

Arts | COMEDY/MUSIC

'Clearly I burnt myself out there. But I've learned my limits'

Comedian Daniel Sloss on his X tour excess, the joy of fatherhood and the myth of cancel culture

TEDDY JAMIESON

START as you mean to go on. It takes Daniel Sloss all of 90 seconds to start telling me about his "stereotypical mental alcoholic breakdown".

We've barely had a chance to taste our Caffè Nero beverages.

Outside it's a blustery, wet Tuesday evening in November on Edinburgh's South Queensferry Road. Inside, Sloss is transporting me to a hotel suite in Hong Kong.

"I had a day off and I didn't leave the hotel room," he recalls, "and Kai [Sloss's friend and fellow comedian Kai Humphries] came to collect me. And apparently I answered the door butt naked and still steaming drunk. He said, 'You're on stage in an hour.'"

This was during the tour of his show X, Sloss's dark, potent contribution to the #MeToo movement.

Its success was such that he travelled to 40 countries in 2018 and 2019, performing around 300 gigs (rather than the usual 40 or 50). Frankly, he says, that tour was too much.

"Oh man, it was a tough f***** time," he admits. "Clearly I burnt myself out there. But I've learnt the limits of what I am capable of."

Eventually, he put Hong Kong behind him.

He got home, got healthy, learned to



love what he did for a living again.

"And then Covid f***** happened," he points out. "So that went from too much work to no work. On the X tour I was like, 'All I want is a year off with no work.' And then the second I got that I was like, 'Not like this.'"

This is just the half of it. Since the last time we met back in 2017, Sloss has also gone through therapy, got engaged and became a father. His son is now nine months old.

In short, everything has changed in the last five years.

Well, nearly everything. He's still – as you may have noticed – as swearsy as ever. He still sees every interview as a

mini performance (which is why speaking to him is such fun), he still has bullet-proof self-confidence, he still is unafraid of speaking out and to hell with the consequences. And he's still sickeningly young.

Compared to me, at any rate. He's 32 now. The New Yorker once said his "face brings to mind Macaulay Culkin's mugshot". That still seems accurate. But sitting beside me he's quick to point out the grey hairs at his temples.

"It's weird for me to think I'll have been doing this half my life when I'm 34. But I must be the 'feel old yet' meme for so many comedians who just remember prepubescent 17-year-old Bieber haircut me walking backstage at the Stand for the first time. Poor



I answered the door butt naked and steaming drunk to be told I was due on stage in an hour



Vlad McTavish or Susan Calman. They'll see me now with grey in my hair: 'Oh my God I remember him when he was a literal child.'"

Sloss is something of a comedy phenomenon. At the age of 19 he became the youngest comedian to perform a solo show in the West End. That precocious Scottish teenager morphed into a bullish, laddish twentysomething who racked up successful show after successful show, including two Netflix specials, Jigsaw and DARK.

You can also catch X on HBO. Next week his 2019 show Socio is going to be streaming on his own website.

On stage he is a confident, clownish performer (that Macaulay Culkin face is used to great effect), but also someone who wants to push the envelope.

In his show Dark he talked about his sister Josie's cerebral palsy and early death. His 2018 show Jigsaw, about relationships and why sometimes it's better to be alone, led to hundreds of

thousands of break-ups among couples who saw it (team Sloss has now stopped counting).

And in the past he has targeted religion, sex education and, oh yes, hamsters.

His latest show Can't is about "two main things", he says. Firstly, it tackles cancel culture.

BASICALLY, his take on it is that it doesn't exist. "I just haven't seen a comedian be truly, actually cancelled. Jimmy Carr is on tour, Louis CK is on tour. Bill Cosby is not in jail," he points out.

"I get so bored of this myth that you cannot say anything any more. There are places where it is 100 per cent true. There are places where you cannot say anything any more because you'll be beheaded, or you will be stoned to death, or you will be sent to jail or you will be found by an actual mob.

"And then there are other versions of 'you can't say anything any more'. Grown men will cry when people

tweet them that they didn't like their jokes. And they'll be like, 'It's cancel culture gone mad.' No, buddy, this is the exact same thing that happened in comedy clubs. It is now happening online."

Heckling has moved to social media, in other words.

"Free publicity is what it is," he argues about claims of cancel culture. "It's this thing that charlatans do. The easiest way to sell something is to make it seem like there is a limited supply and it's in danger. 'I can't say this?' What can't you f***** say?"

I bring up this summer's cancellation of Jerry Sadowitz's show at the Fringe.

"That was the Pleasance's fault," Sloss argues. "I have seen Jerry live twice in my life and it's a Jerry Sadowitz show. I knew who Jerry Sadowitz was before I went to see Jerry Sadowitz. I knew what to expect."

So did the Pleasance, he suggests. "They knew who he was and what was going to happen and they brought him on because they were happy to get his

Daniel Sloss's new show, *Can't*, tackles the notion that 'you cannot say anything any more'

bar sale. They were happy to get the ticket sale."

Wait a minute, we haven't learned the second thing that *Can't* is about yet, have we? Oh yes, he says, one of his friends told him it's about empathy.

"I'm not sure if that's true," he cautions. "For me it's a bit about me inevitably being a hypocrite because I'm a father and it's impossible not to be a parent and be a hypocrite. It's the show I never wanted to do because I've always said I never wanted to do jokes about being a dad. Now that I am a dad, what else am I going to talk about?"

He has wanted to be a father all his life, Sloss says. "I think if you were to ask one of my therapists they would probably tell you ..."

Hold on Daniel, one of your therapists? "I've got through some," he admits.

"But I think my therapist would say having a sibling die at such a young age probably makes a want for kids, because I've always loved kids."

As a result, he's not touring at the same breakneck pace as before. He worked so hard in his 20s, he says, so that "the second I became a dad I could slam on the brakes".

He's ready for this new slower lifestyle. "I spent my entire 20s just doing an impression of what I thought I should be doing. I was, 'OK, I am a semi-successful comedian. Comedy is the new rock and roll. I'm just going to party like f***. I'm going to take heaps of drugs. I'm going to do dangerous things and have lots and lots of sex because that's what you're meant to do and I'm a Z-list celebrity so I might as well enjoy every single part of this."

"And then on my 30th birthday, my now fiancée was with me. And I knew then that it was her forever and part of my soul went, 'Thank God.'"

In short, he is in love and also loving being a parent. In short, you could argue, Daniel Sloss has become the opposite of what he used to be. Turns out, he can live with that.

Daniel Sloss will perform his new show Can't at the Usher Hall, Edinburgh, on Thursday. He is also playing the Caird Hall, Dundee, on December 17 and Alhambra Theatre, Dunfermline, on January 7. An extra date at the SEC Armadillo, Glasgow has been added on November 11, 2023. For more details and tickets visit <https://danielsloss.com/tour/> His show Socio will be streaming on danielsloss.com from next Friday at 7pm.

Reviews



OLLY MURS
MARRY ME
EMI

The seventh album from The Voice UK

coach and all round nice guy Ollie Murs is an ode to his fiancée, the bodybuilder Amelia Tank.

These 11 tracks see him leaning back into the reggae-tinged pop that has served him so well since his 2011 smash hit Heart Skips A Beat.

While largely unadventurous in scope, there is enough range here to keep things interesting.

From the light-hearted 1980s vibe on Go Ghost to the thumping disco of Best Night Of Your Life, energy levels remain high, although you hope the latter song's posturing lyrics are meant as tongue-in-cheek.

Murs enlisted songwriting duo David Stewart and Jessica Agomba, behind hits for K-pop superstars BTS, for the album and they bring a dynamic feel to proceedings.

I Found Her is perhaps the most on-the-chin of the lot, an out-and-out tribute to his future wife, who he met in 2019. It's sweet if a little overblown.

Marry Me is a mixed bag, full of character and energy but often lacking in musical ideas. Either way, it's sure to be a hit.



NEIL YOUNG
AND CRAZY HORSE

WORLD RECORD
Reprise
Records

The ever prolific Neil Young continues his hot streak of releases, from studio albums to rare recordings from his archive.

This time it's a full-length effort with his long-standing band, produced with Rick Rubin at Shangri-La studios.

Young largely puts his guitar to one side, instead turning to the keyboard and organ for a deeper, looser, more ragged sound.

There is a first-take feel to many of the tracks, as if Crazy Horse are learning their intricacies as they play.

To his credit, Rubin lets this happen and the result is a rawness to Young's vocals as he delivers angry sermons on the environment and other modern social ills.

World Record is a solid collection full of passion, although nothing we haven't seen before from the veteran performer.

ALEX GREEN