

What a clusterpuck! Race to parody hockey hit Heated Rivalry results in multiple musicals

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'The best parodies come out of love' ... Kyra Brown and Hanna Barlow in Puck Bunnies Photograph: PR

Five minutes was all it took. The stars of *Heated Rivalry* barely had a chance to shed each other's clothes before writer and composer [Dylan MarcAurele](#) started taking notes, knowing that the horny hockey TV series was going to be his next parody project. "I had this idea that it would be a one-night-only concert for friends," says the New York-based writer of fringe hit [Pop Off](#), [Michelangelo!](#) But then he got producer Alan Kliffer on board, and performances sold out before

the script had even been written. “It was a no-brainer,” Kliffer says. “I trusted it would be good, and I was right.”

After a successful off-Broadway run, *Heated Rivalry: The Unauthorized Musical Parody* is now heading for the Edinburgh fringe – and it’s not alone. Three musical spoofs of the series are hotting up at this year’s festival. With the show’s success – all perky keisters, swanky hotel shags, a secret sex cottage and just a smidgeon of hockey – Kliffer reckons it was inevitable. “You just know, at the end of the TV show,” he says, “that gay men everywhere will race to write musicals about it.”

Not just gay men. Over on the west coast of the US, TV writer Kyra Brown had the same idea. “I was like, this is perfect,” they say. “No one has done it yet.” They laugh – that didn’t last long. Brown brought Christan Leonard on board as co-writer, and their show became *Puck Bunnies: A Heated Rivalry Drag Musical Parody*, the tongue-in-cheek title nodding to female ice hockey fans who prefer the players to the game. Interested in the female gaze of the show, *Puck Bunnies* has chest-plated drag kings at the centre of its rink. While the book and TV show focus on the central gay couple, Brown and Leonard wanted to cast a wider net. “Our show is bigger-label queer,” says Brown.

Rachel Reid’s [Game Changers books](#) (of which *Heated Rivalry* was the second in the series) already had a huge fanbase, but Jacob Tierney’s TV adaptation took the story stratospheric, making *Heated Rivalry* leads Connor Storrie and Hudson Williams into stars overnight. “We love some queer joy,” says Leonard, reflecting on the show’s success, “and we don’t get a lot of it. I think a big part of it is the happy ending.”

Brown, who also plays hunky Major League player Ilya Rozanov in *Puck Bunnies* (“My butt resembles his”), has watched the series six times, while Leonard’s count is up to nine. “The best parodies come out of love,” Leonard says. “We both love it so much, and that allows us to make fun of it, and of ourselves.” MarcAurele made a point to stick with just the one viewing: “The slight gaps in my memory wind up being helpful, to make up my own stories and B-plots.” When he’s writing, he says, “I’m not getting too bogged down. I’m just trying to make my husband laugh.”

The emotions in *Heated Rivalry* exist on a higher plane; it doesn’t feel like much of a reach for the characters to burst into song. With two original tunes, plus parodies of other musical theatre and pop songs, *Puck Bunnies* has a cabaret feel. “It’s an ode to musical theatre as much as it’s an ode to *Heated Rivalry*,” says Brown, whose sister choreographed the show. Both of these shows have queerness at their cores, and not only because of the story they’re telling. “I think it’s inherently queer,” MarcAurele says about musical parody. “It’s in our DNA. Growing up closeted, art becomes an escape and we find ways to not take ourselves so seriously. We find joy where there isn’t always joy.”

Speed was critical to getting these shows off the ground. “We knew we had to turn it around really quickly,” says Brown. Both teams wrote their scripts in roughly three weeks, with Puck Bunnies casting improvisers who were free to play around with the text. “Making demos or, God forbid, sheet music, is just so time-consuming,” says MarcAurele. “The songs live in my head, and everyone just has to trust me.” It worked: at SoHo Playhouse, the New Yorker called it “a flat-out terrific musical, no caveats necessary”.

Adapting a TV show into a stage production requires traversing formal, legal copyright. Parody exists under different laws. “A parody turns things on its head,” says Kliffer, “often using pop cultural references to really build the show that you see.” The art form is a kind of comedy reverence. “I think the key to doing parody well is to treat it like a real musical,” says MarcAurele. “Not to dismiss it as just a parody. If you can set up emotional stakes and make it funny, there’s really nothing better.”

Both productions are coming to the fringe from the US, requiring hefty upfront costs. “I recently got a new credit card,” Brown deadpans. “We’ve made it on the cheap,” says Leonard. “We’ve put up pretty much all the money for this.” Their sold-out shows in LA broke even, but even the cast is chipping in some of the cash needed to bring the show to Edinburgh. “Hopefully,” Brown says, “we’ll make some money to be able to give back to everyone.” At the other end of the scale, Heated Rivalry: The Unauthorized Musical Parody is a commercial show, funded through private investment. “We come from really scrappy theatre,” says MarcAurele, so working on such a large financial scale is “pretty surreal”.

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Playing one after the other at the fringe, audiences can lock in for a full evening of queer ice hockey content. Should you want another round the next night, there’s also Heated Rivalry: The Musical Parody!, from LA comedy group [Quick & Funny Musical](#)s, at the same venue as Puck Bunnies. And if anyone’s feeling puck-starved post-fringe, never fear: Unauthorized is heading to London, as is a fourth – yes, really – musical parody in the form of Trevor Ashley and Phil Scott’s Deep-Heat Rivalry. Puck Bunnies hopes for a future life, too. “We get DMs all the time,” says Brown, “like: bring your show to France!” A Scottish Heated Rivalry fanclub has already confirmed its attendance.

Neither of the theatrical teams are concerned about the multitude of shows with similar ideas. “This is what happens with parody,” MarcAurele reasons. “You just have to lean into it.” Brown has accepted the parody multiverse as an opportunity for cross-promotion. “Maybe externally, it’ll be a heated rivalry,” they say. “But internally, we’re all hanging out at the cottage.”

- Heated Rivalry: The Unauthorized Musical Parody is at [Udderbelly at Underbelly, George Square, Edinburgh](#), 5-30 August, then [Underbelly Boulevard, London](#), 7 October until 1 November. Puck

Bunnies: A Heated Rivalry Drag Musical Parody is at [Other Yin at Gilded Balloon Patter House, Edinburgh](#), 5-31 August. Heated Rivalry: The Musical Parody! is at [Other Yin at Gilded Balloon Patter House, Edinburgh](#), 5-30 August. Deep-Heat Rivalry is at [the Other Palace, London](#), 11 September until 11 October.

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