

Tank Commander McHugh inspired by Manilow

GARY: Tank Commander star Greg McHugh has told how watching Barry Manilow inspired his biggest live show and “changed his life”.

Actor and writer McHugh, from Edinburgh, said he struggled to write Gary: Tank Commander Live, which ran at the Hydro in Glasgow in 2016.

He revealed he took inspiration from watching Copacabana singer Manilow command the same stage.

McHugh, 44, told the Restless Natives podcast: “Barry Manilow changed my life, I’m not joking.

“I was writing the Tank Commander show for the Hydro and I couldn’t break through – I couldn’t make the show feel like it was going to work in the Hydro.

“I was recovering from a broken ankle at the time and it was a long road to recovery so I was struggling with that and then struggling with the script.

“The Hydro very kindly said ‘come up and watch whatever you want to go and see’. I was in Glasgow and I thought ‘I don’t know about Barry Manilow but I’ll go and watch it just to be in the space.

“And when I saw him work the room and side to side of that stage, he just inspired me for the Hydro for Gary.

“It just made sense. I was like ‘oh, my script’s too small,

the idea is too small. We need physically to be over there, and then we need physically to be on the other side of the stage. We need a helicopter to bring us in'.

"Watching Barry Manilow and the way he used the space was what totally inspired me."

McHugh shot to fame as cheesy pasta-loving corporal Gary McLintoch of the fictional 104th Royal Tank Regiment of the British Army.

The sitcom ran for three series on the BBC from 2009-12, with spin-offs including an election special and Edinburgh Festival chat show.

But McHugh said the 2016 sell-out run at the Hydro took a toll on his mental health.

McHugh had just become a father, moved house and recovered from a broken ankle, while there was also huge financial pressure to make the run a success.

He said: "After the show I hit a real mental wall. It was meant to be this perfect thing and I was really proud of what we did but it's got such mixed emotions.

"After that show I thought 'this whole industry is too much for me, I've got a young family'. I was beyond knackered, I just didn't want to be there, I didn't want to do stuff.

"It's interesting these highs, these massive highs, they take a lot out of you.

"I'm a very lucky guy and I love what I do. I now love what I do even more, but at that point... afterwards I was like 'oh man, I don't feel right at all'.

"I had to go and see someone and chat about it and it was a real shot across the bows, mental health-wise, because I'd done too much. It took a long time for me to want to do other

stuff after that.”

Gary: Tank Commander became a cult classic sitcom. But McHugh revealed he was advised to drop the character after he was booed off stage during a festival in Inverness.

Leading stand-up Stephen K Amos, who was on the same bill, advised him his comic creation was “going nowhere”.

McHugh said: “I went on and did a bit of a controversial joke at the time. I can’t repeat it. And they started booing and the crowd really joined in and I got booed off. It was early in the set and they took a real absolute Invernesian hatred towards Gary: Tank Commander.

“I couldn’t (recover). I just had to come off it and it was absolutely soul destroying. Stephen K Amos won’t mind me saying this, because I kind of wind him up about it now, but he said to me, ‘look, you’re a decent stand-up, but that character’s going nowhere’.”



Gary McIntock (Gary Tank Commander) PHOTO Alan Simpson