

two for the show



ON STAGE AND OFF, DRESDEN DOLLS' CHEMISTRY IS A VOLATILE MIX

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There's a lot to look at inside Amanda Palmer's overstuffed kitchen — plastic chili pepper lights festooned everywhere, stacks of the brand new Dresden Dolls CD, "Yes, Virginia . . .", dried flowers piled on a cutting board near the stove, a fake baby's arm stuck on a post. But as usual, off stage as on, it is Palmer herself who commands the attention of the room.

Draped into a chair next to her, Dresden Dolls foil and co-conspirator, drummer Brian Viglione, Palmer alternately cracks up and gets serious over a cup of hot tea (one of which she's just administered to Viglione, who is nursing a cold). She discusses everything from touring with Nine Inch Nails last year to a reporter's suggestion that the duo incorporate papier-mache instruments into the stage act for those particularly aggressive moments.

To mark the Dolls' headlining homecoming at the Orpheum Theatre tonight, and perhaps capitalize on their uniquely charged onstage chemistry, we stepped out of the way and asked Palmer and Viglione to interview each other about what it's

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Dresden Dolls collaborate with the ART for a world premiere in December. D7

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like to be a Dresden Doll, their rise to local stardom, and the experience of having the punk-cabaret field pretty much to themselves.

PALMER: What's the most frustrating and/or limiting part of being in a duo with a chick instead of in a band with a bunch of guys playing guitars?

VIGLIONE: Well, that's kind of a setup for me to say something totally sexist, but the truth of the matter is that when you get your period it's a total nightmare, and there's no one to turn to. It's a natural part of what goes on and is openly discussed, and it's not a negative reflection on women by any stretch. It just makes for a completely different dynamic, but I'm not trying to make a mountain out of a molehill here. I relate to women better than I do with men, which is why most of my friends are women. There's less pressure to be a guy and go out and party and drink and do and say many things all the time.

PALMER: Emotionally, the differences [between male and female] are easier to understand. But what about musically?

VIGLIONE: Musically, I don't think it matters. I've met guys that play like chicks and chicks that play like guys, and that all comes down to your personal interpretation [of music] as an individual, how much charisma and confidence you have when you play. I don't think that's gender specific. Sometimes you find a really strong individual connection, and other times it's more evenly dispersed throughout the ensemble. [The Dresden Dolls] immediately felt like the most comprehensive band experience I've had, where I could have a great friend and play music that I love.

PALMER: Yeah, [a duo] is a blessing and a curse. It's that chal-

Dresden Dolls reflect on each other



Amanda Palmer calls playing in a duo "a blessing and a curse": "If either of us [screws] up on stage, it's just so obvious."

lenge of having to work with what we've got and really not having anything to hide behind. If either of us [screws] up on stage, it's just so obvious. And if we're having a conflict, we have no choice but to sit down and say, "We've got to sort this out."

VIGLIONE: You've mentioned to me a lot of times that you wish I would write songs and that the pressure to write is solely on you. Would you elaborate on that issue? What is it like working with a guy who only does one specific thing?

PALMER: I think that it's more of a wistfulness rather than an actual regret, because you and I are so copacetic and fit together so well, and I also feel like I take that for granted. I think, realistically, being the only songwriter is a real blessing in disguise, because if you know me — and you do — my ability to collaborate with you would probably really be hampered by my need to control the aesthetic of the band.

SAMPLE THE DRESDEN DOLLS

Check out audio clips at www.boston.com/clips.

VIGLIONE: For me, this collaboration works perfectly and plays to our strengths, because I'm not a songwriter. I'm more of a musical collaborator that completely fits into the jigsaw puzzle of your quirks and personality.

PALMER: I would probably be confused and befuddled if suddenly we did have to divide up songwriting tasks. If all of a sudden I had to start arguing with you about which songs we were going to use and whose parts we were going to use, it would just be over. I don't think we would have made it to the second album. But there's no perfect relationship. You can get married and be madly in love with that person, but there's always going to be times where you say, "I wish you loved dressing in leather but I still completely love you so I'm either going to put my fetish in the closet or go seek it elsewhere and hopefully you'll be OK with that." But you can't

change people into what they're not. . . . I know myself well enough to know that I'm a little too much of a control freak and insecure about my work as it is.

VIGLIONE: A lot of your songs have been written about personal, firsthand experiences with relationships. But are there instances where outside political factors have dictated what comes out?

PALMER: The songs are repositories for everything, and that includes what I read in the paper that morning. But I only care about politics insofar as they're personal, and in that way I would agree with the old adage that all art is political, and that if it exists as art it's political. We keep getting these questions from journalists: "Are these songs about you?" And to me that's a ridiculous question. Of course they're about me. I wrote them. Even if they're about a character or a situation, that's my reflection on the character or situation, so ultimately, they're 100 percent about [me]. . . . It's interesting to think about, because I wrote my whole first batch of songs in a vacuum, and I wrote this second batch of songs mostly after we had an audience and I realized, "OK, people are going to hear this so I have to be careful." Or "People are going to hear this and I get to take risks and ruffle some feathers." But ultimately, as long as we let the songs dictate the direction, we cannot go wrong.

BITS & PIECES. Tonight The WBCN Rumble Finals commence downstairs at the Middle East with Scamper, the Rudds, and The Campaign for Real Time, with special guests Taylor Hawkins and the Coattail Riders. Ex-Guided by Voices honcho Robert Pollard headlines the Paradise. Session Americana is at the Lizard Lounge. Sam Bisbee is at Toad. Tomorrow FluTr Effect headlines T.T. the Bear's. Boris McCutcheon holds a CD-release party at the Lizard Lounge. The Ray Mason Band is at Toad. Sunday Stephen Marley is at the Paradise. Monday The Green Pajamas headline T.T.'s.

Amanda Palmer and Brian Viglione have the punk-cabaret field pretty much to themselves.