

Interviewing Dan Daw: Australian disabled performer and producer on the rise

Proudly queer and disabled dance artist, Dan Daw, talks to Theatre Thoughts about creating his latest work *Exxy* and bringing it home to Australian audiences as part of Sydney Festival 2026.



[Dan Daw](#)'s work [The Dan Daw Show](#) – which premiered in 2021 and has since toured around the world – is a dance and movement piece that explores seeing disabled people as sexy and sexual beings. After being seen as an inspiration his whole life, this work allowed Daw to take back the power by showing the world how he wants to be seen. Joined by able bodied dancer and collaborator **Christopher Owen**, it's a show that gives insight into the sweaty push pull of living with shame while bursting with pride.

After experiencing such great success with *The Dan Daw Show*, we talked about the differences he's noticed in creating *Exxy*. "Each work I've made is very different from the other and I think the main reason for that is because the world is changing at the rate of nots. It's about being someone who lives in the margins and you're trying to get to the middle of it and you've got people telling you that you don't belong here – *Exxy* is essentially exploring that."

He says "the Dan Daw show was saying 'I'm here, I'm feeling sexy, I'm proud of who I am'. So I got to that point – but then I've still got all of this self-doubt surrounding that because of the social landscape we still find ourselves in. And that's where we arrived at *Exxy*."

The Dan Daw Show vs Exxy

The biggest difference between *The Dan Daw Show* and *Exxy* is the scale. “This work has four performers including myself, and they’re extraordinarily talented and beautiful humans who I invited to join me in this work because their physicality is very similar to my own. It felt important to find a way I could soften, and surrounding myself with bodies similar to my own gives me something that I don’t find myself being able to do very often in the world. It’s very rare that I’ll pass another body on the street like mine. We’re essentially there to tell the story of ‘what would it be like if everyone in the world moved like I did’”.

Talking about how *Exxy* came about, Daw says he was sitting in programming meetings where they were searching for large-scale works created by disabled choreographers. When the team couldn’t find any – everyone in the room looked at him, and suggested maybe he create what was missing from the industry at the time. ‘I don’t think I’m ready yet’ was Daw’s first thought. “It was such a visceral response. So I wanted to make the work about that. I thought ‘what if I make the biggest piece in my career about how much I doubt myself or about my imposter syndrome and the really visceral feeling I was experiencing?’ I thought that needs interrogating – so that set us up for the journey to make *Exxy*.”

“The work is a hate speech to the medical model of disability and a love letter to my grandmother”



Exxy by Dan Daw Projects. L-R Joe Brown, Dan Daw, Tiiu Mortley & Sofia Valdiri in EXXY at Battersea Arts Centre © Hugo Glendinni

Differences between UK and Australian creative industry attitudes towards disabled artists

Daw spoke about what it's like being a working class disabled artist and the self doubt that has been a part of his life from when he was young. "In making *Exxy*, I went further back and connected my self doubt to the [medical model](#) of disability. I remembered going to lots of hospital appointments as a kid where they would essentially try to make my body do things it would just never do. I realise now that no matter how I tried, my body just couldn't do the things they were asking it to do." When talking about where the self doubt began, he says "it was through not being able to do the tasks they set me – to a youngster, it made me think 'well if I cant do that, who am I? What am I?'. It kind of planted the seed really young as a kid."

I was interested to hear about the differences Daw's noticed between being a working, disabled artist between Australia and the UK. "I think there is a real difference and I've been trying to wrap my brain around for years. [I was trying to] work out why that's the case. Especially for theatre. There are so many disabled actors with gorgeous things going on in their careers in the UK with major players here in a way that I wish there was in Australia."

In 2024, Daw performed in (and co-directed) Sydney Theatre Company's [Cost of Living](#) which is where I first came across his work. This was the first mainstage production in Australia to have an equal ratio of disabled and non-disabled artists on stage as well as working within the creative team. The work highlights everyone's need for human connection and the importance of following a social model rather than just a medical disability support model.

"I was in Australia last year doing [Cost of Living](#) and I've not heard a whisper from any of the major theatre companies going 'hey that was great, let's do more of that'" he says. "We got 4.5 star reviews, we had a great cast and creative team, and I can't fathom why off the back of that, my phone hasn't been ringing. And I don't say that to get more work because I'm fine on that front, but I find it really interesting that people haven't pricked their ears up in the sense of 'we need to do this more'. There's no kind of ambition there and I'd hate to speculate why. And I don't think we can." Discussing the culture of how disabled creatives are treated in the industry Daw iterates "there's a culture of 'well we've done that now' rather than wanting to keep going because that was really great. Instead they go back to regular programming. It's a shame."

"Our job is literally to make things up. So why is Australia making things up through such a narrow gauge? They're kind of lacking the imagination and not tapping into everything that needs to be tapped into"

Exxy on home soil

Exxy premiered at the Battersea Arts Centre earlier this year and is soon to be performed in the Sydney Opera House as part of the [Sydney Festival](#). We spoke about how performing in these larger arenas will hopefully draw wider audiences than his usual following and what he wants audiences to take away from the work. “In *Exxy* (like in all of my work) I take a good hard look at myself and my situation and who I am in the world and *Exxy* in particular is me taking a moment to reflect on how far we’ve come. So it’s my hope that audiences will take a moment to reflect on how far *they*’ve come on a journey they’ve all been on to get to where they are.” He talks about themes in the piece and how “the work taps into things around resilience and building community and working together and what it is to survive in the world – so it’s a very universal message that the work is sending. I think audiences are going to really connect to resonate with it.”

Dan is bringing *Exxy* home to Australia where it’s set in outback Whyalla in his Nan’s back garden where he spent much of his childhood. “The work is a hate speech to the medical model of disability and a love letter to my grandmother” (who will be coming to see the performance!). To be showing the work of this scale at home where I’m from, in a work that’s talking about where I’m from is really special and means the absolute world to be bringing my story home. I’m so excited and cant wait.”



Dan Daw. © Hugo Glendinni

Originally published at <https://theatrethoughtsaus.online/dan-daw-interview-exxy-sydney-festival/>