

As the Stars of *Outlander* Begin Their Long Goodbye, the Cast of *Outlander: Blood of My Blood* Is Just Getting Started

By
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Outlander's Sam Heughan, Sophie Skelton, and Richard Rankin with *Outlander: Blood of My Blood*'s Harriet Slater, Jamie Roy, and Hermione Corfield on Day 2 San Diego Comic-Con.

The latter series premieres on August 8. Photo: Joe Scarnici/Getty Images

Jamie Fraser was just a man in a kilt in Diana Gabaldon's head when she decided, some 35 years ago, to try writing her first novel. That book would become *Outlander*, its story centered on Claire, a war nurse in 1945, and Jamie, a Highland warrior in the 1700s.

Now, more than a decade after Caitriona Balfe and Sam Heughan first brought Claire and Jamie to life in Starz's beloved television adaptation of Gabaldon's historical-fantasy series, fans are preparing for the show's eighth and final season to air in early 2026. But the *Outlander* story will continue on with a new prequel series, *Outlander: Blood of My Blood*, built around Jamie's parents, Ellen MacKenzie (Harriet Slater) and Brian Fraser (Jamie Roy), and Claire's parents, Julia Moriston (Hermione Corfield) and Henry Beauchamp (Jeremy Irvine), who are time-travelers just like their daughter. Premiering on August 8, it's "the love stories that created the love story," as *Outlander* showrunner and creator Matthew B. Roberts describes it.

As *Vogue* rode along with the casts of *Outlander* and *Blood of My Blood* for two days at San Diego Comic-Con in late July, the actors got a chance to talk legacy, family, and the Season 8 moments that made them cry.

Day one kicks off with the OG *Outlander* gang—Heughan, Sophie Skelton (Claire and Jamie's daughter, Brianna), and Richard Rankin (Brianna's husband, Roger MacKenzie)—jumping into hair and make-up at 6 a.m., then into cars headed to Hall H, the biggest venue at the San Diego Convention Center, with a capacity of 6,500 guests.

Of course, one crucial member of their group is missing—Balfe, who is in the UK filming Georgia Oakley’s new adaptation of *Sense & Sensibility*. (She will play Mrs. Dashwood.)



Caitriona Balfe and Heughan at San Diego Comic-Con in 2014

Photo: Getty Images

“The show isn’t the show without Caitriona. She’s such a strong force and such an amazing human being,” Heughan tells me in the green room before their panel. “She’s sorely missed. It’s a nice family reunion. We’ve had these moments, since we finished, where we met up—most recently, at Richard’s wedding. Everyone was dancing. It was wonderful. It was the first time we’d

all kind of been together since wrapping properly.” (He adds that he was “delighted” when he learned about Balfe’s *Sense & Sensibility* casting. “I think we started doing really bad impressions of previous versions of Jane Austen. But she’s brilliant. I know she will bring something very different to that role. But Caitriona’s in a corset again. She’s wished it on herself!”)

“Caitriona and Joey”—as in Phillips, another member of the cast—“were having a great time,” Rankin agrees. “Everybody brought their A-game.” An *Outlander* wedding with dancing and no drama? Imagine.

Skelton, who plays Brianna, Jamie and Claire’s daughter, calls being back at Comic-Con “such a full-circle moment.”

“Richard and I did San Diego Comic-Con for our first season. Tobias [Menzies] was there too,” she says. “It’s great that we could be here to pass the baton to *Blood of My Blood*, and celebrate the legacy that *Outlander* has created.”



Photo: Araya Doheny/Getty Images

Heughan, Skelton, Rankin, executive producer Maril Davis, and Roberts soon gather for a pre-panel group-hug-slash-huddle, which has become something of a ritual. Then, they take the stage for a conversation moderated by comedian Aisha Tyler. It ends with a teaser trailer for Season 8, as well as a live performance of *Outlander*'s main theme, the 19th-century Scottish ballad "The Skye Boat Song," by Raya Yarbrough.

What was it like, I ask Heughan later, to watch a trailer with upwards of 6,000 fans? "Probably my favorite trailer I've seen, because there's so much material going back through all the seasons," he says. "It makes you realize how much we've done, how much drama there's been, how much adventure

and romance. It's pretty epic. It really was one of those pinch-me moments. It's the beginning—and it's the end of that chapter.”



Heughan and Matt Roberts's selfie from the Comic-Con stage

Photo: Sam Heughan

Did anything make him emotional? I wonder. “The scene from Season 1, where Jamie first captures Claire, where he has his sword and we’re sort of covered in blood... That was probably one of the first major scenes we did,” Heughan says. “That one, for me, was just sort of iconic. I was like, ‘Oh, we look good. We look *young*.’”



Skelton and Slater, who plays Brianna's paternal grandmother, Ellen, on *Blood of My Blood*
Joe Scarnici/Getty Images

It was then time for the *Blood of My Blood* panel, moderated by Kate Hahn. The *Outlander* gang took a moment to chat with the slightly nervous new cast—including Slater, Roy, Corfield, Seamus McLean Ross (the young Colum MacKenzie), Sam Retford (the young Dougal MacKenzie), and Rory Alexander (the young Murtagh Fitzgibbons Fraser)—before heading to their own first press stop.

When Heughan, Skelton, and Rankin later lead the *Blood of My Blood* team to their inaugural Comic-Con fan meeting and autograph signing, it is organized chaos, with fans lining up in droves.

As Jamie Roy and I jump into the car for the second press day—both casts will do more than 10 interviews and photo shoots over the course of the weekend, arguably their most chaotic being the *Outlander* crew's sit-down with MTV—I mention I'm worried my dress is riding up.

Roy empathizes, remarking: “I know how you feel. When I wear my kilt, that happens.”

Roy tells me that he loved *Outlander* long before he was cast in the franchise. His favorite episode may surprise people. “I was recently watching ‘The Wedding.’ It’s such a great episode, because of the journey that Jamie and Claire go on. At the start, they’re kind of hesitant and nervous. Then they have this beautiful, long conversation, talking about families and really personal things. You see them fall in love in 60 minutes, which is such an ambitious thing to do on TV. They do it so well. It’s so beautifully written and really beautifully performed by the two of them.”

Roy says that he auditioned with a scene from “The Reckoning,” an episode from *Outlander*’s first season, in which Jamie and Claire get in their first fight. Roy calls it the “You’re tearing my guts out” scene. “When I was watching that scene, I thought, *Oh, wow. The way that that was acted, that’s so impressive.* If I’m going to do this, I’m going to have to get to that level.” When he found out that was the scene he’d have to do for his screen test, he couldn’t believe it. (As it happens, Balfe and Heughan had to do the same one for their chemistry test.)

Hermione Corfield, another longtime *Outlander* fan, also rewatched the series before she auditioned for *Blood of My Blood*, initially going in for the role of Ellen, Jamie’s mother. (When she and Roy did *their* screen test, it was another scene from “The Reckoning.”) Corfield recalls that after some time had passed, she got a callback. “Then I got the sides, and I was like, ‘Who’s Julia?’” (She jokes that she’s still waiting to hear back about Ellen.)

In truth, Corfield bears an almost uncanny resemblance to Balfe. She recalls the moment she realized just how much they looked alike: When Corfield got the role, she had to dye her red hair a dark brown—upon which “the makeup artist looked at me and was like, ‘Oh my gosh. That’s Caitriona.’”



The central cast of *Blood of My Blood*: Jamie Roy, Hermione Corfield, Harriet Slater, Rory Alexander, Seamus McLean Ross, Graham McTavish, and Sam Retford

Photo: Joe Scarnici/Getty Images

Harriet Slater, who *did* book Ellen, says that getting to meet the franchise’s fans in person for the first time is “overwhelmingly exciting.”

“Up until this point, it’s just been lovely online support,” she adds. “But to look up and see thousands of faces...”

As for what she thinks Ellen would have made of her daughter-in-law, Claire, had they been able to meet? Slater beams. “Oh, I think Ellen would have absolutely loved her. [Jamie] grew up with a very, very strong, strong-willed, fiery, feisty mother, and I think he probably recognized that in Claire.”

Two weeks into filming, Slater had a “really lovely phone call” with Balfe about joining *Outlander*’s heady universe. “She chatted to me for an hour on a Sunday, which was so great. It was just so welcoming and supportive. Her main piece of advice was just to enjoy it and really soak it all in. She said, ‘Nobody else is going to know what this is really like on the inside, only you guys are. So, just stick together.’” (This, Skelton tells me, is characteristic of Balfe: “In our industry, it’s sometimes very hard to have women supporting women. It’s talked about quite a lot, but people don’t always put their money where their mouth is. And I will say that Caitríona has been a huge support.”)

Roy shares that he got similar guidance from Heughan, who told him, “It goes by so quickly. There are days where it’s going to be rough, but you just have to step back and appreciate it. Slow down and enjoy it.”



Seamus McLean Ross and Sam Retford

Photo: Joe Scarnici/Getty Images

At lunch, I check in with Seamus McLean Ross and Sam Retford, who play Colum and Dougal MacKenzie, two brothers battling to be laird.

“I think there’s been this highly Apollonian and Dionysian contrast between the two,” Retford remarks.

“Don’t know what either of those words mean,” McLean Ross deadpans.

Retford explains: “It’s a fantastic story: two brothers, Apollo and Dionysus, and their various approaches as gods of chaos and order, and how they balance each other out.”

Retford used to help friends with their *Outlander* auditions. He was thinking about retiring from acting before he auditioned for the role of Brian Fraser in the prequel. “I was eating a pork chop in the self-tape or something ridiculous like that,” he tells me. Three months later, he received sides for Dougal. “I remember reading him on the page and thinking, *Dream job*.” His second audition was no less chaotic: “I didn’t know what time it was, my phone had broken, and I ended up just sat cross-legged outside [casting director Suzanne Smith’s] office, eating a watermelon with a knife.”

McLean Ross plays Slater’s brother, and he loves their dynamic. “Harriet breaks my heart when I’m acting with her. It’s so hard, because Colum breaks her heart on the show. He loves her, but he also loves his clan. He’s driven by this ambition he doesn’t fully understand.”

Heughan can't wait to see the new series out in the world. "I'm hugely excited. I'm probably going to be the biggest fan. They're a beautiful cast. I'm really happy for them."



Another Heughan selfie, now with members of the *Blood of My Blood* cast, including Rory Alexander, Jamie Roy, Richard Rankin, Sam Retford, Harriet Slater, Seam McLean Ross, and Hermione Corfield

Photo: Sam Heughan

For the *Outlander* gang, Comic-Con weekend is bittersweet. "I feel like I could cry now," Rankin says, thinking back to watching Balfe and Heughan shooting their final scene. "We just felt like we wanted to be there. What we didn't know is that it was a closed set. There were 100 of us just all standing around, waiting for Sam and Caitriona to wrap because it was the last shot. I definitely welled up."

“It was a seven-and-a-half-minute take, a ton of dialogue, very intimate. And, obviously, you know that all the crew were there—you could feel the tension,” Heughan remembers. “I did my close-up first, and I was just trying to get through it, to be honest. I think I sort of shut down internally. I could see Caitriona getting more emotional. I think it was her eyebrow or her cheek—something was twitching the whole way. Then we wrapped and walked out, and everyone was there. They called a wrap on it and I was crying. There were tears in our eyes. Caitriona was a mess—she was proper, I think she said, ‘ugly crying.’ I was very emotional as well. It was exhausting—but also wonderful.”

Skelton shares that Balfe was there for her own final scene. “I saw that she was behind the camera with the crew, waiting to clap and wrap me out. She was the first person I went over to. I hadn’t had any tears until then. But she was quite teary, and her being teary got me teary. We were just crying off each other’s tears. I took my wig off, she sat with me, we had a little toast in the makeup trailer. Then we went to where Sam was doing his final scene. They said, ‘That is Sam wrapped on *Outlander* forever.’ Those are very big words to hear. There was just a sea of people clapping, and he just sort of parted a path and found me and Caitriona, and the three of us had a big hug. We all had a little cry.”

Skelton gets choked up. “As we walked back to base, somebody said into the radio—and I’m getting goosebumps now—‘That’s the three of them back at base, for the last time.’ And that made us just break down.”

Even now, Heughan is still processing it all. “Recently, I drove past the studio. I knew that they were there shooting *Blood of My Blood*, and I felt sad. I thought, *Oh, everyone’s at work and I’m not*. It does feel quite hard.”

Can we expect him to make a cameo, perhaps as baby Jamie? I ask. “No, I don’t think so,” he replies with a laugh. “I might need a little help with that!”

After more than 11 years together, Heughan says that he and the rest of the *Outlander* cast are forever bonded. “I think it’s kind of evident, even over this weekend, [how] we just sort of fall back into our silliness a little bit. They really are not just friends. They’re family. I haven’t seen Caitriona as much—we’ve met up a couple of times—but it’s just so nice, because you suddenly realize you know this person extremely well, and you can kind of share anything with them. I know that we’re all going off in our own directions, but that bond will always be there.”

As for what’s next for Heughan, he’ll be on the stage, playing Macbeth at the Other Place—the Royal Shakespeare Company’s intimate theater in Stratford-Upon-Avon—this fall. “It’s a return to my roots,” he says, “and I now need to go learn the lines.” Talk about the start of a new chapter.