

Daniel Sloss, Leicester Square Theatre review - toxic masculinity examined

Male attitudes in the #MeToo age



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by Veronica Lee



Daniel Sloss's recent shows have dealt with some edgy subject matter *Troy Edige*

Daniel Sloss's latest show is called *X*, to denote his 10th show. The Scottish comic started in comedy as a teenager in 2009 when a lot of his material was knob and wank gags, but in recent years his work has had a progressively edgier feel, including shows that delved into his sister's death from cerebral palsy and the childhood grooming from which he had a lucky escape.

At the top of the show, Sloss tells us he's going to make us feel uncomfortable, but in truth at the start *X* feels more like a comfortable settling-in, with some of the puerile jokes that long-time fans such as myself would expect. Sloss, now 28, is, I'm glad to say, still a thoroughly likeable mix of arrogance and awkwardness.

Men simply have got to do better, he says

He tells us he loves kids – but not in that way! – and the more risqué Jimmy Savile-referencing gags make way for a thoughtful delve into why we still regard women's desire to be parents as more normal than men's, and how recent exposure of scandals has tainted men's relationships with children, or at least society's perception of them. He talks about the kind of sex education he would like to see – energetically acted out – and the differences between men and women, not least in their bathroom habits. Those are subjects covered by many comics, but Sloss spins them with a generous dash of originality. His material on women's sanitary products, meanwhile, deserves kudos not just for coming from a man and having a gentle dig at his own sex, but also for being bloody funny.

Sloss says how, in an age of toxic masculinity and the advent of the #MeToo movement, he is re-examining his attitudes to and behaviour around women. He goes through his mental store room of memories of his past sexual encounters, just to make sure, and along the way schools the men in the audience in how being a fan of women means putting their sexual desires on a par with their own. It's a clever way of bigging yourself up in the bedroom department, but it's so deftly done you forgive Sloss for it.

And then comes what the show has been moving towards, his breakdown of what toxic masculinity means beyond the phrase or the nebulous concept; how it actually plays out in everyday life for women. And Sloss tells a story, personal to him, that explains it in simple but riveting terms. Men simply have got to do better, he says. They – “we” – should speak up when they see their friends, their relatives, their colleagues behaving badly around women. In the hands of a less talented comic this section of the show could sound preachy, or even kill the room. He pulls it off with *élan*.

A couple of Sloss's early stories outstay their welcome and in some material there's an element of him having his cake and eating it, but by the time the show reaches its climax the structure pays off handsomely, and Sloss ends with a masterful callback.

- Daniel Sloss *is touring until 26 January, then from 10 May*