

Did Someone Say Musical Parodies? Why You Should Watch More of These Underrated Productions

Due to copyright laws, a work enters the public domain seventy years after the death of the author or creator. If seventy years have not passed since the death of the author or creator, the work is protected by copyright. If a work is protected by copyright, one would have to buy the rights for the work they wanted to use for performance or monetary gain ("The Public Domain"). Once a work enters the public domain, people no longer need the permission of the author to alter, or change the original work ("The Lifecycle of Copyright"). An example is if you wanted to create a musical about *Harry Potter* or *The Bee Movie* to make money, you would need to buy or license the rights for the franchise, since neither is in the public domain. If you are saddened to find that there are no musicals for these properties, then fear not because some unknown creative individuals created parody musicals based on these franchises. Parodies are exempt from copyright infringement because they qualify as fair use. What makes parodies fair use is that they serve as political or social commentary. Parodies also do not exist primarily for commercial gain ("Parody"). I argue that musical parodies of existing works are a very underappreciated art.

Satire is one of the defining aspects of these shows. From magical Zac Efron posters, friendships being formed over candy, to said candy defeating a traitor, these shows provide a lot of satire, often to their benefit.

This essay will focus on the three existing musical parodies: *A Very Potter Musical*, *A Very Potter Sequel*, and *Ya Like Jazz? A Bee Musical*. These three productions are based on the *Harry Potter* franchise, and *The Bee Movie* respectively. *Ya Like Jazz? A Bee Musical*, shares the same plot to *The Bee Movie*, wherein a honey bee named Barry B. Bension is wondering what

career he will do for the rest of his life. One day, he leaves the hive, and finds a florist named Venessa. Barry later finds that humans sell and eat honey, and Barry plans to sue the entire human race for stealing the bees' honey. Barry wins the case, and the bees stop pollinating the world's plants. Barry later sees the havoc the ruling caused, since the bees of the world stop pollinating plants. The bees eventually decide to save the Earth's plant life by deciding to pollinate again. *A Very Potter Musical*, on the other hand, combines aspects from the entire *Harry Potter* franchise. It starts out with Harry Potter, whose parents were killed by the worst wizard in the wizarding world, Voldemort, when he was a young child. Harry, excited for his first day of his second year at his wizarding school, Hogwarts. At Hogwarts, students are sorted into one of four houses: Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw, and Slytherin. Harry and his friends, Ron Weasley, Hermione Granger, and Ron's younger sister, Ginny, are all in Gryffindor. This year at Hogwarts, there is a House Cup Tournament where a champion from each house is selected to compete. Harry is chosen to represent Gryffindor. Throughout the musical, Harry, Ron, and Hermione start trying to prevent Voldemort from coming back after his failed attempt to kill Harry when he was a young child. The musical ends with Harry defeating Voldemort once and for all. *A Very Potter Sequel* takes place during Harry Potter's first year at Hogwarts, and navigates the year where Harry discovers his fame, and makes new friends, which is very different from his life with his aunt, uncle, and cousin who force him to sleep in a cupboard under their stairs. In the wizarding world, there is an escaped convict named Sirius Black who is on the loose after escaping the wizard prison, Azkaban. Due to Black's escape, Hogwarts was appointed a new security guard from the Ministry of Magic, Dolores Umbridge, and the guards of Azkaban, dementors, to find and capture Sirius Black. Harry, Ron, and Hermione learn that Sirius Black is innocent of all his crimes, and that he is Harry's godfather. Now that they know

Sirius Black is innocent, Harry, Ron, Hermione, and Draco Malfoy all have to time travel to save Sirius Black from the dementors and Umbridge, and to capture who committed the crimes Black was accused of, Peter Pettigrew. Harry, Ron, Hermione, and Draco all save Sirius Black and capture Peter Pettigrew just before summer break, where they all will return home before starting their second year.

Both of these productions have exhibited an extreme amount of creativity to pull off aspects of their parodied works that have much simpler solutions through the use of CGI and animation. In *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, the Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher, Professor Quirell, is revealed to have Voldemort in the back of his head. In the first film, the illusion of Voldemort in the back of Quirell's head is created through CGI, but *A Very Potter Musical* tackles this challenge by having two actors share a costume, and by hiding the face of the actor who plays Voldemort. The two actors perform almost the entire first act like this, which causes some great comedic moments in the scenes they are in. In *Ya Like Jazz? A Bee Musical*, the challenge of having a bee and humans communicating is addressed through puppets, instead of just people talking to each other. This creative solution gives off the illusion that a bee and a human are talking to each other. This brings out a comedic effect, but can also show creative solutions to problems exhibited by the cast and crew of these productions.

These productions can portray aspects of the story that do not receive attention in the original works. In *The Bee Movie*, the female lead, Venessa, begins the story in a relationship with a man named Ken. Venessa breaks up with Ken because he attempts to kill Barry—who is a bee—after he enters their apartment. It is important to mention that Ken is allergic to bees, and states so himself. In *Ya Like Jazz?*, there is a song titled “My Girlfriend Left Me for a Bee,” which is sung by Ken, and is about how upset he is that his girlfriend broke up with him over a

bee. In the song, Ken sings “you were my favorite flower in the garden of rose” (*Ya Like Jazz? A Bee Musical*) about Venessa, which shows how much he clearly loved her. As mentioned before, Ken is stated to be allergic to bees, and these allergies are serious, if not fatal. Reactions from bee stings can range from hives to anaphylactic shock (“About Bee Stings”). While Ken never states his reaction to a bee sting, all reactions are certainly uncomfortable, and anaphylaxis could kill him if he develops it after being stung. Anaphylaxis, often called anaphylactic shock, can cause tightness or swelling of the throat, irregular heartbeat, and even heart failure (“About Bee Stings”). It makes you think about Venessa asking Ken why Barry’s life is not more valuable than Ken’s, despite the fact that if Barry were to sting him, Ken could die.

What a great girlfriend Venessa is.

Similarly, in *A Very Potter Musical*, the relationship between Professor Quirell and Voldemort is discussed through separate scenes. These scenes are comedic, and shed light on what it would be like living with someone who is attached to the back of your head. At one point, Voldemort and Quirell sing a song about how they make an odd couple. You also get to see their growing friendship throughout. This is extremely creative, because it mentions topics or plot holes not present in the original source, and provides a realistic reality to those situations.

These projects can satirize reoccurring themes in the original franchises. In the *A Very Potter Musical*, at the start of the school year, Dumbledore says how he is happy to have all the students back at Hogwarts, and says, “And a special welcome to my favorite student, Mr. Harry Potter” (“A Very Potter Musical, Act 1, Part 3”). This points out how Dumbledore has a clear favoritism towards Harry in the original franchise. Also, when Dumbledore mentions how he sorts students into their respective houses, he says “Basically I’ve been putting anybody who looks like a good guy into Gryffindor, and anybody who looks like a bad guy into Slytherin” (“A

Very Potter Musical, Act 1, Part 3”). This satirizes how throughout the original franchise, there is a very common theme that those who are the heroes of the story like Harry, Ron, or Hermione, tend to always be from Gryffindor, and the villains tend to be from Slytherin. *A Very Potter Sequel* satirizes how Harry is idolized by everyone around him for defeating Voldemort when he was a baby. In *A Very Potter Sequel*, Act 1, Part 2, the characters at Platform 9 ¾ sing a song called “Harry Freakin’ Potter,” which is about how they all love Harry, singing lines like “With that lightning scar, you’re a superstar to us all,” and “If we’re in trouble, we know who to call” (“A Very Potter Sequel, Act 1, Part 2”). At the end of the show, when Harry asks Dumbledore why he cannot stay in the wizarding world where everyone likes him, Dumbledore cuts him off saying everyone, “Worshipped you? Treated you like an idol and not like a little boy?” (“A Very Potter Sequel, Act 2, Part 14”) This line addresses that Harry is being treated like a superhero who will save everyone, when he is an eleven year old, who does not know how to deal with that level of responsibility, and why he should not be around that environment all the time.

Parts of characters that may not receive much attention in the original versions can receive attention in these projects. Ron’s younger sister, Ginny has a crush on Harry Potter throughout the series. Since the original franchise is told primarily from Harry’s perspective, you never get to see how other characters may feel or think about something unless they state otherwise. In *A Very Potter Musical*, Ginny sings a love song about her feelings for Harry, which provides a new perspective on other character’s thoughts and feelings that were not present in the original franchise.

Under the satire and humor, there are genuine moments between characters, and what they say. In *A Very Potter Musical* and *A Very Potter Sequel*, Harry and Ron develop a very strong friendship. They meet in *A Very Potter Sequel*, where they bond over their favorite candy,

Red Vines, which is similar to Twizzlers. While the reason they become friends is ridiculous, the friendship they develop in the two musicals is far from ridiculous, and they would do anything for their best friend. At the end of *A Very Potter Sequel*, Harry visits Dumbledore to say goodbye before leaving Hogwarts for the summer to return to his cruel Aunt, Uncle, and cousin. Harry asks Dumbledore why he can't live in the wizarding world permanently with his friends, instead of in the non-magical world where he has no friends and his family hates him. Dumbledore replies to Harry, saying that he "didn't want you to grow up in a world where all of this wasn't special. Because it's our time away from Hogwarts that makes these seven short years so precious. It's like with Ron and Herman. Sure you're not going to see them for a while now but Harry, you've got these days of summer to remind you of how much you really love them" ("*A Very Potter Sequel*, Act 2, Part 14"). While Harry is sad to leave Hogwarts, Dumbledore reminds him why the time away is important, which is a genuinely sweet message about valuing the time you have and your friendships that would not be expected from a satirical piece.

Some may see these comedic portrayals of these characters, and see it as nothing but a joke that has very little depth. I have found that that is not the case here, since both musicals discussed humanized characters who may seem one sided or shallow. Draco Malfoy, who throughout the story is a selfish jerk who torments Harry, Ron and Hermione, later develops into a character who recognizes his faults. When he is asked by Voldemort to kill Dumbledore, he finds that he is unable to, and later apologizes to Harry, Ron and Hermione for how he acted. He then joins the other Hogwarts students in defeating Voldemort once and for all. In *A Very Potter Sequel*, Draco travels through time to help Harry, Ron, and Hermione save Sirius Black. This causes Draco to become friends with Harry, Ron, and Hermione. This reflects Draco's character development in the original franchise, and also adds to his character in ways that would not be

expected from a musical parody. In *A Very Potter Sequel*, Hermione is frequently made fun of by the other characters. She is ridiculed for her appearance, and for her name, where other characters frequently mispronounce it in extreme ways. On the surface, this seems to be played off as one long joke, but the show diverts these expectations by having Hermione sing a song about how she is confident in herself, and how she wants others to see her for who she is.

Hermione sings, “I’m the smartest person that I’ve ever met. [...] There’s so much I know how to do, so much more than all of you,” and “The only thing I wish I knew was how to make them see the girl that I can be” (“A Very Potter Sequel, Act 1, Part 8”). Hermione is very proud of who she is, and just wants the others to appreciate her abilities. Hermione does not want to change for the others, but wants the others to change how they see her, providing a very complex view into her as a character. This song shows that Hermione is not a punchline for a joke, and is a very complex character. This type of characterization helps prove that these musicals are more than their jokes.

The Bee Movie and the *Harry Potter* franchise are not in the public domain. This means that satire productions described in this essay do not generate a profit (“The Public Domain”). The people who spend time writing, directing, and acting in these productions do this knowing they will not be paid for their work and talent. This makes this form of art very special since these works were not created for monetary gain. These works were created solely to entertain people, or comment on already existing properties. These factors make these productions very special, and noble. If you support creativity, then I would recommend watching a few of these types of productions, and give them the appreciation they deserve. While many may see these shows as nothing more than a joke, there are many aspects that prove they are more than their

comedy. From commentary on the original source's story or characters, to developing complex characters and emotions, these productions are much more than they may seem on the surface.

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