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Dresden Dolls bring punk cabaret to the Norva

BY ANGELIQUE MOON
Soundings Staff

Tired of the same old thing? Punk and rock bands with the same hairstyles and fashion sense are everywhere. Many current bands seem to be a carbon copy of something else that was "cool" decades ago.

When people are ready to expand their listening radius and open their minds, they'll run into bands like the Dresden Dolls. Get a whiff of a few of the duo's tunes and it will be like a breath of fresh air. They're definitely not punk. They don't also quite fit into the rock category. It's safe to say the Boston-based duo of Brian Viglione and Amanda Palmer are a genre all their own; and that's fine with them.

Making music solely with Palmer's vocals and piano skills, and Viglione's drumming abilities and affinity for just the right percussion beats, the group calls themselves Brechtian punk cabaret. That term is taken from Bertolt Brecht's idea theater should appeal to spectators' feelings while still providing entertainment.

It's a guarantee listeners haven't heard anything like this group.

The Dresden Dolls will bring their music style to The Norva April 7. With shows just under 90 minutes, listeners should be prepared to become part of the insanity.

"We have our brigade come out and bring crazy performers to shows. It's a shared experience. When Amanda decided to have a play with bands on the same bill, we had living statues and decorations. We

THE
BEAT

WANT TO GO?

- **Who:** Dresden Dolls w/ Jason Weitzky
- **Where:** The Norva, Norfolk
- **When:** April 7, 8 p.m.
- **Cost:** \$12.95/advance, \$15/day of show
- **More information:** 671-8100, www.thenorva.com or www.dresdendolls.com

continued that through the CD release party and special occasions. The general public was enthusiastic. You feel there's more of an exchange between you and your surroundings if you're constantly being stimulated. You'll feel involved," Viglione said during a telephone conversation.

Exciting his voice lesson, the friendly musician explained a Dresden Dolls show is more than just a concert. It's an experience unto its own. A typical show is full of different performers and acts that includes an eclectic mix of people from all shapes, colors and sizes.

He also admitted his vision of music was changed when he met Palmer in 2000.

"It's very true people get caught up in current trends and what kind of jockey or retro movement you're borrowing from next. Amanda's music, I had never heard anything like it," he said. "I saw it as a chance to use my influences. She had theatrical influences. And we incorporated all we are."

Viglione's music background mostly consisted of jazz, rock and punk that was fast and aggressive. Palmer's writing blended well with his, and what they came up with was natural for both of them.

Byline for Dresden Dolls, page C4



Photo courtesy of Roadrunner Records
Amanda Palmer, left, and Brian Viglione are the Dresden Dolls. The Boston-based duo describe their music style as Brechtian punk cabaret. They think outside the box when it comes to rock and bring art and theatrical elements into their live shows. The band will headline at The Norva April 7.

Listening to the Dolls' self-titled album, it would be hard to not want to get involved. Songs like "Coin Operated Boy" feel like theater. The lyrics are smart and insightful, yet cover common topics like love, pain and fear.

Because the duo are so into their music it's not immediately apparent there is no guitar. They cover so much ground musically with various percussion beats and Palmer's driving piano they don't need that added sound.

Palmer's voice is mesmerizing. It's as if she's sharing her heart with audiences and wants them to truly feel a part of what she's singing. That quality is what Viglione thinks keeps audiences coming back.

"I think they feel a deep connection with the sort of honesty and fun that go on at a show," he said. "People just don't go through the motions."

A prime example is the Dolls' shows in England last week with Nine Inch Nails. Although it may seem like an odd mix of music, Viglione said they're willing to take risks like that.

"It was amazing. They're exceptionally friendly people," he said about the Nine Inch Nails audience. "We thought we would encounter hostility from the crowd, but they were attentive and supportive. The second night we came out, we got applause from everyone."

The duo's music is by no means hard, but they do stretch the boundary of what most people think is "normal" music. Viglione said he's very aware of that, and that the band's presence in Boston really seemed to have an effect on people. Bands in that area are now breaking out of the cookie cutter mold of rock.

"There's still just a lot of hard rock bands, but there's a lot of eclectic groups in the lineup this year," Viglione said about Boston's big Rock n' Roll Rumble contest.

"Flutter Effect, we came up with them a few years ago and they've taken the place of us as a weirdo band in Boston," he added with a laugh. "There was a void after we hopped out on tour. We were that crazy band."

Crazy isn't bad, though. It kept the Dresden Dolls from doing the usual club scene. Instead, they looked outside the box and played in galleries, lofts and salons. They also added costumes to their live show: Palmer wears an A-line dress and stripe pants, while Viglione wears pants, a tie and bowler hat.

That may seem like they'd sold out by adding a look to their repertoire, but Viglione explained it actually freed them up more.

"It sort of gave us another channel for our expression. It felt natural," he said.

All their hard work building up their fan base and playing by their own rules has finally paid off. The duo has toured the U.S. and Europe a few times and caught the attention of a major label last year. They signed to Roadrunner Records and will begin working on their second album later this year. Signing to a major label, however, hasn't and won't change who they are, Viglione said.

"They give us creative control, and we've been able to maintain our vision," he said. "It feels more like a partnership than a dictatorship. We've been taking it day by day these days and relishing every wonderful moment. There's so much positive energy. We hope it continues to grow."