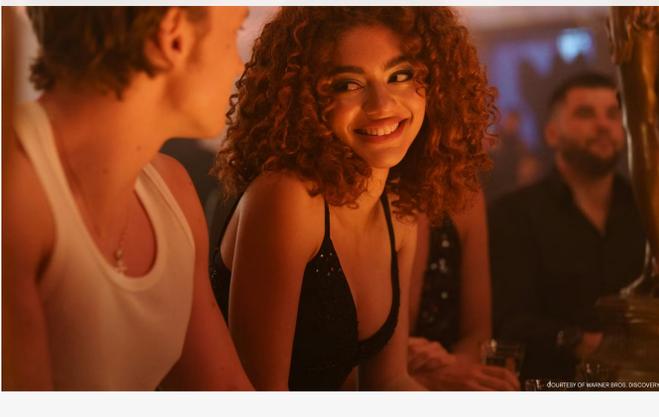


ENTERTAINMENT

KSENIA DANIELA KHARLAMOVA IS HEATED RIVALRY'S FIERCEST ALLY

The woman behind Svetlana talks to NYLON about her hopes for Season 2 and the universal language of love.

by KEVIN LEBLANC
18 HOURS AGO



The international fever for *Heated Rivalry* has no cure, and fans of the show wouldn't want it any other way. In case your newly acquired Brick has you locked out from the online consciousness, the smutty, tender gay hockey show that was originally only on small Canadian streamer Crave before being picked up by HBO for wider distribution, turning leads [Connor Storrie](#) and Hudson Williams into global superstars. (I remember following Storrie last fall when he had less than 30,000 Instagram followers. Both Storrie and Williams now have more than 2 million apiece.) But, as the classic saying goes, behind every man is a beautiful woman, and Ksenia Daniela Kharlamova was the brilliant beauty behind Ilya Rozanov's longtime friend and occasional lover Svetlana.

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ENTERTAINMENT
THE 'EUPHORIA' SEASON 3 TRAILER IS JUST AS CHAOTIC AS YOU'D EXPECT



CONORR STORRIE TRICKED A HEATED RIVALRY EXTRA INTO THINKING HE SPOKE RUSSIAN



THE 'EUPHORIA' SEASON 3 TRAILER SHOWS ZENDAYA'S RUE IN DANGER



KSENIA DANIELA KHARLAMOVA
Courtesy of Warner Bros. Discovery

The show sees Ilya (Storrie) grapple with his feelings for Shane Hollander (Williams) and the pressure from the conservative, bro-forward hockey league and his strict, police-heavy Russian family. Throughout the highs and lows of Ilya's career and personal life, Svetlana always accepts him for who he is. Kharlamova believes that not only is gay representation important, but as she tells NYLON, "I hope people see that if this show has gotten so much love, that these people can as well — if they're closeted, or living in more conservative countries." She knew she came second to "Jane" (Shane's pet name in Ilya's phone), but she rode for him nonetheless.

This role came at a pivotal time in Kharlamova's career, and is her first role speaking Russian, her first language. She grew up between Toronto, Saint Petersburg, and Seattle, and fell into acting at 16. She also has a small part in FX's *Adults*, making her a name to watch in the television space. Her striking looks and emotive face were a draw for this role, and while her callback made her feel like she didn't get the part (more on that soon), we couldn't imagine anyone else as Svetlana.

On the heels of an explosive release of the first season, Kharlamova spoke with NYLON about Storrie's impressive command of languages, her favorite on-set memories, and what movie franchise she'd love to join.



Courtesy of Warner Bros. Discovery

What did the audition process look like for you?

In February of last year, I got an audition through my agent. I thought the character, Svetlana, was super cool. I didn't see much of the story. I just saw who the character was, and I thought, "This is such a cool, confident character." I really wanted the part because I've always wanted to play a Russian-speaking character. I thought that was going to take longer in my career for people to catch on that I am fluent and it's my first language.

In April, I got a callback and it was like, "They would like you to do a Zoom audition for *HR*." And I was like, "What's *HR*?" I was like, "Oh, my God, it's this project from all that time ago." Before I did the callback, I did some research on the books, the fanbase, and the character. The character wasn't in the books too much, so I had a lot of creative freedom to do whatever I wanted. I did that long scene from Episode 2 in the gala. I remember because I had to do it in English and in Russian, we took a small break and they would give me notes and then I'd move on to the next language. After I did the Russian one, there was complete silence on one end, and I'm like, "Whoa, did I do something bad? Did I do it really wrong?" But their Wi-Fi actually cut out, so I was left there in the room by myself and one of the other casting directors was like, "Oh, my God, we're so sorry. You're doing so great. Don't worry." I was like, "Oh, my God, thank you," because I did this entire monologue scene with multiple pages and then I heard silence. I was like, "Oh, wow, I bombed. Was that *that* bad?"

While one of them was fixing their Wi-Fi, the other casting director was like, "Oh, my gosh, we cast the hottest guys. We're so excited for this project." I had a feeling that if they're telling me this, I probably have a good shot. I didn't have any chemistry reads. I met Connor, Hudson, Nadine [Bhabha], the director, the [director of photography], and more of the cast and crew at a dinner before we started shooting. Everyone was so nice and sweet, and so excited for this project. I remember thinking, "It feels like we're like a coven of vampires scheming."

It's so impressive that you jumped right into it, and it feels like there was a lot of trust on set. Do you have any special memories from filming?

I remember having such a fun time during the gala scenes. I remember even though Hudson [Williams] wasn't in those scenes, he was still there on set the whole day, taking [behind the scenes] of us and messing around. I was glad he was there because otherwise, I don't ever get to see him. We'd see each other passing by when we would have scenes on the same day. I really liked that he would come and watch the process. I might do that next season when there's a fun scene I'm not involved in.

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CONORR STORRIE COURTESY OF WARNER BROS. DISCOVERY

HUDSON WILLIAMS COURTESY OF WARNER BROS. DISCOVERY

Russian is your first language. When you heard Connor speaking Russian for the first time, how surprised were you at his accent?

I knew he wasn't Russian when I met him, but I remember it was the night before we shot the funeral stuff — that was my first day on set, maybe his first or second day — and we were in the lobby of the hotel going over our lines and I thought, "Wow. You speak the language so well." Russian is a very hard language in general, but he has a mastery over languages. He also speaks French with a beautiful accent and cadence. I told him, "If I didn't know you, I would think you were a second-generation Russian person who had Russian speaking parents because it's so good." It can be hard when you're learning a language phonetically. You may not know the meaning of every word, but he gave meaning to every word.

I was watching this interview with the director of *Hannet*, Chloé Zhao, and she said, "I don't really understand Shakespeare, but if it's performed correctly, you don't need to understand it. You get the feeling." I felt the same way about his Russian. I don't understand it, but the way he delivered the language and especially his monologue on the phone, you don't need to speak Russian to understand the feeling it.

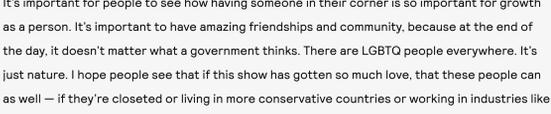
Yeah. It's a big shock when he says he's from Texas. I actually saw the same interview, and I thought the same thing. It was so beautiful to see that it's a human thing more than a language thing.

What do you hope people take away from your role as being an ally for him in a country that doesn't accept him?

It's important for people to see how having someone in their corner is so important for growth as a person. It's important to have amazing friendships and community, because at the end of the day, it doesn't matter what a government thinks. There are LGBTQ people everywhere. It's just nature. I hope people see that if this show has gotten so much love, that these people can as well — if they're closeted or living in more conservative countries or working in industries like sports where they think they might not be accepted. I hope people take away that it is important to have these amazing friends who don't pressure you but are there for you, and you know that they know, but you don't have to say anything to them. We're all human and want human connections we can rely on.

Svetlana really held him down. She was ready to meet him where he was at. I personally hope in the next season this continues, and that you have a bigger part. What are you hoping for in the next season?

Jacob [Tierney] could really do whatever he wants with the next season, but me personally, what I would want to see Svetlana meet Shane. They could do so much with them meeting: two sides of Ilya's world and the two people he trusts the most. I want to see Shane and Ilya's more tender, sweet, coupley moments that we didn't get to see much of in Season 1. We got to see it a little bit in the cottage, but not as much in the rest of the series. I'd also love to see some of the female characters meet, if that would make sense in that universe. I want to see Svetlana involved in some hockey.



CONORR STORRIE & KSENIA DANIELA KHARLAMOVA
IN HEATED RIVALRY.
Courtesy of Warner Bros. Discovery

Everyone is actively obsessing over the show, with no signs of stopping. What's your latest cultural obsession of the moment?

I'm obsessed with *Avatar*. I'm utterly obsessed with that world. I love being on a different planet. I'm into a lot of the *X-Men* comics right now. I'm looking at them on my dresser. I'm trying to watch all the movies, and I'm also really into *Absolute Batman*. That's another comic I'm currently reading.

I would love to see you enter one of those cinematic worlds. You in an *X-Men* movie would be fierce.

Oh, my God, I think the *X-Men* are so underrated. Maybe this is a little shady, but the studios haven't done as much as they could have with that franchise. I don't know if you've ever seen *X-Men '97*, but it's an animated version of *X-Men* that dives into these ideas of love and loss and how to cope after your people have gone through so much. It's so deep and so beautiful, and there's so many concepts that need to be explored more in the movies. I'd love to be a part of a new version of that if they ever do that.