

**DAVID BYRNE'S AMERICAN UTOPIA TO OPEN TIFF 2020**  
**Spike Lee's filmed version of Byrne's brilliant, timely Broadway show will open**  
**the Toronto International Film Festival on Thursday, September 10**  
**HBO and Crave Presentation to air this fall**



Photo credit: Courtesy of TIFF, Photo by David Lee

**TORONTO** — TIFF Co-Heads Cameron Bailey and Joana Vicente announced today that the HBO, Spike Lee-directed filmed version of the Broadway-acclaimed **David Byrne's American Utopia** is the Opening Night Presentation of the 45th Toronto International Film Festival® on Thursday, September 10.

The film documents musical innovator and former Talking Heads frontman David Byrne's powerful Broadway show, where he performs songs on stage and shares the spotlight with 11 musicians from around the world, including Toronto's own Jacqueline Acevedo. Lee masterfully directs a transformative experience, as the show raises social and political issues, revealing how audiences can come together during challenging times through the power of entertainment.

"This joyful film takes audiences on a musical journey about openness, optimism, and faith in humanity," said Joana Vicente, Executive Director and Co-Head, TIFF. "This is especially poignant at a time of great uncertainty around the world. We're eager to share the excitement of Opening Night with audiences."

"Spike Lee has somehow always been exactly of his moment and ahead of his time," said Cameron Bailey, Artistic Director and Co-Head, TIFF. "With **David Byrne's American Utopia**, he brings Byrne's classic songs and

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joyous stagecraft to the screen just when we need it. Spike's latest joint is a call to connect with one another, to protest injustice, and, above all, to celebrate life."

"HBO is enormously fortunate to be able to bring **David Byrne's American Utopia** to the Toronto International Film Festival," said Nina Rosenstein, Executive Vice President, HBO Programming. "David's poignant vision paired with Spike's impeccable direction is a visual journey. TIFF Festival attendees are certain to be captivated by this unique viewing experience during these demanding times."

**David Byrne's American Utopia** played at Broadway's Hudson Theatre in New York City with plenty of fanfare from October 2019 to February 2020. The concert consisted of performances of songs from Byrne's 2018 solo album of the same name, including popular Talking Heads favourites such as "Once in a Lifetime" and "Burning Down the House." Janelle Monáe's "Hell You Talmbout" is also featured in the set list and contributes to tackling the impactful subjects surrounding Black Americans who have been killed at the hands of law enforcement. The 11-person troupe performs choreography by Annie-B Parson and dances with their instruments throughout the stage, creating a high-energy performance. In Canada, **David Byrne's American Utopia** will premiere on Bell Media's Crave day-and-date with the US broadcast on HBO this fall.

Spike Lee makes short films, ads, documentaries and feature films. He is also a teacher. Mr. Lee is a tenured film professor at New York University Graduate Film School and artistic director too.

David Byrne is a Scottish-born, American-raised songwriter and singer. He's best known as the frontman of Talking Heads, who were active between 1975 and 1991 and were inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in 2002. Byrne won an Oscar and a Grammy Award along with Ryuichi Sakamoto and Cong Su for their original score for Bernardo Bertolucci's *The Last Emperor* (1987).

Participant, River Road Entertainment and Warner Music Entertainment are executive producing and financing the project, with Participant as lead. The film is produced by David Byrne's Todomundo and Lee's Forty Acres and a Mule Filmworks production companies and executive produced by RadicalMedia. Byrne and Lee serve as producers. Participant's Jeff Skoll, David Linde, and Diane Weyermann executive produce; along with Warner Music Group's Len Blavatnik, David Bither, Charlie Cohen, and Kurt Deutsch; Bill Pohlad and Christa Zofcin Workman of River Road; and RadicalMedia's Jon Kamen, Dave Sirulnick and Meredith Bennett. Kristin Caskey, Mike Isaacson and Patrick Catullo, who lead-produced the Broadway production, also serve as executive producers.

TIFF continues to work closely with the Province of Ontario, the City of Toronto, and public health officials on the safe execution of the Festival, with its number-one priority being the health and well-being of both Festival filmgoers and the residents of the entire community. The presentation of TIFF's traditional in-person film festival will be contingent on the Province's reopening framework to ensure that Festival venues and workplace practices meet and exceed public health guidelines.

The worldwide health crisis has affected everyone working in the cultural industries, and TIFF has been severely impacted. Its role in the ecosystem of the film industry was the impetus to move forward, to deliver a

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film festival that inspires and engages audiences, and to serve as a beacon of hope for Toronto, for filmmakers, and for the international film industry. TIFF is the cornerstone of a \$2-billion-a-year film industry in Toronto, generates more than \$200 million in annual economic activity for the City of Toronto and the Province of Ontario, and is the chief market to launch Canadian film content into the global marketplace.

The 45th Toronto International Film Festival runs September 10–19, 2020.

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#### **About TIFF**

TIFF is a not-for-profit 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).

#### **About HBO**

HBO® is one of the most respected and innovative entertainment brands in the world, serving iconic, award-winning programming to 140 million subscribers globally. A subsidiary of WarnerMedia, HBO is the world's most successful pay TV service with an extensive array of programming that includes some of the most notable titles to be on television, including drama series *Succession*®, *Watchmen*®, *Westworld*®, *Big Little Lies*®, *Game of Thrones*®, *The Sopranos*®, *Band of Brothers*® and *The Wire*®, as well as comedy series *Barry*®, *Insecure*® and *Sex and the City*®. In the United States, HBO® and sister network Cinemax® are available across multiple platforms including HBO On Demand®, Cinemax On Demand®, HBO GO® and MAX GO®, as well as HBO NOW®. Internationally, HBO branded services, including television networks and the standalone streaming product HBO GO®, are available in more than 70 countries across Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean. HBO and Cinemax programming is also sold into more than 150 countries worldwide.

**TIFF 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.**

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