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Sarah Nurse

Pro hockey player Sarah Nurse is fighting for better representation and inclusion on the ice

Sarah Nurse has been on the ice since she was three years old. Over the past two decades, she's risen to the top of the hockey world, landing a spot on the Professional Women's Hockey League (PWHL) Toronto team and the women's national hockey team (she's played in two Olympics so far). But in all that time, representation has been scarce. Nurse is determined to change that. She helped found a players association, she's part of the PWHL's labour union and she's been an outspoken advocate against the racism rampant in her sport. She also started Nursey Night, where Black Girl Hockey Club members attend PWHL Toronto games and hang out afterward. "Being a changemaker is important to me because I want to see a future where girls who look like me are playing the game," Nurse says. Here, she tells us about her journey to justice—and how she keeps going, even when imposter syndrome tries to score.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

THE KIT CHANGEMAKERS

A hockey phenom. A trailblazing actor. A filmmaker to watch. A designer with soul. And a crew of creators redefining storytelling. Our 2024 celebration of inspiring Canadians is here

By Briony Smith | Photography by Lawrence Cortez

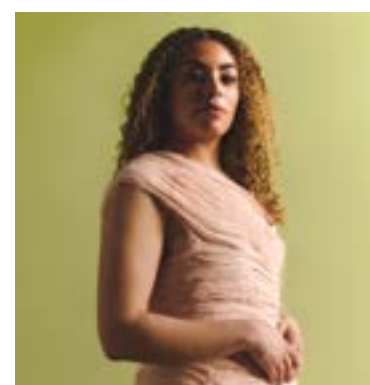
Jean Paul GAULTIER

SCANDAL

ABSOLU



THE NEW INTENSE FRAGRANCE



COLLINA STRADA DRESS, \$1,825. ABSOLUTELYFABRICS.COM.

ON COVER: SMYTHE BLAZER, \$750, PANTS, \$450, SHOPSMYTHE.CA.

CONTINUED FROM COVER

Sport can help empower women and women of colour by teaching them how strong they are. With sport, you set goals and work to achieve them. You're really relying on yourself to find inner strength and build up more skills along the way. Hockey can teach people life lessons about determination, leadership and teamwork—whether that's on the ice or in the locker room. It's always made me feel powerful because I've been able to show my skill.

As a child, I didn't really understand that I was the only person who looked like me. But at the arena, I obviously noticed that I could always spot my dad in the crowd because he was the only Black man. And later, I wasn't just the only Black woman—I was the only woman, period. For years, that's how it was.

When it comes to activism, I think a lot of my work goes back to George Floyd. When [he was killed] and the majority of the hockey world stayed silent, I knew I needed to speak up. I didn't want a sport I loved so much to have no perspective on the issue. I wanted to be a voice within the sport that young people could listen to.

My family has always been serious about giving back and teaching people. My dad is a vice-principal and dedicates a lot of his time to inspiring the next generation. As soon as my platform started getting bigger, I knew

Hockey can teach life lessons—on the ice or in the locker room.

that I wanted to use it for something good. Growing up, I didn't have a lot of women to look up to: not because there weren't any but because sometimes they weren't visible to me. It was important to me that I used my platform to be that person young girls of colour could look to for inspiration.

I've always felt comfortable sharing my opinion and speaking to other girls in hockey to gather the best information. I knew that I would be able to bridge that gap and be a voice for the girls if I took on a role with the [players association]. I also knew that I was willing to put in the work behind the scenes to bring this league to life and that I had people in my life within the NHL and other sport leagues that I could go to for advice as we brought forward ideas.

Once the league was formed, I thought it was important to continue my role with the players' union, knowing that so many girls come to me with questions and for advice. I think my career is unique in that I do a lot of business away from the game and that helps give me a different perspective I can bring to the union.

Nurse Night is something I'm really proud of this season. We've been able to bring so many girls out to games, and I've been able to build relationships with them off the ice. Even if I've had a bad game, knowing how much joy they have in just being at the arena lightens my mood. Giving these girls a chance to see us play live and even meet other girls who are in attendance and look like them is an amazing way to encourage them to get into hockey. At our first Nurse Night, we flew in a young girl from Halifax who had never seen a PWHL game and didn't have any BIPOC friends on her team at home. When I met her after the game, her mom told me that whenever she is feeling down, she'll watch clips from interviews I've had or watch my TikToks for inspiration. That gave me goosebumps!

I also plan on building off Nurse Night by adding additional programs and one special event this summer that will teach girls leadership skills beyond the ice. I want to pass along some of the lessons I've been able to learn along the way. I think this event will be huge for BIPOC athletes.

I can suffer from imposter syndrome. Sometimes, when I'm in those meetings, I question why I'm there, but then I quickly remind myself that I deserve to be there and have earned the right to have this platform and this voice, and using it to make meaningful change is important.

Early on, having girls who look like me come up to me and say that I have made an impact on their lives really inspired me to keep going. Even today, when I see a girl that looks like me in an arena, it stops me dead in my tracks. It brings me so much joy and inspiration to see that they now have a space where they feel safe. —*as told to Briony Smith*

COVER STYLING: JACLYN BONAVOTA; HAIR & MAKEUP: ASHLEY READING (BOTH CADRE ARTISTS); PHOTOGRAPHY: BEN AURICH (JENNY BIRD)

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Jenny Bird

Seven tips for starting your own killer lifestyle business, from the jewellery mogul herself



Jenny Bird is guided by a unique—and inspiring—career approach. For her, business is a way of lifting people up.

"The goal was to build a lasting positive impact and to create beautiful things and empower women along the way," she says. "While others have been noisy in the space, we've been quietly building this magical, sticky community around core values of female empowerment, kind profiteering and conscious leadership."

Along the way, the company has become one of Canada's most successful and beloved fashion brands, offering high-quality, on-trend designs at a more accessible price point; landing on celebs like Zendaya, Hailey Bieber, Jennifer Lopez and Selena Gomez; and netting big dollars for great causes.

Bird directs 1 per cent of every purchase to her brand's Possibilities Fund, which supports urgent-need, mental wellness and mentorship initia-

tives. So far, it has donated \$350,000 and has a goal of reaching \$600,000 by the end of this year.

"We've proven that kind profiteering is possible in Canada—achieving healthy profits year after year while also ensuring all people impacted by the business are treated with respect and experience a kind and conscious operation that is focused on uplifting those it impacts," says Bird. "We've proven that you can have a successful international operation based out of Canada, and we have created jobs and opportunities for women, with a team of over 45 employees in Toronto with an all-female leadership team and a people-first culture I am very proud of."

Want to become a fabulous founder just like Bird? Here, she shares her top tips on how to get your own lifestyle business off the ground—and then make it thrive.

Your idea doesn't need to be perfect before you share it.

START YOUR SUPPORT NETWORK "Share your idea and vision with as many people as you can to get momentum going and [to get] people to align around you in supportive action, like introducing you to helpful contacts."

SHARE FROM THE START—EVEN IF YOU'RE SCARED "Getting stuck early on is a real challenge: Fear, imposter syndrome and personal judgment are often causes of inertia. Be conscious of them if they arise and fight to get over any self-consciousness until you find yourself just beginning. Forward action will motivate you. So just start! Share more with the world sooner than you may think is okay. Take small conscious actions toward pursuing your idea without overthinking it; you will learn how to build it by starting without a road map and being unafraid to ask for information from strangers who have done similar things before. It doesn't need to be perfect before you share it with the world. The best products and services are built by not being shy to put it out there in their early stage, and then by evolving in front of the market and with the market's feedback."

PONY UP FOR GREAT BRANDING "Invest in your brand until it's a standout star; a strong brand name and design is critical in driving consumer demand. Employ the top talent and allocate triple the investment that you think you need for developing your brand's visual identity to suit and stand out in its marketplace, and to be the most desirable."

BE A GOOD PARTNER "Build it while holding the highest respect and honour for all of your business partners, suppliers and the employees and contractors that choose to join you. Being conscious about your business's impact on who it touches is not only simply the right thing to do, it also creates a committed collective movement toward your goals that lifts all up with you as you rise."

PRICE IT RIGHT "Understand profitability and ensure your product is viable in that way, given what the market will pay for it. Your community will tell you what it's worth to them. It's smart to reverse-engineer from that insight until you get to a product that will be both desirable in the market at its price and that will be profitable."

YOU MATTER, TOO "Your personal health and wellness is the foundation for your venture's success. It cannot be underestimated how much mental resilience and physical energy it requires to build a business, so invest in your health and wellness as your first priority to bring your best self to the table each day."

AVOID COMPLACENCY "Success is rented, not bought. As soon as you're on top of your game, it's time to switch things up and look at your business anew; as soon as it's really working, you need to be thinking about how to take the next fork in the road and evolve it."

GAME-CHANGING GIFTS

Dad deserves something special come June 16—here are thoughtful present ideas that do good, too



Just in time for summer, this vacation-ready shirt from Toronto brand Kotn is the warm-weather wardrobe upgrade your dad needs. Ethically made in Portugal, the cross-stitch embroidered print feels like a playful twist on the classic Hawaiian dad shirt. Made with 80 per cent Better Cotton Initiative cotton, not only is the shirt ethically made and biodegradable, it also supports small-holder cotton communities. **KOTN SHIRT, \$138, KOTN.COM**



If your dad's handshake often feels like a brush-up with sandpaper, this new hand balm from Aesop is the intensely hydrating salve he needs. Rich with notes of cedar atlas, patchouli and clove bud, the cream has a greaseless finish. Aesop's ongoing commitment to the Aesop Foundation means that your purchase supports causes including helping Indigenous communities. **AESOP ELEOS AROMATIQUE HAND BALM, \$43, AESOP.COM/CA**



Bringing the family together around a feast is a signature dad move. Whether his specialty is pasta, soup or salad, let him serve it in one of these artful bowls from Toronto-based goji studio x arte*. All proceeds go to East Scarborough Storefront, a partnership of residents and services working to foster and maintain the vibrant Scarborough community. What better way to break bread? **GOJI STUDIO X ARTE* BOWL, \$20 EACH, MAKEARTE.CA**



Is Dad's idea of a good time strolling around Home Depot on Sunday? He'll get a kick out of this cool nod to his favourite pastime. The net proceeds of this just-launched baseball hat go to Tradeworx, which helps provide youth with a path out of homelessness by employing them in viable careers in the trades. Add a gift card and join him on his next hardware excursion. **THE HOME DEPOT CANADA FOUNDATION HAT, \$10, HOMEDEPOT.CA**

3



Aicha Bastien N'Diaye

The content creator extraordinaire shares how social media can make hearts dance

Photography by Kristina Dittmar

Movement is part of Aicha Bastien N'Diaye's DNA. Her father, Oumar N'Diaye, is a renowned dancer in the West African dance community, and, she says, she grew up in an environment where "dance was used as a language to communicate and connect." She went to dance school, and all along the way, she moved and moved. West African dance, like her father. Powwow dances. Hip-hop. Krump. She adored them all. She took her love to TikTok, where she shared her moves with the world, garnering 336,000 followers and spreading awareness of her art forms and, as a Wendat woman of Guinean descent, her cultures. Now, she's co-hosting *Décoloniser l'histoire*—season 3 shoots this fall—and co-directing and choreographing dance performance *Yahwatsira*, which runs May 23 to June 8 in Quebec City. Last November, she attended the TikTok Indigenous Accelerator program event; here, she tells us why creating community moves her—and can help save others.

I trained in contemporary, ballet and hip-hop, so I can learn choreography and fit the mould. But my style is not confined to any standards: It is raw and profoundly connected to rhythm and music. I often dance instinctually, rather than intellectually. There are clear influences from African dances, Powwow dances and smoke dance. My freestyle can lead me to something reminiscent of a Tanti dancing in her kitchen or dancers deep in a trance. When movement is related to culture, it becomes spiritual. Movement connects me to those who moved before me, as much as those who are dancing in the circle with me. When I dance, I am never alone. It brings me back to freedom, strength, hope and joy.

Dance and movement make me feel authentic. Movement doesn't lie. You cannot fake when you twirl and jump on the powwow trail. Elders are watching. You cannot pretend when you're deep in a doundouba freestyling. Kids are watching. All you can do is be yourself and express the realest version of you. I got into TikTok in such an unserious way. A friend of mine dared me to get over the biases I had against the app and just give it a try. I downloaded it while telling myself I would never post anything. I rapidly understood that this platform was different and surprisingly dived in. Now, it feels so good to create the kind of content that I wish my younger self would have seen growing up.

Creating content makes me feel like a magician. I create content with the same approach I use to create movement. To me, it's all art. In the end, it's not so much about how it makes me feel but more about how I felt when I had my first creative

impulse—the excitement, the chills, the tingling in my hands—and how those who'll receive the content will feel.

Content brings people together, and there are great online communities, but to me, it makes more sense to build these communities in real life. The content is what makes us aware of each other, and then it's our job to connect and elevate from there.

I often say people don't realize how exhausting it is to be the only BIPOC in a room... well, the TikTok Indigenous Accelerator program event in Winnipeg (page 5) reminded me how energizing and inspiring it is to be surrounded by your people. It was healing. I bonded instantly with creators I had only talked to in comment sections before, and we laughed as if we had known each other for years.

The last night of the event, after the panel, I was talking with girls and two-spirit kin about the need but also pressure of healing and being a great role model for the new generation. It felt so good to realize we aren't alone. We were seven people in their 20s, wearing moccasins and beadwork unapologetically, drinking sparkling water because "drinking is colonial" and hurts many of our people back home. That night, I decided I would embark on a sober journey, and I haven't had a drink since.

I think online communities play a big role in amplifying real, diverse Indigenous voices and can make a huge educational difference, so the in-person feedback moments are always those I keep close to my heart. I'm always fascinated by how the person who saw your content feels like they know you; it's like they carry and cherish a little part of you without you knowing it.

A year ago in Montreal, on a snowy day—the kind of day when you shouldn't go outside—I was at a red light, praying for the light to turn green so that I could run to the other side of the street. When it was my time to cross, a person walked right up to me, held my hands and said, "Your dance videos with your dad saved my life," hugged me, and left before the pedestrian countdown ended. I didn't get a chance to know their name or to say anything, but I shed a few tears of joy and gratitude. Sometimes, when I'm overwhelmed and feel like creating content isn't worth it, I think about that." —as told to *Briony Smith*

Movement connects me to those who moved before me, and those who dance with me.

4

These visionary voices

Last winter, TikTok invited a group of trailblazing influencers to Winnipeg to participate in an Indigenous accelerator program built around community and connection. Kristina Dittmar captured the moment



Kathleen Doxtator (@yakotshani), a member of the Oneida Nation, is a teacher who is working to revitalize the Oneida language. She's also a micro-influencer on TikTok, where her forthright yet gentle manner has created an ever-growing engaged community.



"It was healing," says Aicha Bastien N'Diaye (above and top right), about the TikTok accelerator program. "I bonded instantly with creators I had only talked to in comment sections before, and we laughed as if we had known each other for years."



Taking over the dance floor in Winnipeg.



Lesley Hampton, an award-winning Anishinaabe artist and fashion designer who has dressed Lily Gladstone, Tantoo Cardinal and Devery Jacobs (see page 7).



James Jones is better known as @notoriouscree across social media, where he reaches an audience of more than six million. A traditional hoop and powwow dancer, Jones is a force. He's performed at the Olympics, Coachella, the Pan-Am Games.



Isabelle Chapadeau (@isapadeau), an Inuk content creator from Nunavut, has built a powerful TikTok following by creating content about community, sobriety and creativity.



TURN A NEW PAGE

Change up your bookshelf with cool titles from Canadian authors

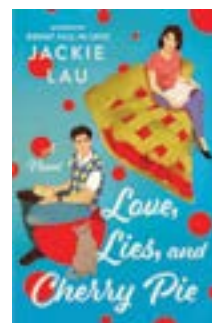
There's something about a good book and warm weather that goes together like *Challengers* and a throuple meme. Say "game, set, match" to your perfect springtime #TBR list with this curated bunch of new reads by Canada's coolest literary talents—*Sarah Laing*



Collide by Bal Khabra
Sound the Five Red Chili alarm, Spicy BookTok: This romance debut from Vancouverite Bal Khabra is a collegiate enemies-to-lovers delight. (On Kindle Unlimited, it's already had 4 million page views.) She's got her eyes set on grad school to be a sports psychologist. He's the captain of the hockey team who epitomizes every athlete cliché. Or so she thinks. They're thrown together into the enforced proximity of a thesis research project and an attraction more irresistible than a freshly Zamboni-ed rink.



Wild Failure by Zoe Whittall
This short story collection is for everyone who swears that genre assuming the pretentious worst. These stories inspire the addictive fascination of the most viral TikTok storytimes: An agoraphobe takes on a mountain lion; a sharehouse becomes the subject of a true crime podcast. It's all packaged up with the wit and insight that cement Whittall's place as one of CanLit's brightest lights. It's bite-sized storytelling that's tailor-made for nibbling on between naps on a sun lounger—and it's funny, too!



Love, Lies, and Cherry Pie by Jackie Lau
When you're in the mood for a sugar rush in literary form, look no further than this wholesome love story—a Toronto geophysicist-turned-romance-novelist. This is a Rocky Road of romance tropes—fake dating, enemies-to-lovers, opposites attract. It all comes together for a fresh update on the classic "She pretends her nemesis is her boyfriend to stop her mother nagging her about getting married." Lau is the author of two other adorable rom-coms, including *Donut Fall In Love*.



A Sweet Sting of Salt by Rose Sutherland
If you love a re-telling of a myth—or you're just partial to a maritime love story—you'll devour this queer re-imagining set in 19th-century Nova Scotia by an exciting debut author. The folk tale in question is *The Selkie Wife*, wherein a man steals a seal's shed skin—leaving her naked on the shoreline—and coerces her into marriage. The selkie's saviour is the isolated community's only midwife, who risks everything to help the mysterious woman who has captured her imagination, and her heart.



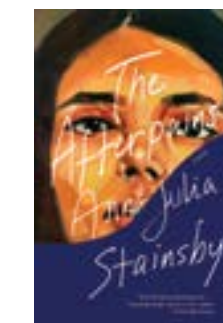
Glass Houses by Madeline Ashby
Think your work retreat was a nightmare? Consider the poor souls sent on the "our startup just got acquired!" trip whose private plane makes an unplanned emergency landing on an island, population one very creepy mansion. (You know it's bad when the first chapter opens with someone washing blood from their hands.) Set in the near future and replete with deliciously specific references to its Canadian backdrop—like the Parkdale Victorian where the startup founder holds court—this is equal parts twisty thriller and whip-smart reflection on the dark side of our digital age.



A Great Country by Shilpi Somaya Gowda
You might be familiar with this Toronto-born author's international bestseller, *Secret Daughter*. This spring, Gowda is back with another powerful story about the gloriously complex, endlessly fascinating thing that is family. This time, a trigger event—the arrest of a 12-year-old boy—becomes the fulcrum for a tender exploration of an Indian-American family caught at the juncture of legacy and possibility. A gripping exploration of the American dream circa 2024, it's set in California's privileged gated communities, a.k.a. Kardashian Country.



The Takedown by Lily Chu
The strapline for this delightful novel is "Crazy Rich Asians meets *Succession*," and while accurate, it downplays just how thoughtful this Toronto-set rom-com is, with its exploration of toxic positivity and the ways that can impact a life. Our heroine Dee's relentless optimism and daily affirmations land her in a situation where she's forced to work with her nemesis (and annoyingly attractive) Teddy to bring down the leadership of a luxury conglomerate, all while contending with her parents and grandparents who unilaterally announce they're moving in with her.



The Afterpains by Anna Julia Stainsby
This debut novel is one for the days when you're feeling in need of a *Notebook*-level cry. Tackling themes of motherhood, grief and homesickness, the story is told from the perspective of four different narrators, each pulling on the tragic thread of the loss of a child from their own vantage point. Rosy is still trying to cope with the death of her daughter two decades earlier. Isaura has fled Honduras for Canada, desperate to give her daughter Mavi a better life. All four collide in a dramatic way and, well, we won't spoil the rest.

5



Luis De Filippis

The filmmaker's first movie—a stunning portrait of trans joy and discovery—has received widespread acclaim. What's next?

Luis De Filippis saw the same types of boilerplate stories on-screen. Over and over—and over. So she started dreaming up her own movies, crafting more nuanced narratives and characters. The Canadian Screen Awards (CSA) took notice; her debut *Something You Said Last Night* (available on Crave) is nominated for their John Dunning Best First Feature Award. The film features Carmen Madonia as Ren, a young trans woman who takes off on a family vacay after being fired, and must choose between remaining snugly in the bosom of her Canadian-Italian family—or striking out on her own.

This prestigious CSA nom comes on the heels of De Filippis winning the Changemaker award at TIFF as well, thanks to the film's beautiful trans representation. De Filippis's advocacy goes beyond telling less stereotypical trans stories: "Representation is not just about who is in front of the camera, but also who is behind the camera," she says. De Filippis and her lead producer, Jessica Adams, started the Trans Film Mentorship (TFM) program, which allowed five trans youth interested in pursuing careers in film to come on board and make the film with them, starting in the pre-production phase and going all the way through to the end of production. "With the help of (director) Gabrielle Zilkha, TFM has gone on to run more mentorship programs over the past two years," says De Filippis. "We're currently prepping for two more mentorship programs, which run summer and fall 2024."

Here, De Filippis talks about the heartbreaking nature of filmmaking—and why she just has to do it anyway.

How did you become interested in filmmaking? What did it awaken within you? "I was always interested in storytelling. But why film? It's an amalgamation of all the things I love and ultimately, filmmaking is building fully realized worlds that an audience can get lost in. I fell in love with cinema when I was 16 and saw Sofia Coppola's *Marie Antoinette* in theatres. Through music, costumes, production design, Coppola was able to pull this 18th-century figure out of the cobwebs and make her relatable and understandable: Marie Antoinette was Paris Hilton, Lindsay Lohan, a misunderstood pop star. I walked away being like, 'I want to do what she does.'"

Why does making films bring you joy? "I'm not sure if making films brings me joy, as much as it's something that I feel compelled to do. Every so often I think, 'I could be doing something else, something less heartbreaking,' but then I come right back to film. Somehow the film medium suits my brain the best. I think it has something to do with how film forces you to be equal parts meticulous and improvisational."

Why was it important to you to feature more trans people in lead roles? "Because we exist. And we have perspectives and stories that have yet to be explored through film. Trans women are always the most interesting people in any given room. How could I not continue making films about them?"

Why is it meaningful for you to portray average trans lives on-screen vs. the usual trauma or gender conflict? "I'm personally bored with the trauma and gender conversation that is offered as the main plot line when it comes to trans characters. My friends and I have fully rounded lives where being trans has little to do with our day-to-day experiences. I want to see more films with trans characters whose lives are just as complex, flawed, and banal as the trans people I know."

What do you love about writing and directing your own features? How does the added agency and control make you feel? "I love the exploration of the characters and worlds that you, as the creator, think you know. It's amazing to go back and look over a first draft of something and compare it to the final work. When you let a character take over and show you things about themselves, that's when the real magic happens. Writing is just as much about letting go as it is about keeping control, but you have to have the agency as the lead creative to allow the project to go in new and unexpected directions. Having the freedom to shift with a story is paramount."

What does it mean for you to be shortlisted for this CSA award? Why is it especially nice to be recognized by fellow

Canadians? "It's nice to be recognized by your peers. I'm very happy that we are nominated for the John Dunning Best First Feature Award; it is a group effort, and this is a group award. I am also very excited that Mara Zigler is nominated for her work in costume design. She did such an incredible job. The costumes seem so effortless, but in reality she put a lot of time and dedication into every single detail. She scoured vintage shops for the perfect faded T-shirt, haggled with pawnbrokers for the perfect gold charms, and when she couldn't find something that she was looking for she made it, with the help of Reilly Kizer. Carmen wears a couple custom pieces in the film, and I think they just go that extra mile in making her character shine."

Writing is just as much about letting go as it is about keeping control.

How can audiences help support female and trans filmmakers? "By giving us your time. Financiers pretty much care about one thing: the numbers. So if you are curious about the work of someone, be proactive and go and find it, watch it, tell your friends about it. In order for us to continue making work, every project has to be seen as some kind of a "success"; there's not as much room for us to fail upwards. If financiers see that audiences are interacting with the work, they're more likely to continue supporting the people who made it."

How are you spending your time these days? What makes you happy? "Right now I'm dreaming of summer, going to see a lot of movies and planning my vegetable garden."

What are your plans for your career? What kind of work do you want to do? "My goal is to continue making the films I want to make, in the way I want to make them, with the people I want to make them with, all while being able to support myself and make sure my collaborators are able to support themselves. As for new projects, I definitely feel a new project bubbling up; we'll see what it turns out to be. Creating is a mystery; it's an act of faith."

PHOTOGRAPHY: RYAN FLUEGER

6

Devery Jacobs

Actor. Writer. Producer. How this prodigious performer is doing it all

Devery Jacobs remembers her first Canadian Screen Awards—and how terrifying it was. She was nominated for Best Actress for her role in *Rhymes for Young Ghouls*. "I was so overwhelmed by this industry that felt so much greater than myself," she says. "I didn't know anybody there and was just surrounded by people who I had admired for so long." Now, she'll return to the award show in triumph, taking home this year's Radius Award, which is bestowed on artists whose work has a global impact. (Past winners include Simu Liu and Stephan James.) "It feels like a full-circle moment where I remember being so overwhelmed, and now I'll be coming back and getting the Radius Award," she says. "It definitely feels like kind of a homecoming."

Jacobs's talent transcends both genre and job title. In the past year, she's finished up her star turn on *Reservation Dogs*, Sterlin Harjo and Taika Waititi's highly acclaimed FX drama; she wrote the final season's buzzy Ethan Hawke episode and directed another one. She snagged a spot in the Marvel universe with roles in *Echo*, and *What If...?*, where she voiced a Mohawk superhero. "I never thought that I would see Indigenous people on a stage like that, growing up. And so it was so cool to be able to be a part of that," she says.

And, now, Jacobs is turning producer, ushering passion project *Backspot*, a cheer-leading drama in theatres May 31, to the big screen. Oh, and she stars in it as well. "[Even though I'm] a former athlete, it's rare when I get to embody such a physical character and such a physical role and highlight that part of who I am," she says. "And I never would have been cast in a role like that had we not created it for me." They shot the movie in just 17 days—including a wince-inducing 12 takes of the elaborate final number—and Jacobs did every stunt except for one. "I knew that if went down, the whole production was going down," Jacobs says. "So, I had to be really in tune with my body where I'm like, okay, I have two tumbling lines left in me, or I have three jumps."

Jacobs also wanted to show a different kind of queerness on-screen when it came to her character's love life. "So often in queer cinema and queer films, there's conversations about how hard it is to be queer. We wanted to move past that. Like, what does it actually tangibly feel like to be an out queer teen athlete in 2024? Sport is a really loaded place for queer and trans youth right now, so, for us, we wanted to move past the coming-out story. We wanted to dive into what different queer relationships look like, not only romantically but with queer elders, with queer peers, and finding the nuances within those dynamics and relationships."

Jacobs was passionate about working with activists and "people who stood for things and used their platforms for good" on this film, along with queer folks for queer roles, which resulted in Evan Rachel Wood coming on to play a stern coach. Wood likened the scrappy production to *Thirteen*, Catherine Hardwicke's debut that helped launch Wood to fame. Just as Holly Hunter had contributed her star power to help that movie get made, Wood lent hers to this Canadian indie to ease its way into the world.

Embracing queer elders. Body positivity. Indigenous representation. Activism is as precious to Jacobs as creating. Often, they are one and the same. "Creating change



is a part of who I am as a Mohawk person," she says. Raised in the charged atmosphere in the wake of the 1990 Oka crisis, Jacobs says so much of her upbringing was political: about revitalizing language, about making sure they were decolonizing and reconnecting to their communities and cultures. "For me, being able to infuse that mission into the storytelling that I do, it feels like it's a part of the fabric of my DNA, like being a storyteller and also being Mohawk and also being queer, it feels like all of those things have been in many ways in resistance to the status quo and the systems that western society has set up for us. A lot of who I am is in opposition to that," she says. "But I think that by hearing different voices, we're able to move forward in a better way that is actually respectful of people and will create a better and more sustainable society."

She still remembers when she moved to New York, fresh off the exhilarating experience of working with an Indigenous director on an Indigenous film in *Rhymes for Young Ghouls*. She thought there was going to be a whole world filled with green-lit projects with Indigenous creators at the helm, she says. "I had a very rude awakening—the roles that I was auditioning for were really stereotypical and Pocahontas-centric, and it was really not an experience that I recognized in myself." It reminded her of when she'd watch movies growing up, featuring crude caricatures of Indigenous people. "I wouldn't even realize it was supposed to be us," she says.

Now, she plans to forge new stories, authentic stories, and hopefully evolve some minds along the way, whether it's about missing and murdered Indigenous women or global warming and fracking and pipelines or queerness within Indigenous communities. "I would love to move forward and combine my passion for this activism with the storytelling, but in a way that isn't like a documentary hammering you over the head, but it's embedded into the characters, into the world and what our reality is as Indigenous peoples," she says. "I'm really interested in what these new beginnings will bring."

ON THE TOWN

THE POWER OF PLANTS

Celebrating Earth Month with our favourite plant-powered beauty brand

What better way to honour Earth Month than by spending a beautiful afternoon with Origins? With over 30 years of expertise, Origins is on a mission to care for skin holistically by tapping into the power of plant science and skin physiology. This was brought to life when Origins created an exclusive Farmers' Market experience at Toronto's Casa Madera restaurant to educate beauty influencers and media on their plant-powered skincare innovations and tree planting environmental efforts. "From the start, Origins has been committed to the well-being of both skin and the planet," says Taposhi Gandhi, Brand Manager and Vice President of Origins Canada. "We prioritize sustainability through the responsible sourcing of our earth and plant-based ingredients."

Here are some highlights from the event.

Photography by Isabella Pugiotta, @iizzdigital.



Guests were given a reusable tote bag to shop the Origins Farmers' Market.



Stands were set up for each of the iconic Origins collections: GinZing, Mega-Mushroom, Plantscription, Checks & Balances and Masks.



The event wrapped with a lunch from Casa Madera's vegetarian menu that highlighted Origins' signature natural ingredients.



As part of this experience, guests had the opportunity to plant a tree in someone's honour, through Origins' partnership with non-profit organization One Tree Planted.



Taposhi Gandhi, Origins Canada Brand Manager and Vice President and Edoardo Bernardi, General Manager.

PHOTOGRAPHY: NEZ GENEREUX

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