

FIRST NIGHT: COMEDY

Review: Daniel Sloss at the O2 Forum, NW5

A former teen prodigy is starting to match his mastery of the comic moment with a real sense of daring and ambition

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Daniel Sloss returns with his tenth stand-up show in as many years

★★★★☆

Is it his laddish self-assurance that has propelled Daniel Sloss from Edinburgh Fringe success to Netflix specials; to a big tour that will take in long stints in America and Australia and a night at the London Palladium? You might think so at first as the 28-year-old Scottish comic takes to the stage, oozing easy command, swearily offering to give us a show that will make us uncomfortable. He'll go on to justify dark humour as a kind of safe way of defusing the horrible, unacceptable thoughts we all carry inside us.

You question your initial assumptions, though, when he goes on to coo at length over his beloved goddaughter. And when, although he gets laughs out of depicting his brittle banter with his mates, he has fun mocking the strictures of blokeishness. Then confesses to the old-school chauvinism he still has in his bones, even though he has evolved away from consciously agreeing with any of it. Then opens up about his, and by extension other men's, ignorance about tampons and sanitary pads. And he ends with darker material that will — as he warns us it will — suck the laughter out of the room, while also making you look back and see better the thread running through the rest of the show.

Sloss was a teen prodigy: this show, *X*, is his tenth in as many years. And it shows him starting to match his mastery of the comic moment with a real sense of daring and ambition. It's his show about toxic masculinity, a post-Me Too awakening, and it's not entirely free of the urge to preach. Yet not only is he trying to confront his own fallback positions, he is also trying to fuse the swaggering with the vulnerable rather than pretend to be something he's not. He needs to edit himself more harshly: at 100 minutes, this is far too long. Yet it's a bold, fascinating evening.