

Aunty Donna Redefines Australian Comedy

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Australia's comedy landscape is being reshaped by the trio behind Aunty Donna, whose high-energy live performances and digital content have steadily built a devoted following over the past 13 years. Broden Kelly, Zachary Ruane, and Mark Bonanno, alongside their collaborators Sam Lingham, Max Miller, and composer Thomas Zahariou, have expanded their work beyond YouTube sketches into Netflix series, albums, books, podcasts, and production ventures.

Aunty Donna's live shows, known for rapid-fire and absurdist humor, remain their cornerstone. The group is set to embark on the "Dream World Tour," spanning more than 50 dates across Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States throughout 2025. Multiple Australian shows have already sold out, reflecting the group's sustained popularity.

The performers emphasize the importance of audience connection. "We used to have to win over every audience, which was challenging given our style," Ruane said. Bonanno noted a turning point when strangers attended shows because of the group's online content, demonstrating their growing reach. The team now prioritizes creating an environment where audiences can enjoy themselves without pressure, a strategy credited with expanding their fanbase and sustaining engagement.

Aunty Donna's transition to television illustrates the group's adaptability. After two unsuccessful pilots in Australia, Netflix commissioned *Aunty Donna's Big Ol' House of Fun* in 2020, produced by *The Office* actor Ed Helms. The show received critical acclaim and broadened its international following. Subsequent Australian commissions, including *Aunty*

Donna's Coffee Cafe on ABC, allowed the group to maintain domestic visibility, though further seasons have not yet materialized.

Direct engagement with fans has become a defining strategy. Kelly explained that large production budgets can create distance from audiences, whereas online and live interactions foster sustained loyalty. The group has also cultivated a positive, supportive community, avoiding the toxicity often associated with fan spaces.

The Drem tour is expected to be the group's last major live series "for a good while," reflecting the physical demands of touring after more than 15 years of live performance. Individual projects during the hiatus have included Kelly's solo comedy shows, Bonanno's filmmaking ventures, and Ruane's collaboration on *Refused Classification*, a tribute to Australian film critics Margaret Pomeranz and David Stratton.

Looking ahead, Aunty Donna plans to focus on Grouse House, a platform designed to bypass traditional media gatekeepers and support alternative Australian comedy. The initiative works alongside the group's production house, Haven't You Done Well, providing opportunities for emerging comedians such as Demi Larder, Cameron James, and Greg Larson.

"The goal is to create a space where comedians can develop and present ideas without compromise," Bonanno said. Kelly added that Grouse House aims to highlight niche talent in Australia, while Ruane emphasized maintaining high standards for supported projects.

After more than a decade of trial, error, and success, Aunty Donna remains committed to expanding Australia's comedy scene, nurturing new talent, and delivering content that engages audiences both domestically and internationally.