



# Unshakable: The Dresden Dolls

By Rob Williams  
Photo By Kyle Cassidy

Cabaret Punk? Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill on a bender at CBGB's? It's hard to nail down just what Boston's Amanda Palmer (piano, vox) and Brian Viglione (drums) sound like, but in a few short years they have risen from coffee house obscurity to play over 100 shows a year and land an opening spot on Nine Inch Nails' current world tour. I sat down with Amanda Palmer between gigs for a lesson in life, love, and playing with dolls.

**RW:** In a BBC-6 interview you stated that it's not your intention to revive Cabaret as an art form, rather that you are 'just a rock band.' Have you seen your music influencing other acts here in the US, your native Boston, or Europe?

**AP:** "Well, to say that we are 'just a rock band' might be stretching it a little bit. That answer is mostly in defense of being wanting to pigeonhole us into the art-rock niche, where we don't really belong. The songs aren't very far out, and for that matter, neither are the performances. They're very digestible, though they are very intense. As far as influencing other bands goes, that's a tricky question. I don't think we've started a wave of Punk Cabaret bands by any stretch of the imagination, but I do see that some local bands in Boston who are a little left of center to begin with are starting to get more of their due, and that may be because of our success. I like to think that we are more inspirational than influential. Sort of like this: 'Look, we're an offbeat band with abnormal instrumentation and we've made it this far by sticking to our aesthetic and musical guns. That means you can too.'"

**RW:** Your music has some very subtle, soft moments. Has the crowd on the Nine Inch Nails tour quieted down enough to let you be heard?

**AP:** "With a tour like Nine Inch Nails we don't let many of those quiet moments leak through into the set, unless we feel that the audience is completely paying attention, sometimes they are, sometimes they're not. One of the beautiful things about this band is that we have so many different types of songs that we could play all balls-out material for an hour or play all ballads and still have a cohesive set for totally different audiences. We write out set lists and don't use them 80% of the time, we just feel out the crowd and play what makes sense. From what I've gath-

ered, the goth/industrial fans love it. There is something primal and visceral about the live show that really speaks to those folks."

**RW:** I noted you added additional dates on the tour to headline without Nine Inch Nails... what made you decide to do this?

**AP:** "We still need to make money on tour and as a support band you're relying mostly on your merchandise sales and off-day shows to pay for your touring expenses. But equally important is that we want to get out there and own the stage every few shows, play our whole set, and let our hair hang down with our real fans. Not to mention we have boatloads of fans who weren't able to score NIN tickets, and we don't really consider the shows with NIN to be the full 'Dolls Experience.'"

**RW:** I understand you'll be going back into the studio after the tour... can we expect to hear new material this time around?

**AP:** "At the NIN shows we're sticking mostly to the album, but we'll be playing lots of new stuff at the off shows. These songs really only get finished as they evolve at the shows and we feel how the audience is reacting to them. It's a very important part of the process before hitting the studio."

**RW:** While your instrumentation is minimal, your music is incredibly complex, like a tango. Do you 'simplify' any of your music for the live show?

**AP:** "We did add extra musicians on the debut record, but we're planning to keep it 'authentic' for the next record and only use piano and drums. You'll find, if you listen, that the piano is able to mimic the basses and guitars from the album with dead accuracy for the most part."

**RW:** What drove you to choose the visual imagery of cabaret to compliment your music?

**AP:** "It drove me. This has always been my style and aesthetic. I've been a vintage nut since I was a little girl. It's just the thing that makes sense to me. Cabaret, the idea, also represents a kind of artist freedom and inhibition to me. I worship the fantasy of the '20s cabaret the way other musicians worship at the altar of Woodstock and the

freedom and risk-taking that it represented."

**RW:** Your music is clever and dark, both moody and ecstatic--the lyrics equally scathing and funny... given all these emotions, what are your favorite songs to perform and why?

**AP:** "My all-time favorite is 'Half Jack.' There are different reasons for loving to play a song live. Some are wonderful songs but very hard to perform or sing... for instance, I don't like playing 'The Jeep Song' live. It's a great tune but the vocal kills me. 'Half Jack' is a song that I can always get into, it always brings me back to myself and reminds me what I'm doing up on stage, sort of like coming home after a long tiring trip or getting into a pair of worn jeans."

**RW:** I've been reading your tour diary, and it's pretty funny--what exactly does a groupie expect to find in your tour bus? What does a Dresden Doll need on tour? I heard you have a thing for chocolate.

**AP:** (Laughs) "What do they expect? I have no idea. If they've been reading my journal, they probably expect to find the truth. Tea, the occasional glass of wine and my yoga mat. There is no snorting coke off stripper's tits, unfortunately. We do get into some great discussions about the meaning of art, though. What will you see? I can't speak for Brian but I can't live without Green Tea, my space pillow, my laptop, Ice Cube the polar bear, and my electric toothbrush. Chocolate is dangerous. We keep it off the bus."

**RW:** It's been a short five years since you met Brian. How has your relationship changed with fame and fortune?

**AP:** "Fame is a miff. Our relationship has only changed because of time. We are closer than ever and are always finding a deeper understanding of the other and their needs. Brian and I are family now. Our love for each other as friends and our love for this band is unshakable."

**Unshakable?** That's exactly how I felt about writing this interview. The Dresden Dolls open for Nine Inch Nails, May 3rd & 4th @ The Fillmore Auditorium. Both shows are sold out, but rumor has it they may play an acoustic set at a nearby South Broadway watering hole. Read Amanda's diary for yourself @ [www.dresdendolls.com](http://www.dresdendolls.com)