

The Musical Side of MARGARET CHO

by lance perkins

When a community pulls together in the face of adversity to support a great cause, wonderful and beautiful things can happen. One shining example of this in our LGBT community is the success of The True Colors Tour. The brainchild of Cyndi Lauper, in 2007 she enlisted a plethora of talented artists to unite in the fight for human rights with the mission to "Erase Hate." Lauper chose comedian Margaret Cho to emcee the tour and featured many comedic guests, top music icons and up and coming artists of our LGBT community. Two True Colors commemorative albums have since been released.

Recently Margaret Cho, herself has gotten many of the artists from the tour to collaborate on a new CD / DVD including Amanda Palmer from the Dresden Dolls and Girl in a Coma. *The Rage Monthly* caught up with Margaret to talk about this amazing new project and see what she has been involved with since that memorable tour.

Margaret hopes to tour again with True Colors. "I would love to do it if they do it again. It was so great and I'm always hoping to. They are just so fabulous and I love working with Cyndi, I just adore her."

Planning for the new CD/DVD to be released early 2010, Cho talks about working with Amanda Palmer and Girl in a Coma. "Amanda and I have been friends for many years, we've toured together and worked together a lot so we wanted to do the songs together, which is fun. I work with some of the people that Girl in a Coma work with too, so that worked out really well and I am a huge fan of theirs—I love them." When asked if there would be a tour for the new album, Margaret replied, "I don't know. I'm hoping to but I'm not sure. We'll see what happens in the coming year."

After the True Colors tour, Margaret Cho appeared with Amanda Palmer in the Dresden Dolls video for "Shores of California." Palmer said of the experience with Cho, "I've been friends with 'The Cho' for a long time, ever since we found out we were mutual fans of each other. She's wonderful to work with, about as funny as you would imagine, her being Cho and all. I can't wait to see her blossom musically. I found it so inspiring that she wanted to play guitar and just picked it up and DID it. Woman's got ovaries!"

Cho is also planning to have music videos on her new CD / DVD. She explains, "I'm going to make videos for every song. I don't think I'm going to direct them all, although I haven't gotten to that point yet, but every song will have its own video – it will be like a video record. I really like Olivia Newton John and when she put out the album *Physical*, she made a video for every single song, so I want to make my mine like a video album." Of course the songs on new CD will include Cho's notorious brand of humor. Margaret elaborates, "The one I wrote with Grant Lee Phillips is called, "Eat Shit and Die," that's a good one. There's also a song called, "My Puss" that is live from the True Colors Tour with Diana Yanez. There's just a bunch of stuff that I'm putting together. I've been doing music a while and I have incorporated it







(l to r) Jenn Alva and Nina Diaz of Girl in a Coma, Margaret Cho, Amanda Palmer and Phanie Diaz of Girl in a Coma. Photo by Ken Phillips

into my stand-up, but I'm just going to do more of that." Jenn Alva of Girl in a Coma shares her excitement about working with Margaret by saying, "Nina's (Jenn's bandmate) working with Margaret on a song and once she is ready, I will come in and put the bass and the drums to it. Yah, that's going to be cool! She says she's not that good on the guitar, but she is actually a pretty good guitar player! She's got a great voice too and is a lot of fun! I'm sure her new album is going to be a blast!"

Margaret Cho fans got a preview of her musical skills on her recent sold-out "Beautiful Tour" that was also filmed at the Terrace Theatre in Long Beach, California. Cho lovingly sings, "Eat Me Out" for the finale of the show. The stand-up special debuted on SHOWTIME in July and is set to be released on DVD this fall.

Previously, Margaret had a reality sitcom, *The Cho Show* with the talented Selena Luna on VH1. Cho said, "She really makes me laugh so much and she's such a star. I think I'm really good at bonding with and nurturing new talents. I'm really proud of her and my accomplishments with her and how far she's come. I just love her!" Luna and Cho also recently did a live dance and burlesque show called "Sensuous Woman." "I think somehow some of that dance vibe will come into my new CD. Half of the record will be guitar and the other half will be techno. Sort of like Lady Gaga and Britney Spears, and the other half will be like singer / songwriter stuff which is fun."

Margaret is currently living in Atlanta filming a new series, now airing on the Lifetime network titled *Drop Dead Diva*. Cho said, "I play Terri who is the assistant to the lead character in the show, Jane Bingham, who is a lawyer. It's like a legal drama but the premise is a little different. She sort of reincarnated in this different body and she has to learn all this new stuff and I help her out, presenting her with the cases. It's pretty cool, I really love the show." When asked about how this show is different from her first sitcom, *American Girl*, Margaret explains, "It's different because it's not a sitcom, it's a drama and also I'm a supporting character, so I don't have to carry the whole show, which is a lot of fun for me. I can still do stand up

stuff and work on my album so it's not all consuming like my show was before." She continues, "It's kind of a dramedy. I certainly am able to do kind of what I want to, have fun and make the part really funny, which is really cool. It's a little quirky." She continues... "I really look at the character as being an extension of myself. It really is me if I wasn't a stand up comic—if I was, you know, just a person in that job—I'd probably be the same way. So to me it's kind of me playing as myself."

Margaret takes on quite a few women-oriented issues on the show, such as unfair competition and office politics to insecure body issues. "I've always had body issues, but that's a huge part of my life, you know? I've always kind of... I mean, I'll always understand like, the pain of not feeling 'right' in your body and not feeling good enough and um... certainly, the show addresses that in a very wonderful and humane and exciting and funny and dramatic way—which is what made me want to do the project in the first place. You know, they're gonna talk about body issues and the way that women compete with each other in a really great way, and to treat them with such respect and dignity and love and... I really admire the creators. Like the show just talks about how we really are doing a disservice to feminism, and all of us struggle when women try to keep each other down and I think, the show definitely explores that and it explores the way that we value certain kinds of beauty over other kinds and I think that's really an important thing to look at too."

Cho has been awarded many community honors but says she never set out to be an activist. She explains, "No. I never even thought I could do that; really I was just going to be a comedian and never thought about it. I think because I'm unusual, because I made it in America, and because I'm queer and I talk about queer issues, being feminist, being Asian American; all those factors influence when you apply your values to your work and try to talk about your issues. If people want to acknowledge that then that's wonderful! I am very proud of all of the things that I have been able to accomplish."