

# the spin

SPINAL CORD INJURY BC

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## Street Music

Danny Sloan relies on talent, technology and tenacity to pursue his love of busking







# Busker Dan

Talent, technology and tenacity have allowed SCI BC peer Danny Sloan to become one of Vancouver's most well-known street musicians.

If you ask Danny Sloan about the perks of his workplace, it's location first and foremost.

"I love playing music, whether it's busking or not," says the 49-year-old Vancouver guitar player, singer and songwriter who has been earning part of his living as a street performer for the past ten years. "But if I were to list the things that make busking particularly special, I'd say this: your office window offers 360 degree views of the mountains, False Creek, Vancouver's night lights. Such stunning, beautiful views.

And the sunsets! I can't tell you how many I have seen."

But the stellar views are just part of the story.

"I get multiple memorable moments a week," adds Sloan, a T10 paraplegic. "Most of the time, they revolve around watching kids watch me. I keep timing with my head, as I can't tap my feet, so that sometimes creates a very memorable scenario where the kids watch my head and start bobbing theirs. Then their parents' phones come out. Honestly, I have had so many great moments, I can't even

count them. It's probably the most underrated job I can imagine."

He's quick to point out that, like any job, busking isn't without its challenges.

"I often times finish playing my ass off and no one claps or notices," he says. "It's okay; it's the nature of it, but it teaches you to not be so dependent on others for affirmation. It's also a production-type job. I play four to six hours a day, five days a week, so you get sick of yourself, naturally. You have to do things to motivate yourself while playing; you have to reach deeper inside yourself."

Although he started playing guitar when he was 20, it wasn't until he was injured seven years later that music became vitally important in his life.

"With the changes and extra time that my SCI brought me, at first music was a kind of soother," Sloan told us a few years ago when we published a profile of SCI BC peers who are musicians. "The ball then just kept rolling faster and faster. Songwriting and singing exploded for me in university and, when I was at my lowest point emotionally, I turned to music. It may very well have saved me when I made the conscious decision to dedicate myself to it as much as possible."

Over the years, Sloan has developed his own unique style that incorporates blues, rock, Latin and folk themes. He plays rhythm and lead guitars, both acoustic and electric. With his band Digger Dan & The Dirt Brigade, and via other collaborations, he's played countless gigs in and around Vancouver—and continues to do so. But over the years, he's found himself busking more and more, to the point where it's now become his own version of a regular 9-to-5—it's a never-ending gig as there's always somewhere to play, and someone to play for.

"I came to busk while I was living in the Okanagan and had these melodies, but didn't know how to sing. I felt self-conscious singing at home, but less so outside. So I started with a very simple acoustic guitar set up—some days I wish I went back to that!"

As for the pandemic, Sloan says he's overcome his initial fears and now uses a



common sense approach in order to continue busking—something he believes has become that much more popular given the current lack of more formal and indoor entertainment options.

“At first I was freaked, like most people, and kept indoors. Then I lost my fear, and decided to go out. I just went to two places—Olympic Village and Harbour Green Park. It was kind of weird. It was like an open air pub in Olympic Village. Everyone carrying bags of booze. It didn’t feel a lot different though. I did begin interacting more with people during that time, and found people particularly appreciative because, of course,

live music events were cancelled.”

Wondering how a musician with paraplegia gets himself and his gear to a location and set up? The answer is his rig—a power wheelchair that’s been amazingly outfitted so that he can move a ton of equipment to a location using public transit, set up with virtually no assistance from anyone around him, and play a full day of music. See below for a visual overview of his rig.

“It allows me to be totally independent when I busk,” he says. “Occasionally I get someone to hang the bag on my back, but it’s pretty rare. I have several setups for the power and even the manual wheel-

chair in the event that I have a problem with my chairs.”

He adds that he’s always thinking of ways of improving the efficiency and usability of his rig, and he’s making small adaptations all the time, often with the help of those who helped him create it in the first place.

“I’d like to send out a big thank you to Ed Bell (Bell Tech), Doug Gayton (Vancouver Resource Society), Dave Joseph (CS Mounting Systems), and the Neil Squire Society for helping me with my rig,” he says.

To see and hear Sloan play online, or learn more about him, his rig, and his upcoming gigs, visit [diggerdanmusic.com](http://diggerdanmusic.com) or [instagram.com/digger\\_dan\\_music](https://www.instagram.com/digger_dan_music). ■

## DANNY’S BUSKING RIG



Chest pack for picks, capo, hearing protection, a plastic bag to go over Danny’s controller in the event of rain, a headlamp, spyglass, multitool, wallet, keys, change purse, etc.

Lightweight, made-in-Canada Yorkville EXM Mobile Amp, powered by lithium ion batteries.

Rugged MEC 60 litre duffel bag hooks onto the on the back of Danny’s chair with carabeener and contains cables, effects pedal board with attached sign, music books, tip box, a foldable step stool, and music stand.

Heavy duty Quantum Q6 Edge power wheelchair with larger batteries to carry extra weight. “It’s purple. I call it The Purple People Eater. PPE...my kinda PPE.”

MONO Tick 2.0 bag attached to front of guitar case contains tools, cables, power adapters, extra batteries, a second mic clip, guitar straps, string cleaner, a clip on night light, wind clips, spare strings, and a string winder.

Custom MONO case for two guitars—one acoustic, one electric. “I mix it up between both because electric guitar is easier on my hands and voice as I solo more and sing less than on the acoustic.”

Custom-made steel support bar that wraps around the chair to support guitar case, etc.

- OTHER GADGETS, HACKS AND MODS (NOT SHOWN):**
- Three mounting systems from CS Mounting Systems
  - Custom effects pedal board, made from wood with velcro across it to hold pedals
  - Velcro on the side of amp to hold a variety of items within arm’s reach
  - Velcro on cables to prevent them from hanging/wearing out input connectors
  - Mic stands that hold a variety of things, including a camera to record “the often funny random goings on while busking—children dancing, weird adults, etc.”

Mehrezia Khazri Photo