

Amanda f**king Palmer!

Former Dresden Dolls singer Amanda Palmer has had a passionate niche of fans for a decade before she raised \$1.2 million through Kickstarter in 2012 to fund a record. Now with a new book out, the singer reflects on life, marriage, and her favorite street paper vendor.

BY LAURA KELLY
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

When the music industry finally gets its act together, finishes going through its painful digital rebirth and settles on a formula that works for the future, you can bet there'll be a chapter in the text book on Amanda "Fucking" Palmer.

The former Dresden Dolls singer, purveyor of insatiably emotional 'Brechtian punk cabaret' and owner of a pair of eye-popping eyebrows, has had a passionate niche of fans for a decade. But the reason the world sat up and took note is that she, more than anyone before her, worked out a way to turn her tribe into a viable business plan.

When she raised \$1.2 million through Kickstarter to fund her album *Theatre is Evil* in 2012, proclaiming "this is the future of music," the world beyond 'her people' sat up and took notice. She became a poster child of crowdfunding, TED (her talk's had in the region of 10 million views), Twitter (more than 1 million followers) and feminism. Palmer also became a lightning rod for controversy and one of the most hated figures on the Internet.

She talks about all this as she races down the Massachusetts Turnpike from Boston, after visiting her friend while he went through his latest round of chemotherapy, to upstate New York where she is about to launch a work-in-progress musical called *The Bed Show* that she's based on her music.

Palmer says both her philosophy and thick skin goes back to her days as a street performer in Boston. As a human statue called the 8-Foot Bride, she'd busk for cash in Harvard Square and was part of a "street eco-system" that included "buskers and vendors and newspaper hawkers and homeless people."

Prominent among these was the local street paper vendor. "I loved that guy," says Palmer. "He's been selling copies of *Spare Change* newspaper in Harvard Square for 20 years. He sells them operatically. He was often my company as I stood there as a statue."

"He was part of that landscape that was a huge part of my life in my 20s. We all lived in a somewhat different stratosphere. I loved, absolutely loved, those years of my life and feeling like I was really part of the architecture of the city. We all kind of took care of each other."

"That was part of what really informed my philosophy about the music community and what is possible when you build and enter and maintain an ecosystem like that."

Handily for future scholars, Amanda has spent the last year locked away refining her worldview into "The Art of Asking (or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Let People Help)." The memoir-cum-instruction manual explains how she went from street performer to digital pioneer and why asking

for help is "an act of intimacy and trust."

Reading it feels very much like a passionate late night conversation, putting the world to rights with a good friend over bad red wine. But then, as someone who was there when The Dresden Dolls first played the UK, I know what side I'm on.

Does she worry about how critics will react? "Yes, I'm terrified," she admits. "I'm incredibly proud of the book — but I also discuss a lot of really difficult personal things in this book, especially revisiting old controversial traumas and reopening those doors and discussions."

"The idea that I could put this book out into the world and it would simply be ripped to shreds or misunderstood, or waved in the air as yet another example of how I am a flaming narcissist who doesn't understand the real world is a profound fear. But, by that same token, it's why I had to write the book."

Combining the personal and the polemical, while using the author's own life as case study, *The Art of Asking* sits among a new wave of feminist writing that includes Caitlin Moran and Lena Dunham. Like Lena and Caitlin, criticisms of Palmer have been widespread and mostly centred around her supposed self-obsession and her "unexamined privilege," as though her comfortable upbringing precludes her right to take help that is willingly given, or to tackle misogyny when she runs up against it.

Palmer refuses to make life easy for herself. She's mouthy, bolshie and forever

wading into the latest debate — her sympathetic poem for Boston Marathon bomber Dzhokhar Tsarnaev comes to mind. But if you don't believe that much of the criticism is bound up in sexist ideas about how women should behave then you need only look at how differently her husband (author of "Coraline," "American Gods" and "Stardust") Neil Gaiman is treated. Spoiler: it involves significantly fewer death threats.

The intimations that Palmer secured her book deal because of Gaiman — or that he wrote it for her — have been as predictable as they are depressing. Gaiman did have some input, Palmer says, but only to help tell the story of their relationship and how they became the geek world's equivalent of Brangelina.

"We are a bizarre couple of people," she explains. "We work constantly, we travel constantly. We have our ups and downs, we have our relationship troubles. But there is a profound support when it comes to our work. We may be standing there arguing about who was or wasn't supposed to pick

"As Amanda Palmer, the Queen of Too Much Information, I find it really difficult to look at the internet and watch people waxing romantic about Amanda Palmer and Neil Gaiman's perfect marriage. I want to slam my head against the desk."

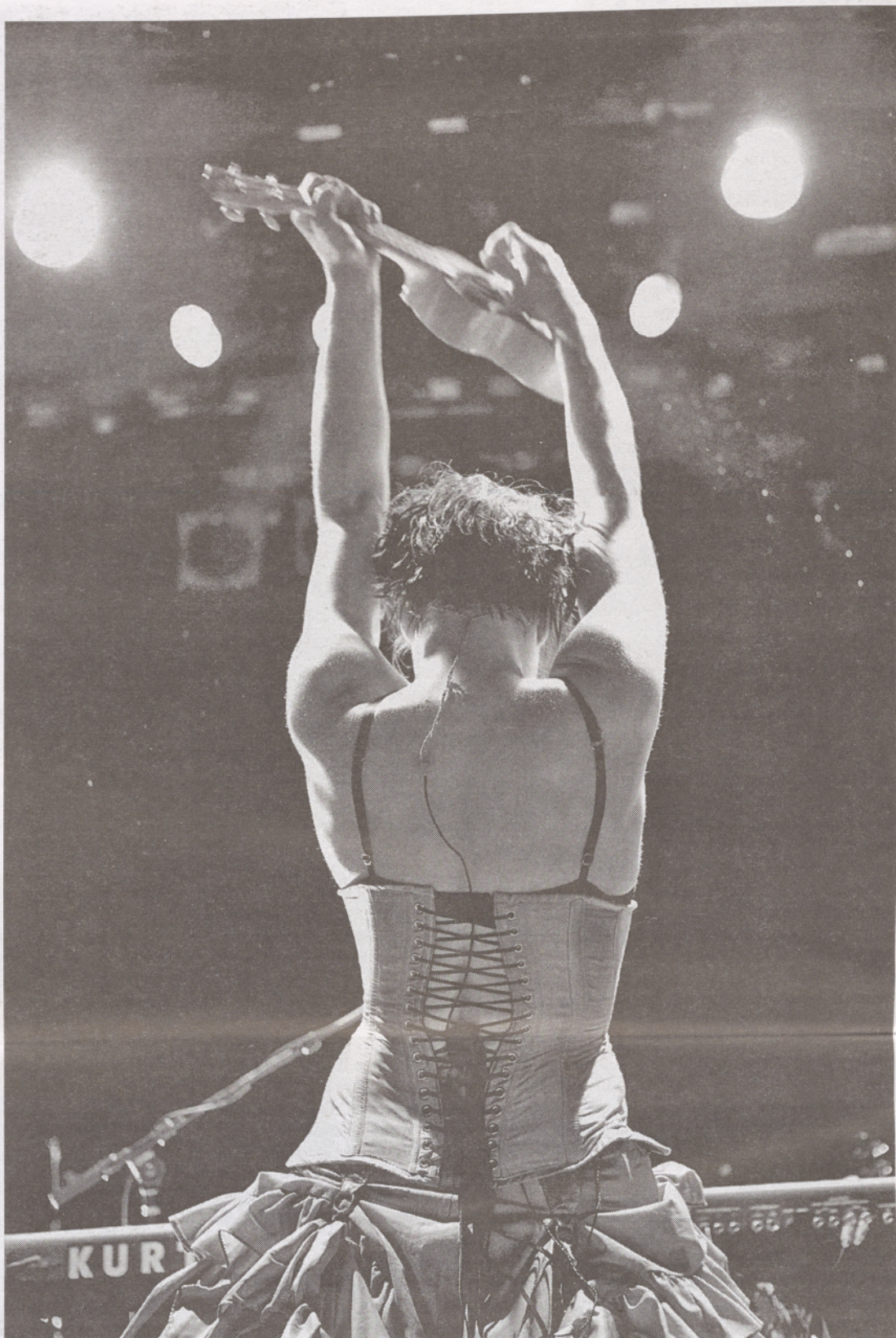


PHOTO COURTESY OF
NATASHA
MOUSTACHE

See PALMER, page 11