

**WORLD PREMIERE OF  
*ONCE WERE BROTHERS: ROBBIE ROBERTSON AND THE BAND*  
IS TIFF 2019 OPENING NIGHT GALA FILM**

**Daniel Roher's deeply personal story of the Canadian music legend's life, a Crave Original Documentary, will open the 2019 Toronto International Film Festival on Thursday, September 5**



Photo credit: Courtesy of TIFF, Photo by Elliott Landy

**TORONTO** — TIFF Co-Heads Cameron Bailey and Joana Vicente announced today that the World Premiere of ***Once Were Brothers: Robbie Robertson and The Band***, Daniel Roher's touching tale of Robertson's young life and the creation of one of the most enduring groups in the history of popular music, The Band, will be the Opening Night Gala Presentation for the 44th Toronto International Film Festival® on Thursday, September 5, at Roy Thomson Hall. The premiere marks the first time a Canadian-made documentary opens the Toronto International Film Festival.

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The documentary film, directed by Roher (*Ghosts of Our Forest*), inspired by Robertson's 2016 memoir, *Testimony*, tells the moving story of Robertson's personal journey as he overcame adversity and found camaraderie alongside the four other men who would become his brothers in music, and who together made their mark on music history.

*Once Were Brothers: Robbie Robertson and The Band* blends rare archival footage, photography, iconic songs, and interviews with many of Robertson's friends and collaborators, including Martin Scorsese, Bruce Springsteen, Eric Clapton, Van Morrison, Peter Gabriel, Taj Mahal, Dominique Robertson, and Ronnie Hawkins.

"This is one of Toronto's great stories of a hometown hero," said Bailey, Artistic Director & Co-Head of TIFF. "From his early years in this city, to the inspiration he took from life on the Six Nations reserve, to the impact he's had on generations of music lovers, Robertson emerges in Roher's film as a truly Canadian-made superstar. In our first year as TIFF's Co-Heads, Joana and I are thrilled to open the Festival with a Canadian story that speaks to the world."

"This stirring documentary takes audiences on a musical journey and shows us just what it takes to build one of the most significant groups in rock history," said Vicente, Executive Director & Co-Head of TIFF. "Robertson is a Canadian music icon, and his moving story of persistence and passion is the perfect way to begin Festival 2019 for both Cameron and me. We're eager to share the excitement of Opening Night with Toronto's film lovers, and audiences can expect some very special guests joining us to help celebrate."

"Robertson's tale is a remarkable reminder of how vision, ambition, and hard work can empower one's wildest dreams," said *Once Were Brothers: Robbie Robertson and The Band* director Daniel Roher. "Robbie took a chance on me, and I will be forever grateful that he rolled the dice on a kid from Toronto to helm his story. Opening the Toronto International Film Festival is beyond some wildest dreams of my own and I am thankful for everyone who believed in me."

"I'm so tremendously honoured that the premiere of *Once Were Brothers*, inspired by my memoir *Testimony*, will be the opening movie at TIFF this year, in my hometown of Toronto, Ontario, Canada," said Robertson.

In a career spanning six decades, Robbie Robertson has continued to create as a songwriter, producer, performer, actor, author, and film composer. His raw talent thrust him into the spotlight and put him at the centre of a cultural revolution, backing Bob Dylan on his notorious 1966 electric world tour and later collaborating with Dylan on the groundbreaking *Basement Tapes*, then as a member of The Band, inventing the musical hybrid known as Americana with songs like "The Weight," "Up on Cripple Creek," and "The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down." Of late, Robertson has been working on a new solo album, due this fall.

Made in conjunction with Imagine Documentaries, White Pine Pictures, Bell Media Studios and Universal Music Canada's Shed Creative, the project is executive produced by Martin Scorsese, Imagine Entertainment Chairmen Brian Grazer and Ron Howard, Justin Wilkes and Sara Bernstein for Imagine Documentaries; White Pines Pictures' president Peter Raymont, and COO Steve Ord; Bell Media president, Randy Lennox; Jared Levine; Michael Levine; Universal Music Canada president and CEO Jeffrey Remedios; and Shed Creative's

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managing director Dave Harris. The film was produced by Andrew Munger, Stephen Panizza, Sam Sutherland and Lana Belle Mauro.

*Once Were Brothers: Robbie Robertson and The Band* will stream on Crave in Canada later this year.

The 44th Toronto International Film Festival runs September 5–15, 2019.

TIFF announces more Gala and Special Presentations on July 23.

Festival ticket packages start at \$110. Purchase packages online at [tiff.net/tickets](http://tiff.net/tickets), by phone (416.599.TIFF or 1.888.599.8433), or in person at TIFF Bell Lightbox until August 11 while quantities last.

TIFF prefers Visa.

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**About TIFF**

TIFF is a charitable cultural organization whose mission is to transform the way people see the world through film. An international leader in film culture, TIFF projects include the annual Toronto International Film Festival in September; TIFF Bell Lightbox, which features five cinemas, major exhibitions, and learning and entertainment facilities; and innovative national distribution program Film Circuit. The organization generates an annual economic impact of \$189 million CAD. TIFF Bell Lightbox is generously supported by contributors including Founding Sponsor Bell, the Province of Ontario, the Government of Canada, the City of Toronto, the Reitman family (Ivan Reitman, Agi Mandel and Susan Michaels), The Daniels Corporation and RBC. For more information, visit [tiff.net](http://tiff.net).

**The Toronto International Film Festival is generously supported by Lead Sponsor Bell, Major Sponsors RBC, L'Oréal Paris and Visa, and Major Supporters the Government of Ontario, Telefilm Canada, and the City of Toronto.**

**This film is eligible for the Grolsch People's Choice Award.**

**The Gala programme is made possible through the generous sponsorship of Fairmont.**

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For more information, contact the Communications Department at 416.934.3200 or email [proffice@tiff.net](mailto:proffice@tiff.net).

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