

Killing Us Softly

AMANDA PALMER'S LATEST SOLO ALBUM BRINGS OUT OUR INNER GOTH. BY KATIE PEOPLES

Amanda Palmer, the XX-chromosomal half of the Boston-based Dresden Dolls, has had a whirlwind year, from her breakout solo album, *Who Killed Amanda Palmer*, to her belly-baring "Leeds United" video, to her collaborative photo book with Neil Gaiman (www.whokilledamandapalmer.com), to her performance in Washington, D.C., on Inauguration Day. And Palmer's time on her "solo" tour has been packed with more musicians and cabaret performances, (with the likes of **curve** favorites Vermillion Lies) than you can shake an Edwardian cane at.

First, how was performing in D.C. on Inauguration Day?

It was magnificent. Every single person in that city that day just felt like they were this little thread in this huge historical tapestry, and you could just feel the electricity in the air everywhere you walked and everywhere you went. It was just awesome.

Your work mixes cabaret, goth, steam punk and Edwardian-era styling. What inspires you to combine all those influences?

That's a very hard question for me to answer, because I don't think I know. I mean, I think if you pulled the dossier on everything in my life that I've absorbed, it might make sense, but it's not like I can point to one thing or another and say, "Well, this is obviously why I wound up this way or obviously why I dress this way." It's such a wide variety of things that make an artist what they are. And I think it's actually boring... if you can nail it down that easily.

You've covered loneliness, mental illness, rape and abortion. How much of that is your personal experience and how much is just musical storytelling?

I think, like all art, it's a combination of truth and fiction, and everything definitely has an emotional truth, and not every detail in every song is real. But I tend to write about the darker things that fascinate me or that confuse me, and since it's art you can take it anywhere you want. But that can get a little sticky and turn into a problem when, you know, people start making assumptions about who and what you are because of what you've written. That's actually been a pain in my ass lately, because the songs of the Dresden Dolls and Amanda Palmer are so dark that [people assume] I must be this really psychotic, fucked up person, and actually it couldn't be further from the truth. It's the songs and the music itself that I think make me a pretty well-balanced person.

You identify as a bisexual woman. Has any-

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one in the music industry tried to exploit that?

No, luckily. There's a lot of things that you have to deal with as a woman, obviously, in our culture and in the music industry, but I dare say I've faced far less backlash as a woman, being bisexual, than I would as a man. No one seems to care and that's the way it should be. Because I don't want people to think of me as "Amanda Palmer, the bisexual." I'd like them to think of me as Amanda Palmer, the performer, or the musician, or whatever role I happen to be in during that moment, unless they're in bed with me. Then they can think of me as Amanda, the bisexual. That's fine. I'll allow that.

You also participated in *Out*'s 100 People of the Year photo shoot with other famous queer women, like Rachel Maddow, Tegan and Sara, and Jane Lynch, but what did you think about Katy Perry being the only woman on the cover of that issue?

You know, it was pretty confusing. I was chatting with Tegan and Sara about that, and she [Perry] has said specifically that she is not bi or gay. I mean, correct me if I'm wrong. And I wouldn't necessarily call the song "I Kissed a Girl" an anthemic call to arms or anything like that. So, I don't know if she's a gay icon. If she is, then she's part of the cultural story. She kind of rubbed me the wrong way—so calculated and so commercial. It's generally not the kind of thing that I'm into.

That's been the complaint in the lesbian community and the bisexual women community, that she is trivializing those things with one song.

Yeah. I mean, it's a catchy pop song. But once I saw the video, I heard the song and I was like, Oh right, that's the single

I've been hearing about, and I did a little research on her, and she seems really smart. She obviously knows what she's doing. But watching the video—this was really terrible, misogynistic soft-core porn. Like, it's really bad. There's nothing empowering about this, it was just really trashy. So that sucked. There's a lot of powerful tools out there that can be misused. There's no obviously right or wrong way to do it, but some things just don't feel quite right, and that song didn't feel quite right. We've been making fun of it on tour and so I should probably fucking shut up about it. [Laughs] It's fun to make fun of people. What are you going to do?

Is there anything you want to say to your lesbian fans?

Just to my lesbian fans? Something that no one else will ever know? Good question. It's a beautiful time to be a woman—don't take it for granted. ■



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