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## Everyone spoofs

Theater's hottest trend sends up 'Jersey Shore,' 'Twilight' and Mayor Emanuel

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Anna Schlegel as Snooki

By Julia Borcherts, For RedEye  
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Ugly friends have feelings too. "Sometimes I wake up in a tub, and sometimes I wake up in a ferret cage," sings one of the grenade girls in "Jersey Shore: The Musical," a spoof show now playing to packed houses in Lakeview.

The show, put on by sketch troupe 4 Days Late at Studio BE, satirizes sex with grenades (aka ugly chicks), Sammi and Ronnie's arguments, The Situation's abs, and plenty of other things we love/hate about the East Coast crew who tans for a living.

The onstage spoof—a parody or satire of an original work—isn't limited to reality TV shows. In fact, there are many pieces of pop culture being spoofed in Chicago right now: superheroes ("You're Not My Captain, America"), gaming ("Boobs and Goombas: A Super Mario Burlesque" and "Fellowship of the Boobs: An LOTR, WoW, D&D, RPG Burlesque") and classic sci-fi ("A Nude Hope: A Star Wars Burlesque"). Local cultural icons are getting lampooned as well—Annoyance Productions is enjoying success with "Oprah! A Comedy! Live Your Best Laugh" and "[Bleep] You, I Love You, Bye: The Rahm Emanuel Story."

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But wait, there's more: Gorilla Tango is producing two more new nerd burlesque shows this year ("Boobs of Khan: A Star Trek Burlesque" and "Areola Jones and the Temple of Boobs") and remounting a fangbangers spoof ("True Twilight: A Glee Club Musical").

So what's with all the spoof shows? Certainly, in rough economic times, theater companies want to choose material likely to fill seats. It seems to be working: While some parody productions have demonstrated more lasting power than others, not one of the theater companies RedEye spoke with can recall a spoof it produced that turned out to be a complete flop.

"People gravitate toward that which they know," said Annoyance Productions artistic director Mick Napier, who has been producing satiric shows since 1987. "And that which they know made fun of is even more fun for them."

Timing seems to be the key to choosing subject matter that connects with audiences.

"I would never put 'The Brady Bunch' up right now; it's kind of waaaaay done. But back then, 20-some years after it was on television, it was time to revisit that," Napier said. "I think it's just a matter of ... where people are and where the universal consciousness is."

Annoyance's "Rahm" show takes quirky facts about our new hizzoner—ballet, anyone?—and incorporates them into larger-than-life fictional scenarios—in this case, giving him a demanding dominatrix of a ballet instructor to show how that shaped his character. But the "Jersey" cast has a different approach.

"Snooki wears a lot of leopard print and whines a lot," said 4 Days Late artistic director Erin Lane. "JWoww wears shirts that show off the ladies, but maintains a rather bully, masculine way of carrying herself. And Sammi mopes around in pajamas and tight dresses with horizontal rips down the back. But we're not doing impressions. We've created characters inspired by the real people, which is why Angelina

is played by a man [Nate Stoner]."

So if spoof shows are here to stay—at least for the foreseeable future—does that mean that we're on a slippery artistic slope to social irrelevance? Not at all, says Lane, who believes that a well-done parody offers two things that we can all use right now: a good time and an opportunity for audience members to start a conversation about what's going on in the world.

"We have something to say, and we feel like we're hitting upon something in society that is palpable at this time," she said. "And I think we can make our point through this medium and make a point about this medium at the same time."

"Plus, everyone knows the show. I watch the show, I love the show, I think it's fantastic. It's like watching a train wreck; you can't look away. I hate myself for it but, you know—you get over it."

JULIA BORCHERTS IS A REDEYE SPECIAL CONTRIBUTOR.