

MANY years before Daniel Sloss was born the Monty Python team had a comedy sketch about the funniest joke in the world. The idea was the joke was so hilarious that hearing it in full was not survivable. Anyone exposed to it would, within seconds, die laughing.

Well, the joke that stand-up comedian Sloss tells about relationships is certainly not the funniest in the world. Some would dispute that it is a joke at all. But that it is deadly for certain romantic partnerships is, by now, beyond question.

The figures speak for themselves. In the four years since the 28-year-old Scot wrote the routine more than 20,000 people have messaged him to say their relationship did not survive the experience of seeing him perform it. The actual number of romances it has put the kibosh on may be considerably higher.

A further 75 divorces around the world have been filed for, Sloss says, as a result of exposure to his comic treatise on romance – and, to his great amusement, he has even started to be named in divorce papers.

Meanwhile the number of engagements called off because one or more of the parties involved happened to catch his somewhat cynical take on love stands at 65.

It is a tally which might give less self-assured performers pause. He is, after all, supposed to be in the entertainment business.

Repentance, however, is not this confident Fifer's style. Touched by tragedy as a youngster growing

up in the coastal village of East Wemyss, he has become a kind of *enfant terrible* of the comedy scene, getting his first break in the industry long before he had left his teens and, in the last decade, becoming one of the biggest stars on the circuit. Challenging, taboo-smashing (and some would say utterly tasteless) material has become his stock in trade.

Regrets? Not a bit of it. 'I deserve a Nobel Peace Prize,' he jokes.

In all seriousness, Sloss really does believe that his comedy routine, written at just 24 with a fraction of the relationship experience of much of his audience, is a force for good.

'The vast majority of people who have messaged have been positive and it seems that both sides are much happier,' he tells the Mail.

How is it possible, then, that a young stand-up comedian with a taste for the single life could become the scourge of couples going through a shaky patch?

Well, the television exposure has certainly helped.

In contrast to the deadly joke in the Monty Python sketch, where extreme care had to be taken to avoid exposing the public to it, Daniel Sloss's devastating critique on relationships has started streaming on Netflix – which has 137million subscribers around the world. Within days of it debuting there, the number of broken romances doubled, then quadrupled. Finally, when it hit 20,000 last month, Sloss stopped counting.

THE routine about romance forms the second half of an hour-long show called *Jigsaw* which has been available on Netflix since late last year. 'It was never meant to be a break up show,' says Sloss. 'Jigsaw – or as it was called when I was touring it, "So?" – was written as a love letter to single people and clearly it is stimulating people to have awkward but clearly important conversations about their relationships.'

And just what is it in this love letter to singletons which makes so many people with partners long for an uncoupling?

The answer is one clever analogy, a home truth or two and several truckloads of cynicism. 'I strongly recommend that you break up with your partners right now just to feel even a little



Laughs: Daniel Sloss with fellow comic Michael McIntyre in 2010

by Jonathan Brocklebank

bit of what I felt that day,' says Sloss on stage as he recalls the relief of getting out of a destructive relationship.

At another point he asserts that '80 per cent of relationships are horses**t' – and, in one of the more distasteful sections, he encourages those in difficult relationships to imagine how much easier life would be if their partner were to die.

To be sure, Sloss's brand of comedy is not for everyone. In one show in Indianapolis an audience member outraged by Sloss's bellicose atheism pulled out a gun.

And he is accustomed to older audience members walking out of his shows in disgust.

But, along with the offensiveness, there is a substantive side to his routine on relationships. It revolves around the analogy – imparted to Sloss by his father Martyn – that life is like a jigsaw puzzle where the picture on the front of the box is missing.

For Sloss's father, his wife Lesley is the centrepiece of his life's jigsaw puzzle and their many years of blissful togetherness prove she is a perfect fit.

But look at your own relationship, challenges Sloss. Is your partner the perfect fit or are you instead engaged in the folly of trying to force a piece that patently does not fit into the centre of your jigsaw puzzle?

This, claims the young comedian, is the pattern repeated across the globe by 'people in love with the idea of love' who are afraid to be alone because society conditions us to view singletons as losers in love.

The real losers are those who persist in trying to jam a jigsaw piece into a place where it does not fit, argues Sloss, who says he has been happily single for years. 'The worst thing you can do with your life is spend it with the wrong human being,' he lectures from the stage – and for many impressionable romantics who may already be harbouring doubts about their partner, a comedy routine becomes a lesson in life.

Sloss underlines the point with a combination of rhetoric, wisdom and naivety.

'There are 7.5billion people on this planet and you found your soulmate 20 miles from where you live?' he mocks. He counsels,

as anyone versed in pop psychology might, that 'you have to learn to love yourself before you can allow someone else to do it'. And, in a section reeking most strongly of the idealism of youth, he contends there would be no future in a relationship where a partner did not love his many weaknesses as passionately as she did his strengths.

With four more years on the clock since he wrote it, does any of the material embarrass him now?

'No, I stand by what I said – it's just as relevant now... and in fact the thousands of messages I get about it from all over the world mean it is resonating with other people as well.' But, as the catalyst for so many break-ups, has he not even considered the other side of the coin?

SURE, there is truth in his characterisation of imperfect relationships, but what about the other generally acknowledged truths about affairs of the heart – that even good relationships require work, that compromise is essential?

'Yes,' replies Sloss. 'But I am a stand-up comedian writing a comedy show about my perspective on relationships. I started writing *Jigsaw* when I was 24. I'll leave the analysis and counter arguing to people who make their living doing that.'

He also claims, not unreasonably, that: 'If I, a 28-year-old, can break up your relationship with a stand-up routine then your relationship wasn't that strong in the first place.' Besides, there is an argument at least to suggest the biggest loser since the show was picked up by Netflix may be Sloss himself. Such a jaundiced view of relationships can hardly make the prospect of romance any easier, can it?

'Nope. They've been warned... you have to admit, if I end up with a partner one day after all this, they absolutely will know what they are letting themselves in for.'

There is, of course, rather more to Sloss than his infamous comedy routine on relationships – his infamous comedy routine on his late sister Josie who suffered from cerebral palsy, for example,

The comic whose show helped split 20,000 couples

Scots stand-up Daniel Sloss is taking Netflix by storm with his brutally frank routine about love. Just be careful who you watch it with...

and his trenchant insistence that other people do not *get* to be offended by it.

Only his family do, he says, and they are fine with it.

It is in his other Netflix show, *Dark*, that Sloss tells the story of his upbringing as the eldest of four siblings in East Wemyss. When he was nine, seven-year-old Josie died – and jet black humour from the grief processes of the little boy and his family is extracted for the benefit of his audience.

What did his parents think about the inclusion of such personal and sensitive material in a comedy show.

He says only that 'they have been incredibly supportive from day one and continue to be so'.

'Day one' for Sloss's comedy career came in 2007 when his mother, an environmental consultant, met the Glasgow come-

dian Frankie Boyle at a conference. Knowing her son dreamed of a future in stand-up, she asked if her 16-year-old could email him.

The Waid Academy pupil contacted the *Mock the Week* star days later and, perhaps seeing something of himself in him, Boyle offered him work experience.

Within weeks the youngster was shadowing him at the Edinburgh Fringe and the pair even collaborated on material for the TV panel show.

By 17 Sloss was a finalist in the Fringe's competition for new acts *So You Think You're Funny?* and, by the time he was accepted to study history at Dundee University, even his mother was convinced he should hold off for a year to see if he could make a success of stand-up.

He has never looked back. Since 2008 he has written a new show

every year and, now based in Edinburgh, has become an institution at the Fringe.

Still more impressive, perhaps, is the level of Sloss's success outside his native land. Not perhaps since Billy Connolly has a Scottish comedian's act exported so fruitfully beyond British shores.

He is about to come to the end of a sell-out, 30-show run in New York's off-Broadway. Next week, he moves on to Los Angeles, where he will complete four dates, the first of which sold out in a day.

Not that the Americans always saw the funny side. 'Five years ago in Boston, I did a weekend run and across the entire weekend I sold 35 tickets.' Then there was the encounter with the unamused Christian with the gun in Indianapolis.

'I did a joke about there being no God,' says Sloss. 'This guy was

pretty upset. He threatened to let me meet God.'

Success has brought financial rewards, naturally, but he says the real prize is the freedom to go anywhere in the world and have an audience. And besides, there has been little time to spend it.

'My flat needs a lot of work doing and my car has moss growing both in and on it so yes, I hope it will change in the future. Bring on the freshly painted, zero moss alternatives!'

Continuing his quest to challenge audiences, Sloss's latest show, *X*, has at its heart an incident which is no laughing matter at all – a sexual assault on a woman of Sloss's acquaintance.

'It's meant to be tough for men to listen to,' he says. 'X is the best show I have ever done but it also has the hardest content and I am loving the fact that, because peo-



Big stage: Sloss is now a huge success although his controversial material has not appealed to everyone

ple have seen *Dark* and *Jigsaw* already, they are fully prepped for my style of comedy when they come to see X.'

His comedy is not everybody's idea of fun, certainly. Several indignant men jilted by their girlfriends after seeing his show have assured him of that.

Nor, in many people's books, might it compare favourably with Monty Python's joyous sketch about a highly dangerous joke.

Sloss's jokes really are dangerous.

But his audience – many of them millennials as cynical as he – love him for it.

■ Daniel Sloss is performing *X* at the Glasgow Pavilion on May 25, Edinburgh Playhouse on August 15 and Aberdeen Music Hall on October 5. Tickets available at www.danielsloss.com

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