Dark Slope Studios, has launched a new virtual production fellowship. The studio will begin accepting format pitches on Monday July 19, 2021.

Applicants are invited to submit a brief proposal with a series idea that balances innovative production techniques with compelling storytelling and visionary concepts that blur the line between the real world and the digital world. The studio is looking for concepts that introduce virtual reality experiences into conventional linear television shows, make use of deep fake facial tracking elements or combine LED screen and virtual production Integration into a unique, highly original new format of television content.

All applications will be reviewed, and three finalists will be selected. All proposals will be considered and up to three concepts will be awarded $5,000 CAD and a chance to negotiate a development deal with Dark Slope Studios. The company will work in collaboration with the creators, providing mentorship and guidance on the development of the series to bring these concepts from idea to reality.

The prize awarded is for the best ideas as judged by Dark Slope and their evaluators. The creator will retain all rights. Dark Slope Studios will secure a first right of negotiation for 6 months for the project. Additional information is available here. Submissions open on July 19.

“We are looking for ideas that appeal to a global audience,” commented Dark Slope Studios president Dan Fill. “We’re a nimble, ever evolving company with strong industry roots and are looking to support the next generation of talent by providing seasoned guidance in an environment that encourages experimentation.”

Dark Slope Studios’ proprietary Flex KS production pipeline integrates a combination of full body and facial motion tracking while leveraging the use of LED screens and video projections for realistic shooting environments while maintaining green screen use for hyper reality VFX. It uses the real time power of Epic’s Unreal Game Engine to create animation, FX, real time integrated live action and gaming world content.

KENAN THOMPSON

DEADLINE

Kenan Thompson Talks Production Company Plans, Would Love To Build DreamWorks-Esque “Machine”

By Peter White
June 16, 2021 12:55pm



The New Yorker

Kenan Thompson is a pretty busy guy. In addition to starring on *Saturday Night Live* and fronting and exec producing his own eponymous sitcom for NBC, Thompson exec produces Nickelodeon's reboot of the sketch comedy *All That*.

He would also like to do more of the latter.

Thompson, speaking to his old *SNL* pal Seth Meyers in a conversation for the Banff World Media Festival, reiterated plans to move further into production.

When asked by the late-night host whether he's still looking at his own production company, he said, "I'd love to be as busy as I am right now and also know that I have to 300 people to work on something that has nothing to do with me, that's very exciting. I'm a big fan of creative people all the way around the industry from set decs to make-up artists and cameramen, I'm just a big fan of the business so the idea of me being able to put a real project together and have people working and supporting their family and keeping that whole wheel in motion, that's kind of the dream for me."

He added that he'd love to be like Steven Spielberg, joking that he'd also like to sell his company for [rubs fingers together]. "To be like a Spielberg, to build a DreamWorks and then sell it, of course, that's definitely one of the dreams because he's still a creative person but he's built a machine that employs tens of thousands of people. I think that's one of the coolest things you can ever do in your lifetime."

Meyers said he assumed Thompson would return to *SNL* for his 19th season, pointing out that Lorne Michaels wouldn't let him go anywhere. Thompson went with it, suggesting that he will be among those cast members to return to the long-running NBC show this fall even if not all of the current cast does.

Kenan was renewed by NBC for a second season and will likely air in 2022.

CBC

TV-EH?

CBC ANNOUNCES NEW PROGRAMMING DIVERSITY COMMITMENT

JUNE 21, 2021 GREG DAVID

From a media release:

At the Banff World Media Festival this morning, CBC announced a new programming diversity commitment to better reflect Canadian audiences and advance equity, inclusion and representation in the Canadian production industry.

Effective immediately, CBC's programming diversity commitment will require that at least 30 percent of all key creative roles on new CBC original scripted and unscripted series commissioned from independent producers will be held by those who self-identify as Indigenous, Black and/or People of Colour or persons with disabilities. Each type of series will have a tailored, genre-specific approach to what is considered a key creative role, with details to be posted on cbc.ca/ip. For example, for scripted drama, comedy and kids (live action) series, the 30 percent requirement will apply to all writer, director and principal performer roles. The new commitment will be included in all CBC contracts with independent producers, and will also require that producers of current CBC series set action plans detailing how they will work to increase equity and representation across existing productions.

"We know we have work to do to better represent the voices and lived experiences of creative talent from Indigenous, Black and all racially diverse communities as well as those with disabilities, all underrepresented groups that are significantly underemployed in the Canadian industry," said Sally Catto, General Manager, Entertainment, Factual & Sports, CBC. "This new commitment formalizes our ongoing efforts to increase equity and representation across all areas, and is an immediate first step in ensuring that our original series will be led by a more diverse range of creative talent who authentically reflect more communities and perspectives across the country.

CBC's new commitment builds on the foundational diversity commitment made by CBC/Radio-Canada at Banff in 2019, with the majority of original series on CBC's 2021-22 programming slate meeting the first goal, and many already achieving and in some cases exceeding the new 30 percent target including *Coroner*, *Diggstown*, *The Porter*, *Pretty Hard Cases*, *Run the Burbs* and *Sort Of*. CBC will continue to discuss and evolve the new commitment in partnership with the Canadian creative and production industry.

Radio-Canada remains committed to ensuring that at least one of the key creative roles on all of its original French-language scripted and unscripted programming is held by someone from an equity-deserving group by 2025. Beyond that, it is increasing its investments in programs such as *Synergies* to help build greater capacity for diverse talent within the francophone market.

CBC/Radio-Canada will also maintain the public broadcaster's momentum in gender equity, having already surpassed gender parity goals across all commissioned programming.

REALSCREEN

BANFF '21: CBC commits to 30% diverse key creatives in its programming

By Playback Daily
June 18, 2021



CBC announced an ambitious new programming diversity commitment at the Banff World Media Festival (BANFF) today (June 18).

Effective immediately, all new original scripted and unscripted series commissioned from independent producers will require at least 30% of all key creative roles to be held by those who self-identify as Indigenous, Black and/or people of colour or persons with disabilities.

In order to determine what qualifies as a “key creative role,” CBC will follow a tailored, genre-specific approach to be posted on cbc.ca/ip. In a press release announcing the news, CBC explained that in scripted drama, comedy and kids (live action) series, for example, key creatives extend to all writer, director and principal performer roles.

The new commitment will be included in all contracts with independent producers going forward. However. CBC is also requiring producers on existing series to set action plans in order to increase equity and representation on current productions.

“We know we have work to do to better represent the voices and lived experiences of creative talent from Indigenous, Black and all racially diverse communities as well as those with disabilities, all underrepresented groups that are significantly underemployed in the Canadian industry,” said Sally Catto, GM, entertainment, factual and sports, CBC, in the release.

“This new commitment formalizes our ongoing efforts to increase equity and representation across all areas, and is an immediate first step in ensuring that our original series will be led by a more diverse range of creative talent who authentically reflect more communities and perspectives across the country.”

The announcement builds on the commitment CBC made to diversity at BANFF 2019. At the time the broadcaster revealed that by 2025, it aimed to have at least one of the key creatives (producer, director, writer, showrunner and lead performer) in all scripted and factual commissioned programs held by a person from a diverse background.

As CBC notes in its release, the majority of original series on the recently announced 2021-22 schedule meet that goal, and some exceed it, including *Coroner*, *Diggstown*, *The Porter*, *Pretty Hard Cases*, *Run the Burbs* and *Sort Of*. At the annual upfront in early June, the new roster included more than 35 new greenlights and renewals.

At Radio-Canada, the company remains committed to hiring at least one person from an equity-deserving group in key creative roles in all original French-language programming by 2025. It is also increasing investments in programs like Synergies to increase diverse talent in the francophone market.

C21

CBC steps up diversity push

Canadian pubcaster the CBC will now require at least 30% of all key creative roles on indie productions to be held by those who self-identify as Indigenous, black and/or people of colour, or those with disabilities.



Sally Catto

The programming diversity commitment is effective immediately and relates to all original scripted and unscripted series commissioned by CBC from independent producers.

It has been introduced so CBC can "better reflect Canadian audiences and advance equity, inclusion and representation in the Canadian production industry," the pubcaster said.

Announced at the Banff World Media Festival last week, the move builds on the previous diversity commitment made by CBC/Radio-Canada at Banff in 2019.

This saw the pubcaster aim to ensure by 2025 that at least one of the key creatives in all scripted and factual commissioned programmes will be held by a person from a diverse background.

CBC said most original series on its 2021/22 programming slate now meet this first goal and many are already achieving and in some cases exceeding the new 30% target.

These include Coroner, Diggstown, The Porter, Pretty Hard Cases, Run the Burbs and Sort Of. CBC said it will "continue to discuss and evolve the new commitment in partnership with the Canadian creative and production industry."

Each type of series will have a tailored, genre-specific approach to what is considered a key creative role. For example, for scripted drama, comedy and kids' live-action series, the 30% requirement will apply to all writer, director and principal performer roles.

The new commitment will be included in all CBC contracts with independent producers and will also require producers of current CBC series to set action plans detailing how they will work to increase equity and representation across existing productions.

"We know we have work to do to better represent the voices and lived experiences of creative talent from Indigenous, black and all racially diverse communities as well as those with disabilities, all underrepresented groups that are significantly underemployed in the Canadian industry," said Sally Catto, general manager for entertainment, factual and sports at CBC.

"This new commitment formalises our ongoing efforts to increase equity and representation across all areas, and is an immediate first step in ensuring that our original series will be led by a more diverse range of creative talent who authentically reflect more communities and perspectives across the country."

The broadcaster added that it remains committed to ensuring that at least one of the key creative roles on all of its original French-language scripted and unscripted programming is held by someone from an equity-deserving group by 2025.

Beyond that, it is increasing its investments in initiatives such as Synergies to help build greater capacity for diverse talent within the Francophone market.

CBC/Radio-Canada added it will also maintain the public broadcaster's momentum in gender equity, having already surpassed gender parity goals across all commissioned programming.

OVERALL COVERAGE

CBC

Banff World Media Festival brings world-class speakers to attendees in virtual event

One session will be spent with the director of the new Marvel TV series

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For the second year in a row, the Banff World Media Festival is going online and will bring those in the media industry together vitually to network, workshop and pitch ideas. Comedian and YouTube personality, Jasmeet Raina "Jus Reign" (pictured above) will host this year's Rockie Awards ceremony from Fairmont Banff Springs Hotel. (Banff World Media Festival)

A virtual festival full of master classes, keynote speakers and panels for the global media industry started Monday, and the guest list is topnotch.

For the second year in a row, the Banff World Media Festival is going online but is still bringing hundreds of actors, writers, producers and executives together to network, workshop and pitch ideas.

Jenn Kuzmyk, executive director of the Banff World Media Festival, says it will be the 42nd anniversary of the festival and still a place attendees can connect with one another.

"The festival has actually grown through this period over the last two years. It continues to be a place where people from all around the world who are involved in the entertainment and media industry gather — be that virtually this year or of course, in person at Banff," she told *The Homestretch* on June 11.

She adds that this year, the festival had a bit more time to plan for the virtual event and were able to get some of the highest-profile speakers to ever take part.

According to a press release, there will be number of high-ranking executives from Netflix, the head of Warner Brothers Studios as well as show runners and actors from several shows — like actress Kaley Cuoco from HBO's *The Flight Attendant*.

The executive director adds that the industry has changed the pandemic, due to most of us streaming shows day in and out, but that it's also opened up a lot of opportunities, which will be discussed at the festival.

"We're all watching shows that are not just originated in North America, they come from all over the world and that's something that has absolutely changed and continues to internationalize how the entertainment industry works for sure," she said.



An In Conversation session featured Seth Meyers from Late Night with Seth Meyers and Kenan Thompson from Saturday Night Live. (Banff World Media Festival)

Award-winning director of Marvel Studios' The Falcon and the Winter Soldier, Kari Skogland will also take part of the event along Marvel Studios President, Kevin Feige. It's called the Summit Series: Kevin Feige and Kari Skogland.

Skogland told *The Homestretch* on Wednesday that the conversation, which will take place Thursday, will focus will look at some of the themes of the show — specifically the making of the Marvel Cinematic Universe series and thoughts on the future of storytelling.

"We really wanted to have a very in-depth discussion about racism in America through the characters that we were not only introducing, but also characters of the (Marvel Cinematic Universe) who are really beloved," she said.

For those that haven't watched the series, it's a sequal to Marvel's *End Game* but looks at each of the characters individually and spends more time with them.

"The character, Sam Wilson was handed the shield and so as the first Black Captain America, this was a very, very big deal," she said.

Skogland says at the festival, they plan to talk more about the shift in optics during the series and why it's an important to story to tell.

"Certainly this is not a new story. So let's hope that by by bringing it to the fore once again, that we open the doors to further conversation," she said,

The director also has plenty of advice for those starting up in the industry and says events like the Banff World Media Festival are important to attend for a variety of reasons.

"You are in a small space with very influential people and therefore you're able to get to know them on a personal basis, because at the end of the day, it's a business where people work with people they know and like," she said.

She says by mingling (even virtually) you will feel more comfortable pitching ideas.

"Nothing happens overnight. So, you know, kind of keep your eye on the prize," she said.

As well, you can sharpen you skills in a variety of departments, such as producing and even finance.

"You have to have you have to be able to sell your project. So all of these things are learned," she said.

The Banff World Media Festival runs online from June 14 to July 16, Visit their website for more details.