

# **The Tim Ferriss Show Transcripts**

## **Episode 67: Amanda Palmer**

### **Show notes and links at [tim.blog/podcast](http://tim.blog/podcast)**

Tim Ferriss: All right. So I'm gonna click "record," and then we're just gonna take a couple of seconds of silence, and then we'll jump right into it.

Hello, boys and girls. This is Tim Ferriss, and welcome to another episode of the Tim Ferriss Show where I deconstruct world-class performers, whether they be billionaire hedge-fund managers, early-stage investors, like Peter Thiel, or celebrities, Arnold Schwarzenegger, musicians, chess prodigies, and so on. They have commonalities, and they do have tools and tricks and routines that you can use.

This episode, I am interviewing Amanda Palmer, who is a musician, but also a social media virtuoso and innovator as a musician, from the standpoint of both music and business models.

Some of you, I'm sure, have seen her hit TED presentation, "The Art of Asking," which has been viewed more than six million times. But her story goes much, much deeper, and we will plumb the depths.

We will talk about, of course, perhaps the Dresden Dolls where she first rose to prominence as one-half of that acclaimed punk cabaret duo, then the journey from solo album to leaving her record label altogether and experimenting with things like Kickstarter. She made international news in 2012 when she raised nearly \$1.2 million preselling her new album, "Theatre is Evil," which went on to debut in the Billboard Top 10. It's one hell of a story.

And she's also known as the social media queen of rock and roll for her constant and disarmingly intimate – and I say disarmingly intimate, such as standing naked in front of a roomful of fans who sign your body with various markers; I'm not kidding – engagement with fans via her blog, Tumblr, Twitter, where she has more than a million followers.

And she has really opened a lot of eyes to, say, direct-to-fan or pay-what-you-want business models for building and running her business. So we get into all of this, and we, of course, dip our toe

in the different tactics and stories from "The Art of Asking," how she manages relationships, and much more.

So let me stop this preamble and allow you to enjoy a very fun conversation I enjoyed immensely with Amanda Palmer. Amanda Fucking Palmer, welcome to the show.

Amanda Palmer: Thank you, Tim Fucking Ferriss. How are fuck you?

Tim Ferriss: I am great. And the only reason I ask – or rather introduce things that way is because I'm been dying to ask you – you have Amanda Fucking Palmer listed as your alias, or "also known as," everywhere I've been able to really try to do homework, including Wikipedia. How did you end up with "Fucking" as an alternate middle name?

Amanda Palmer: I didn't do that. Well, as you know, Wikipedia is not authored by the artist.

Tim Ferriss: Right.

Amanda Palmer: Amanda Fucking Palmer is a joke nickname that Ben Folds gave me while I was working on my first solo album. And the funny thing about the name is it was actually aimed at me as an insult. It was sort of like – it was one of those "take back the night" moments, you know, like, well, like all the words that you're not allowed to say.

Tim Ferriss: Right, yeah, you can say anything on podcast, too. I encourage it.

Amanda Palmer: Right. But, I mean, it was one of those things where Ben had someone who was a friend of a current enemy, who referred to me – every time she referred to me, she referred to me as Amanda Fucking Palmer. And so Ben, as a joke, because we were working on a record in Nashville together for, like, a month, as a joke started calling me AFP. And it just became – and you also, like, you lose your mind in the studio, and everything devolves into toilet humor instantly.

That just became the running studio joke, and that was Ben's pet name for me, and I thought it was funny enough that I started using it myself. And then it just sort of turned into a thing. I don't even know how it turned into a thing, but I think that's a good nickname as an early deliberate – kind of like it lands on you, and then it sticks like glue.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, I love it. So you disarmed the insult by adopting it completely.

Amanda Palmer: Which kind of is my life philosophy.

Tim Ferriss: I love that. I love that.

Amanda Palmer: No, really, just take on the pain, and wear it as a shirt.

Tim Ferriss: I love this. And I'll trade a really quick anecdote, which is I was really bummed out at some point a few years ago when a new book came out, and it got panned by this guy in the New York Times that I don't particularly like. But what I decided to do as retribution –

Amanda Palmer: You steal part of his –

Tim Ferriss: That's exactly what – I took part of it, which was intended to be this over-the-top insult, but out of context, it sounds amazing. It was, like, "Tim Ferriss walks on air and land" or something –

Amanda Palmer: Awesome.

Tim Ferriss: – and, like, dot, dot, dot, and I put it on the –

Amanda Palmer: That's the best.

Tim Ferriss: – I put it on the inside flap of The 4-Hour Chef as a reward.

Amanda Palmer: I have an indie rock friend who got panned in – I don't know if it was the New York – it was the indie rock equivalent of the New York Times, which means it was Pitchfork or something.

And they wrote this scathing no-stars review of his new album, saying, "So-and-so thinks he is the second coming of Christ and the most amazing musical genius to ever walk the face of the planet," and he just removed the beginning of that and stole the rest of the quote and plastered it on his press kit. And I was, like, "You are awesome."

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, the movie poster, dot, dot, dot, amazing what magic can be worked doing things that way.

Amanda Palmer: Exactly.

Tim Ferriss: So I have a confession, and that is your book, so, The Art of Asking, I got halfway through it, and the reason I haven't read the

second half is because I was so inspired by the book that I put it down to start asking people around me for all of the help that I'd been too ashamed or embarrassed to ask for. And, as a result, I have fixed my –

Amanda Palmer: You had no more time to read.

Tim Ferriss: I have no more time to read, so busy asking. And I have ended up –

Amanda Palmer: That's pretty wonderful.

Tim Ferriss: – fixing my health after a severe bout with Lyme disease last year and have just had these multiple quantum leaps forward, so I wanted to thank you for putting the book out there, first of all.

Amanda Palmer: Oh, that's wonderful. I'm so happy to hear that actually. I'd rather hear that than hear that you finished my book and loved it, but it didn't change anything in your life. So that makes me really happy.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, I was so just completely smitten with the book. And the subtitle, I think, is really important, so correct me if I get this wrong, but I believe it's "How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Let People Help."

And I wanted to ask you – and, of course, we're gonna come back to some of your background and everything else – but why did you – a book is a hard thing. I mean, a lot of things in life are hard, but books are a challenge. Why did you decide to put this book together and put it out there?

Amanda Palmer: I don't think I would have put this book together if I hadn't been offered a totally, "We will make this easy for you" book deal because I'm one of those people who's always got 19 projects on the backburner. And one of them was, "Someday, I should write a book. I'll write a book someday when I have time, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha."

Like, someone who tours 250 days a year and has millions of unrecorded songs and all sorts of bizarro side projects, you know, a book always seemed like a great thing in theory, and in practice, just a huge pain in the ass and not something that I ever really imagined fitting into my life as a runner-arounder because I know enough about book writing to know that it's not something I could

tap out on the fly on flights from one place to the other. I was really gonna have to press pause on my life as I knew it.

And, after I started working on my TED talk, I'd had the vague idea of writing a book. Sort of the first time I really thought about it, other than the basic, narcissistic, "I'll write my memoir someday," which I think every artist who lives kind of an off-kilter, bizarre life with interesting stories probably has the thought someday to just write the stories down, but the first time I really thought about writing a book was actually after my experience street-performing because street-performing, in my particular experience with street-performing, was so unique. And I didn't know of anybody out there who had written about what it was like to be a living statue.

And then, later in my life with crowd-funding and the internet and really seeing the connections, the strange but philosophical connections between living-statue work and stripping and starting a band and trusting fans and asking for money, I was, like, all of these things are really related. They're all kind of part of one philosophy and one story, and that would make a great book.

And it's unlike anything else I know. It's not really a book about music. It's not really a book about being a street performer. It's kind of a book about an approach to life that is about abundance and trust, instead of about scarcity and fear in the frame of art and performance art, but also, as I found as I kept carving out the book, it was also about relationships and risk and kind of the big themes.

And, once I did the TED talk, while I was working on the TED talk, I worked together with my really good friend, Jamy Ian Swiss, who's this fantastic magician and essayist. And he sort of fell into my lap as my TED coach because I called him one night, and I knew that he had given talks at conferences. So he was one of the people in my life that I could tap as, "You understand TED. You understand conferences. I can't ask most of my friends about this. What makes a good talk? Could I read you what I've written?"

And what I thought was gonna be a 20-minute phone call turned into a three-hour phone call with Jamy giving me all sorts of advice and all sorts of opinions and all sorts of, you know, calling me on my bullshit. And by the end of that three hours, I was, like, "Jamy, you're gonna be my wingman on this TED talk. If you help me do this, I will love you forever." And he was, like, "I'm here for you. I will help you with this TED talk."

So I would say he's sort of like the hidden hero, man behind the curtain of my TED talk because he was the guy on the phone with me every other day for an hour while I read him draft after draft after draft of my TED talk.

And there's a reason my TED talk wound up so good. I didn't just knock it out and read it. I worked – slaved on that fucker for two months. Really, it was like constructing a perfect little monologue with no fat and just the right cadence. And I really, really, really – I really worked hard on it.

But one of the things that happened, as I added little anecdotes and added stories, and we cut them, and we refined and honed and decided that this was a little too off-topic, is we came up with the phrase, "It'll go in the book. You don't have to put it in the talk, Amanda. You only have 12 minutes. That'll go in your book someday."

And so that was when the imaginary book took shape, which is, for this 12-minute TED talk, I was trying to condense my entire life philosophy into a teeny amount of time, but there were so many other stories that were relevant. And I comforted myself with the idea that, if the TED talk resonated, I would someday expand it all into a talk.

And then I didn't have to worry about that at all because the minute the TED talk went online and went viral, my phone rang off the hook with book deals. And I just decided I would take one, and then I would just go down the rabbit hole and figure out how to write a book.

Tim Ferriss: The TED talk is fantastic. And for people listening, I'll put the TED talk in the show notes, so you guys can check that out, as well. It's a great introduction to the then expanded narrative and collection of stories and lessons that is the book, of course. And I'm sure when you wrote the book, you were, like, "Well, it doesn't have to all go in the book. This'll be the online extras," right?

Amanda Palmer: Right.

Tim Ferriss: But the mention of TED and the Amanda Whisperer, your friend who was helping you with the presentation –

Amanda Palmer: I call him the TED doula and then the book doula.

Tim Ferriss: Exactly. The TED doula, I'd be very interested to hear what some of the best feedback or changes were that he gave to you for the TED talk itself.

Amanda Palmer: Well, a lot of it was not unlike writing a book. And, since you've written, I'm sure you know this quandary, which is you get so interested in your topic that you keep wanting to expand and expound. And the true beauty of making a good TED talk or a good book is that you edit down, and you distill.

And so the key with the TED talk was I kept wanting to add. Like, "Oh, my God, and then there's this, and how could I not talk about this? And there was this amazing thing that happened." And our goal was to just, literally using an economy of language, I would write a sentence and write an anecdote and speak it. I would be on Skype with Jamy.

And it would take me a minute and a half to tell this story about couch-surfing with this girl and her family down in Florida. And then the goal was, how do we take this story that took a minute and a half to tell, and I thought I had got it as far down economically as possible, and then take that minute and a half story and condense it into 20 seconds? Literally, what words, what single words could we use to convey that whole sentence?

And it was like songwriting or poetry where, instead of saying and expounding and going off on tangents, you just pick that one perfect sentence that sums up everything you felt. And, in that sense, there was a real artistry behind it.

And I found, watching other TED talks and looking at other TED talks, they have that in common, which was an economy of emotion and of expression. They didn't need to explain this and that and the other thing. With a single anecdote or a single detail, they emotionally take you right there, and they don't need to say anymore, and they can get on to the next thing.

Tim Ferriss: It brings to mind a couple of things. The first was an exercise that a writing professor of mine back in college, named John McPhee, used to have us do, which would be to take something like the Gettysburg Address and have to pull out five lines or six lines, which was always so torturous, but separately was told very early on – I think it was related to teaching, as opposed to writing, although I think the two are very similar when you're talking about non-fiction – and that was that most teaching fails from too much

information, not too little. And I think the TED presentation's very similar.

Amanda Palmer: Sure. I think you could say that about art.

Tim Ferriss: Sure, yeah.

Amanda Palmer: The best art is about economy. And even if your art is durational performance art, even within that, there can be an economy because the artist who's just trying to do everything winds up unable to express whatever it is that's of importance.

Tim Ferriss: Durational performance art. What would be an example of durational performance art?

Amanda Palmer: Marina Abramović sitting in a MOMA for three months.

Tim Ferriss: Got it. That's a long duration.

Amanda Palmer: That's durational performance art. But, if you look at Marina Abramović sitting in a MOMA for three months, there was an economy about what she did. She didn't wear a different costume every day and also try to do 90 other things at once. It was her and a chair and another person, and there was a real economy in that.

So I've definitely had a battle all my life with economy. I'm a maximalist. And I have driven collaborators and managers and boyfriends and girlfriends and pretty much everybody in my life crazy because I always wanna add more, and I wanna do more. And, oh, my God, if we're gonna do this, we could do this on top of it, and we could do this, too, and let's add more dancing girls, and let's add more triangle, more cowbell, all the things.

And, as an artist – and you see this in the wisdom of older artists as they talk about their processes – your life goes on, and you pare down, and you keep paring down to the point where you realize that it wasn't the extra performance artists that made your show good. It was the ability to pare down to the impactful detail. And that's just true in art, as in life, for sure.

Tim Ferriss: And how have you become – do you feel like you have become better at editing and distilling in your art? And, if so, what has been the most helpful in getting you to that point?

Amanda Palmer: That's a really good question because it also really depends on the form. Songwriting is a good example.



Tim Ferriss: Sure, songwriting.

Amanda Palmer: And even recording songs is a good example. I used to think – here's a really specific but a really good lesson – I used to think, and one would think, that if you were just recording a single song – let's say it's a really aggressive piano song, and it's just piano and vocals – you would think that layering and overdubbing more piano would make for a stronger sound.

So, instead of just having one single piano playing a baseline on the right hand and your vocal on top of it, you record the piano ten times over, and so you've basically got the entire range of the piano on the recording, and you crank everything up to 11.

And the fascinating thing about that is – and incredibly poetic, as related to the rest of art and life – is the strongest, loudest sound you can get from a piano is playing two notes, a low C and a middle E. And banging the shit out of those two notes is way more impactful and striking and strong and aggressive than overdubbing 27 notes on top of that.

And AC/DC is kind of the perfect example. Those guitar riffs and those single notes, they burn themselves into your brain, and they don't need a whole lot of extra. It's the sheer epic simplicity of the minimal.

And I've found that this is true pretty much everywhere in life, especially when it comes – I mean, you were mentioning it with teaching – it's something that I have been learning in my relationships from Day 1 and still struggle with to this day and found myself even doing in the last 48 hours of my relationship with Neil, which is learning how to say less, and especially for someone like me, who's a motor-mouth and wants to be constantly communicating and engaged, the ability to have a thought and not just blurt it out and to have something that you think is interesting that you wanna share or to have an observation or a criticism and not say it and deliberate and consider, "Is this actually useful? Is this actually compassionate? Is this actually necessary to the conversation, or does saying less actually leave more space for more love?"

And I've found the best advice from my mentor, who I also talk about in the book, and funny enough, it's pretty economical advice, as well. His life advice to me, when I'm going into a conflict or a

difficult situation with my parents or an argument with Neil, his advice is, "Say less." That's it. Just say less.

Tim Ferriss: It's such good advice.

Amanda Palmer: It's great advice.

Tim Ferriss: Great advice for emails, too, oh, yeah.

Amanda Palmer: And on that, we should just skip the next 60 minutes of the podcast and leave it at that.

Tim Ferriss: Right. Gonna play two notes on a piano for the next 45 minutes. Please stand by.

I definitely wanna come back to your relationship briefly a little further down the road. But I'd love to rewind the clock a little bit and talk about the Eight-Foot Bride. Could you give people a little bit of context, for those who don't know your story, just a little bit of context on the Eight-Foot Bride? And the question I'd like to then add on that is just what your main lessons learned were from that experience that have translated to all of the other endeavors and experiments that you've had.

Amanda Palmer: Okay. Well, the basic background is that I was a living statue, and most people know what that is because they've seen it, if they've traveled to any metropolis.

But, if you don't know what a living statue is, it's a street performer, usually monochromatically colored, all white, all silver, or all blue, face painted, gloves. And, sometimes, living statues wear sunglasses and wigs. And my least favorite living statues wear masks because I think that's cheating because there's a real beauty in watching somebody's frozen face. That's a real part of the talent.

But, basically, I graduated college. I knew I wanted to be a performer, a musician. I knew I was either gonna go into music or theatre, but my main passion was songwriting. And I was working my collection of shitty jobs. My main shitty job being – and it was a great shitty job, just in case my old boss is listening, because I love him – I worked in a fantastic little ice cream shop in Harvard Square that was called Toscanini's, and we scooped ice cream and made coffee for the denizens of Harvard Square and Harvard.

And I had seen street performers all my life, and I remember mentally noting every time I saw a living statue, "Who does that, and who gives you permission to do that? And I could do that. Anyone could clearly do that. You just need to paint yourself and get on a box."

And so, one day, I just did it. I painted myself white and put on a bridal gown and a veil and some gloves, and I stood on a box. I was terrified. And I put a hat at my feet, and I gave out flowers. And that first time I got up and did it was a real – it was sort of one of those life breakthrough moments where I felt so fraudulent. I was, like, no one's giving me permission to do this. No one's taught me how to do this. I'm really faking this. I mean, I assume you just stand here. But I don't remember how. Are there rules for being a statue? And I just did it, and it was delightful.

And I really – I had this moment of feeling incredible freedom, just taking that \$17.00 I made that day and just going out and buying a sandwich and a packet of cigarettes and going, "Oh, my God, this money is just mine. People just gave it to me." It was such a – like a eureka moment, after only having been given money in the form of a paycheck from a boss, to just have people giving you cold, hard cash for performing in the street was a really beautiful feeling.

And I never went back after that, although being a living statue in Boston is a clearly seasonal occupation. So I would sort of – I would go back to café work in the winters, or I would travel and perform the Eight-Foot Bride in warmer, hospitable climes, like I went down to Key West, and I went to LA. I tried my hand at Vegas. I went to Australia one winter. But I would say I made about 95 percent of my living statue income right in the middle of Harvard Square over the course of four or five years.

And it wasn't until I looked back after years of having transferred into the music and rocking and rolling, touring performer career that I realized how much street life and busking life had shaped my approach to everything. My life philosophy was not an academic approach. It was not a music business approach. It was a busking approach, which is you have to be good at what you do, and then you rely on the good will of others. And that's the way busking works. Nobody buys a ticket. You do your thing, and you have to captivate a crowd, and then you pass your hat.

Tim Ferriss:                   What separates a good living statue from a great living statue?

Amanda Palmer: Oh, I think there's two answers to that question. I have seen some shitty fucking living statues in my day. I have seen some people who have put the absolute minimal amount of care and effort into their costumes and makeup. And it's always really depressing to me to see a bad living statue, someone who's just wearing a raincoat and a bad mask and isn't even really standing still and is barely interacting with the people who are giving the money.

And, regardless, everyone is always curious about a living statue, even a bad living statue. And children's curiosity is unrelenting. So they can't really tell the difference between an immaculate living statue, who spent \$2,000.00 on a beautiful latex costume that looks completely realistic, or someone who's just wearing a shitty raincoat and a mask. All they know is that there's something happening, and it might be magic. And if they put their dollar in, something magical is gonna happen.

But I have seen some really incredible living statues with just glorious costumes, and they're just killing it in the aesthetics department, but they don't love you. And my favorite living statues are the ones who have some pathos and who actually connect with you.

And that was the approach I took to the Eight-Foot Bride, which is, as a performer hungry for love and connection, I treated every single patron as like a ten-second love affair. And I just – I enjoyed so deeply the act of looking into a stranger's eyes and thanking them for giving me a quarter, that it was a real part of the job, but also means that I'm really disappointed if I go up to a living statue, and they're, like, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, you gave me a dollar. Now, fuck off." It always just makes me sad.

Tim Ferriss: It feels like a cheap trick or something, yeah.

Amanda Palmer: Yeah.

Tim Ferriss: You mentioned eye contact, and you have very striking eye contact and certainly used that in your TED talk, and I've seen it in other photographs and videos. What advice would you give – I think that most people avoid excessive eye contact – but what advice would you give to average Joe or Jane out there about using eye contact to connect with people? What are your thoughts on that?

Amanda Palmer: Oh, I have a lot of thoughts on that. I mean, I think eye contact is very hard for a lot of us because it's so threatening. And the more disconnected we are and the more time we spend looking into our

devices and barely looking at each other, the more threatening it is to keep and hold somebody's gaze.

But, God, is it powerful. I mean, looking somebody in the eye, unthreateningly, unaggressively, I really feel like it is often the antidote for what is ailing us because we feel so connected superficially in so many ways, and perhaps we are, through our Twitter feeds, through our Facebook feeds, through our many events, through our doing this and that and running around, but if we're able to do all that, and we're not able to look at and see each other, it all can feel really superficial.

And I had some really life-changing experiences in yoga retreats particularly, and I read about one of them in the book. One of the first teacher training yoga retreats I went on, I was probably 26, 27, and we did this exercise where – there was maybe 50 of us in the group total, and we did this exercise where we got into groups of, like, ten, and we took turns just standing in a line facing each other. And it was basically an exercise in presence.

And the goal was just to stand there and face another person, maybe about a foot apart, eye to eye, just gazing into each other's eyes and not reacting, not smiling, not giggling, not rolling our eyes, not saying, "Oh, doesn't this feel kind of uncomfortable and silly," just really just holding the gaze.

And what was so incredible to me about that – and this was after I had clocked my five years as a living statue. So I, of course, am just loving this. I'm soaking this in. This is like crack cocaine to me basically. I'm, like, yeah, I get to just look in someone's eyes for three minutes, and then I get to look in someone else's eyes. And I just – to me, the juicy intimacy of that felt like a warm bath.

But, for six or seven people in that group of 50, they burst out sobbing. They could not handle actually – and we did a lot of talking and kind of breaking down postmortem of this experience afterwards.

And it wasn't even that they felt overwhelmed by having to look at someone else. They felt overwhelmed by actually feeling seen by another person and the emotional, overwhelming experience of feeling really just intimately seen by another, having spent possibly an entire lifetime not being seen by their parents, not being seen by their peers, not being seen by the people around them and maybe avoiding it for reasons of just fear, fear of intimacy, fear of being found out, fear of whatever it was.

And I remember looking at this – and these weren't fucked-up people. These were your average, totally functional adults in their 30s with jobs and kids and the whole nine. And I remember thinking, this isn't just them. This is really all of us. We do not connect with each other at nearly the level we could. And though we live in close proximity, and though we sit on the subway with each other, and though we have a wide variety of things connecting us and making us sort of pseudo-intimate, a lot of us are really alone. And that was a real eye-opener. Excuse the pun.

Tim Ferriss: No, I think this is a really profound point that you're making, and the pseudo-intimacy, I think, is a great way to put it. I tend to unexpectedly at times brush – just enter a zone of sort of profound loneliness.

And the irony in some ways, I think, is that, of course, you have an incredibly loyal fan base, and I'm very fortunate to have a really fantastic group of readers and listeners. And I find it so easy to love them, to love my friends, to love my family. I find it very difficult sometimes to love myself. It seems almost self-indulgent, and that's some kind of weird – I'm sure there's plenty of analysis that could be done on that.

But one of the most therapeutic – we were talking about – you had mentioned yoga before we got started and also again here – one of the most therapeutic, unexpectedly therapeutic experiences I've had in the last six months is starting to play with something called acro-yoga –

Amanda Palmer: Yeah.

Tim Ferriss: – where you're doing acrobatic yoga, and there's a trust element and a vulnerability element of balancing each other upside down and staring. You have to maintain points of eye contact, and it's a very visceral, primal need that is being satisfied. Anyway, I don't want to ramble on, but it's been a really profound realization for me that I can't think myself out of this loneliness.

Amanda Palmer: No, yeah, I mean, I think we think that we can think a lot of things. We can think our way out of a relationship problem. We can think our way out of a sexual problem. We can think our way out of a work problem. And, to me, yoga and also meditation and really trying to have a constant level of body awareness, it's so important because you really can get lost in your head.

And if you demand that your head and your body are disconnected, and you really can just, like, as long as you sort of feed your body and drag it around as a container for your mind, everything's fine, the whole system starts to fall apart.

And I see that more and more, especially as I get older. If I neglect my body, and I neglect actual physical contact with other people for too long because it's just a pain in the ass, because I just don't have time, because I'm too busy this week to get to yoga, because of da, da, da, da, it really – the whole building starts to feel like it's built on sand. Shit just falls down.

And there's still something in us and in me because we are taught to be so rational and so head-oriented that you kind of don't wanna believe that it's true and that you can get away with it, but you can't. It all eventually comes back to roost.

Tim Ferriss: You mentioned meditation. I'd love to dig into that for a second. And, as I understand it, you've also written about meditation before. There's one piece, when I was doing a bit of research, "Melody vs. Meditation." What does your meditation practice look like, and what are the benefits that you've seen?

Amanda Palmer: Well, I have this special room in my house that's covered with candles and lots of statues, and I burn six sticks of incense, and I drink a special stick tea, and then I float into the air, and it's really rad.

Tim Ferriss: When can I come to your house?

Amanda Palmer: That's all bullshit.

Tim Ferriss: I had a feeling.

Amanda Palmer: What I usually do, if I'm being good, is first thing in the morning, I will just use my phone as a timer, and I will sit on whatever I can grab. If I don't have a meditation cushion around, I'll grab a bed pillow or a towel, and I will sit cross-legged somewhere. If I'm in a teeny hotel or a friend's house, sometimes, it's in the bathroom or on the bed. And I try to meditate for ten minutes if it's a crazy busy day and a half an hour if I can carve out the time. And I definitely notice a huge difference in my day if I actually make the time to do that.

And I was brought into the world of meditation in my late teens, early 20s and just basic Vipassana meditation, nothing fancy, no

crazy mantras, no gods or deities, just basically sitting on the earth as a human being and paying attention to your breath and your body and letting thoughts come and go, but really trying not to be attached to the drama that comes visiting.

And I wish I could tell you I was great at it. I've been meditating for 20 years, and I still feel like a shitty meditator, which I think that's part of the journey is realizing that it's not like you meditate for a year, and all of a sudden, you're enlightened, and you can sit and think about nothing for a half an hour.

But what you do learn is that just the act of watching where your brain is obsessing for a half an hour. And if my timer goes off after a half an hour of meditating, and I realize that all I have been doing is constructing an argument in my head with a person in my life or thinking about merch designs, and I somehow lost the plot two minutes into my meditation and flew off, that just tells me where my head is at. It tells me that I'm stressed out. It tells me that that's what's preoccupying me.

And on a good day, I think about constructing an argument, I think about my list of things to do, I think about what I'm about to eat when I get up, and those thoughts come, but I'm able to let them go five or ten seconds later and say, like, "Hi, okay, I see you, yeah, you're here. Okay. Now, you're gone. Let's go back to paying attention to our breath." And then five seconds later, it's another thought, and you say hello to it, and you say goodbye to it. And, to me, that's a much more, quote, unquote, productive meditation practice.

But the real productive meditation practice is just that you sit your ass down, and you actually do it, and you watch what happens. That is the practice. And it's never easy, but you do get a perspective onto the inside of your head and your thought process that I think is essential if you're going to progress because you get to know yourself. You get to watch the little tricks that your brain is playing and the places where you are obsessive and getting stuck.

And it has been in moments of meditation and, honestly, actually, more moments in yoga, often just like at the end of a yoga class, lying on a mat on the floor, watching my thoughts enough that I'm not just caught in them, where I have had the most insightful – I wanna say the most insightful insights – but I've had the most insightful moments of my life, looking at my thoughts and going, "Are you serious, Amanda? Like, you actually really just spent



five minutes coming up with a plan that actually you know is really destructive, and yet, your brain was having a field day with it?"

And just the act of being able to stand back and saying, "Wow, you're thinking this. You've actually been thinking this way all your life. This is not necessarily good. Maybe we should find another way out of this problem," or whatever. And you don't get insights like that unless you give yourself some perspective because, if you're just spending your life going and going and going and being trapped in the thoughts and not giving yourself a different point of view, you just – you stay in the crazy.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, I think developing the skill as the observer is, I've found, just so critical to be able to step out of the rapids onto the shore and just observe it for a while, as opposed to being sort of trapped like a monkey in the slipstream of thought, getting washed over the rocks.

And, as you put it, I think a lot of people have this pass/fail mentality with meditation where, if they can't think of a candle flame for 20 minutes straight, they're a failure, and they quit.

Amanda Palmer: Yeah.

Tim Ferriss: And I tell people all the time, I say, "Look, almost without fail, every time I sit down to meditate, a portion of it will be spent fantasizing about some elaborate retribution against someone who cut me in the salad line in college or something so fucking ridiculous." But it's just the act of meditating, somewhat like stretching, I suppose, just gives you a certain responsiveness, as opposed to reflexive kneejerk response to stuff, that I find very helpful.

Amanda Palmer: Yeah, well, it is not unrelated to the "say less" conversation we were having.

Tim Ferriss: Right, right.

Amanda Palmer: It is the ability to realize when you are not saying less is directly related to the amount of perspective you can take in any given moment, argument, conflict.

Tim Ferriss: Definitely. I would love to ask you a couple of questions that are a bit of a lateral step, but I'm curious nonetheless. The first is: What book or books do you give most often or have you given most often as gifts to other people?

Amanda Palmer: Well, I go through different phases.

Tim Ferriss: Besides your own, I suppose.

Amanda Palmer: Yeah, that one doesn't count. I go through phases, but I have some perennials, and two that I can think of off the top of my head, one is directly related to what we were just talking about, mindfulness and meditation and sort of cutting through the bullshit.

One of my absolute favorite books of all time, because it changed my life, is a book called Dropping Ashes on the Buddha. It's by Zen Master Seung Sahn, who was a Korean Zen monk. And I read it when I was maybe 24. And it's a short book, and it's actually – it's just a series of letters that this really funny, very direct, very no-bullshit Korean monk wrote back and forth with his students in the '70s. And most of the students are Americans. They're sort of that first wave of, "We are getting into meditation. We are lost. Please help guide us."

And this guy's ability to economically get to the point of what's important and how to explain to somebody else how to cut through the bullshit and just get to mindfulness was a game-changer for me at 24. And all of the yoga and meditation I had kind of dabbled with up until then sort of coalesced, and that book really opened my mind. It was sort of one of those, "Oh, my God, I think I get it" books.

And so I have given that book to probably 30 people or 40 people, especially people who have told me that they are feeling kind of lost and/or depressed or directionless or younger people who are at crazy crossroads in their life and need something to hang onto. I've given many copies of that book.

Tim Ferriss: I can't wait to read it.

Amanda Palmer: It's fantastic. And there's actually – if you like it, there is a companion book that was his second collection of letters, which was called, Only Don't Know, which was one of his – because he spoke in this thick Korean accent and had all these hilarious ways of phrasing things, which is one of the most amusing things about the book. And he keeps saying to his students all the time, "Only say, 'Only don't know.'" It was just a great, great accent.

So my other one that I have given to a gazillion people, which is sort of on the flip side of the other metaphysical side of the fence,

is Bill Bryson, who is one of my favorite non-fiction writers, wrote a book called A Short History of Nearly Everything, which is – I don't know if you've read Bill Bryson, but he's one of the –

Tim Ferriss: I have.

Amanda Palmer: – he's one of those guys, like, he can write about anything, and I would read it.

Tim Ferriss: What is it, Into the Wilderness, or he has one about hiking or attempting to hike the Appalachian Trail?

Amanda Palmer: Yes, I love that. I've read all of his stuff. So he decides to, as an every man with a basic understanding of the history of the earth and basically the history of science and how things work, decides to tackle this with his basic knowledge and spends a few years researching a book. And just the first 20 or 30 pages of this book are of great comfort to me because he spends pages expounding on exactly how small the earth is in relation to the rest of the universe.

And, along with reading about Zen meditation or anything, if anything is gonna put you in a good mood, or maybe send you into an existentially angry crisis, knowing how totally insignificant your life as a human being on the planet earth is, in the grand scheme of things, and we're talking space and time, this book is just like – is incredibly humorous, but also is just one of those great perspectives where you read it, and you feel totally emotionally connected to Bill Bryson and his desire and his hunger to learn these things. And, also, you get to feel like your place in the – your insignificance in the cosmos, and that's another favorite.

And that's just in the nonfiction department. Fiction, I think, is for another podcast.

Tim Ferriss: We can do that in a Round 2 for sure. Well, I know what I'm getting on my Kindle then, particularly Dropping Ashes on the Buddha. I thought I had – the collection of letters format is really one of my favorites, so I'm excited to grab that.

So a lot of what we've talked about ties into, directly or indirectly, how people define success. And I'd be curious to know, when you hear the word, "successful," who is the first person you think of, and why?

Amanda Palmer: Oh, God. You know, it's funny, when you said it, the first person who popped into my head was Neil, but that's probably because I just spent all day with him, and he is successful.

You know, it may feel like a dodge to answer it this way, but success is something that has been so plastic and fungible in my life, especially because I live in a world in entertainment and in performance and now in book-writing. It is a competitive field. It's not like my sister or someone else who just has a job in science and gets their job at the university. And maybe I'm full of shit, and everybody out there with any job, from shoemaking to plumbing, feels highly competitive.

But, especially being a female singer, the world sort of views you as being in competition with the woman next to you, right down to the fact that you are on the charts here, and she is on the charts there. And the world measures you and measures your success by number of downloads, number of fans, number of Twitter followers or whatever.

And I have found that part of the struggle of actually finding happiness as an artist is the daily fight to not define success by the way the rest of the world defines success, which is hard because you have to fight the same battles every day, because you go out into the work environment, and the entire industry, and even to a certain extent your own fans, because they're sort of all drinking the same Kool-Aid, are kind of all telling you, "Well, success is defined by this. Success is defined by this. Success is defined by this."

And you're there in your own little bubble, going, "Well, I know that's not really true." I know that there is that superficial level of success, but then there's also my personal success, which no one else can define for me and really is only defined by how happy was I when I woke up this morning, and how happy am I when I'm bedding down at night? And that's not reflected in any of the billboard charts or in any of the iTunes downloads.

So success has this bizarro two-faced – I'm losing my words today – what's the word for what a thing is?

Tim Ferriss: The essence?

Amanda Palmer: Essence, perfect. So, yes, success has this very two-faced essence where you, especially as an artist playing the game in the industry and putting out music and putting out books and so forth, you kind

of have to play that game a little bit and ride the balance of trying to get your book on the New York Times bestselling list and knowing what to do to do that, but also, simultaneously, not drinking the Kool-Aid, like swishing it around in your mouth and then spitting it out.

Tim Ferriss: Going for a success tasting, but not –

Amanda Palmer: Exactly. It's like being a wine sommelier who doesn't drink. And I think, speaking of meditation, it all kind of – this winds together and is actually a really good example of the sort of thing I would notice myself thinking and finally get to a point where I could really catch myself in the act of comparing myself to other artists and being jealous of people who had more chart success or being jealous of artists who seemed to me to be more successful. And so, in my crazy brain, they must somehow be happier or must somehow have beat me or must somehow have something that I don't have.

And, honestly, it's in the moments of yoga and meditation that I find myself – it's like you and your revenge plot against the person who cut you in the salad bar – my moments like that are going, "Oh, my God, I really am doing that thing. I really am thinking about Fiona Apple, Regina Spektor, or Lady Gaga as the person who sold more records and, therefore, must be happier. Why didn't I make that decision? Why am I not where they are? Why did I not do this? Why didn't I go into fashion? Why didn't –" and watching and actually having the ability to watch my brain and stand back and go, "You know, Amanda, you realize that that's not actually success. You realize that, even if you had that – whatever thing X is – it's not gonna buy you happiness. Just sit with that for a second, and notice what you're doing."

And to that, I am grateful, really grateful for a mindfulness practice because I don't stop having those crazy thoughts. They come, but I can at least catch myself in the act and see that I'm doing it.

Tim Ferriss: You're getting better at training them, the wild thoughts, in a way perhaps. So this, I think, underscores a really important point, I mean, the definition of success and the misconceptions or self-delusion that we can get caught up in. Looking externally, what are common misconceptions about you?

Amanda Palmer: Oh, that's a good question.

Tim Ferriss: Those people who think, "I know who Amanda Palmer is," what are the common misconceptions?

Amanda Palmer: "I know who Amanda Palmer is. She's that narcissistic, talentless, hairy cunt married to my favorite author, Neil Gaiman. Fuck her."

You know, I would like to think – in my darkest moments, I would like to think that the most common misconception about me is that I am not self-reflective and that I don't have self-knowledge and that, if I am a narcissistic, evil, attention-getting fill-in-the blank, that I'm not the kind of person who knows myself and dissects myself.

And one of the weird things about especially being a female performer is you get a lot of the same grief. You start to notice the patterns. And when I was in my mid-20s, and it was sort of the dawn of the Dresden Dolls, and I sort of faced my first wave of internet criticism, and the main criticism was, "She's an attention whore." That was sort of the big go-to for people.

And the amount of sort of bravado and simultaneous shame that I felt when I would see people saying that about me was really interesting because, on the one hand, I was intellectually and emotionally smart enough to go, "Okay. Well, people are calling me an attention whore, but I'm a performing singer/songwriter. My job is to get attention."

So I can see the double standard here. And I can also see that nobody is calling the male artist who I opened up for or who opened up for me, no one's calling him an attention whore. I think this is a thing that's more or less aimed at me because I'm a woman, but I could be wrong. I mean, maybe there's something in this, and maybe my very insecure secret self is right. Maybe I am in this for all the wrong reasons. Maybe I am just too narcissistic. Maybe I am too hungry for attention. Maybe I'm doing something wrong.

But, honestly, having now been in the business for – it's now whatever it is, 13 years later since I started the Dresden Dolls – I feel like I've seen enough waves of criticism and also detected enough patterns after enough time and done enough self-inquiry that I can sort of piece the puzzle together and get, "Yeah, I was kind of right, and I was kind of wrong."

Mostly, looking back at how I reacted in anger and fear at 25, I was mostly right. Most of the people criticizing me, as I was 25

and struggling to make it as a musician in Boston and aggressively pounding at the piano, and aggressively wearing few clothes, and aggressively doing whatever the fuck I wanted, and aggressively not caring about the etiquette and the fashions of the day, yeah, mostly people were threatened or angry. But it didn't have a whole lot to do with me. It mostly had to do with them, and it still feels true.

And I think one of the things you come to terms with, as a performer, and especially as a female performer, is you are so desperate, especially at the beginning of your career, you are so desperate for universal approval and universal love. And you figure that, if you do your job right, and you really work hard, and you write fantastic songs, and you are a consummate entertainer, that everyone must love you, and it's not a bad way to be. You aim high. You aim for the center of the target and the brass ring that's furthest away.

But, also, you realize, whoever you are, there is no universally beloved performer. There are people out there who hate John Lennon. There's people out there who – name an artist, and there's people who hate them. And one of the things that you discover, as you journey down your livelihood as a performer, and you sort of negotiate your own career, is sort of developing an acceptance that your audience is gonna be your audience, and your audience isn't everybody.

And there will be those out there who decide that you're not their cup of tea and that your style rubs them the wrong way and that they don't like your voice, or they don't like your songs, or they don't like your appearance, or they just don't like you. And it's just part and parcel of the job.

And I remember people telling me, at 25 and at 27 and at 29, that if I was being criticized, it was a real sign of success. And even though I intellectually knew that, that took me years to actually emotionally take on and feel the truth of that, that if people are angered by you, if people care enough to write about how they don't like your music, write about, at this point, write about how they don't like your book, you're doing something right because, if you're being discussed at all, and your work is of enough merit to merit criticism, then you're just on the path.

And you're not so naïve as you were at 24, thinking that if you just pushed all the right buttons, everyone would eventually see the light and love you. It just doesn't work that way.

Tim Ferriss: Doesn't work out that way, yeah. I think that you could mention any artist, any person of note or who's had a decent amount of public exposure, and they probably have a hate page dedicated to them. I mean, it really doesn't matter who it is.

Amanda Palmer: Yeah, [inaudible].

Tim Ferriss: But you mentioned fans and wanting everyone to like what you do. But, certainly, I think that to business, as in art, if everyone is your customer, then no one is your customer on some level. You're, I think, somewhat famous for having a very diehard fan base. And maybe this is a tired question, but I would love to still hear from you, why you think that's the case, and I'll just leave it at that.

We can certainly dig into it, but you have such a dedicated fan base, I mean, above and beyond, in a way that has sort of mesmerized a lot of people in the music industry and elsewhere, ranging from the huge success of your Kickstarter campaign, to, I think, challenging the status quo, which may be part of the reason that you get a lot of the flack that you do, couch-surfing with fans, bringing fans up on stage. There's so much we could dig into. Why do you think your fans – you have such a large contingent of diehard fans?

Amanda Palmer: Well, I think that has to do with how specifically intimate my writing is because it's certainly not for everybody. And when I look back at my career – you can hear me, right?

Tim Ferriss: Oh, I can hear you.

Amanda Palmer: Okay. I just thought I lost myself for a second. So, when I look back at the last 10, 15 years of my life, I definitely see a lot of moments where I could have turned to the left, or I could have turned to the right, and I could have made things, for lack of a better word, more palatable, more radio-friendly, more universal, more this is the kind of thing that I know more people can digest. And when I look at those choices, I pretty much have, on the whole, chosen not to take that turn, which isn't to say that I want to alienate people. In fact, the opposite is true.

But I've kind of deliberately resisted commercial success, mostly because, as I grew in my career, which did grow slowly – it's not like I started writing songs one day, and then the Dresden Dolls started, and then six months later, we were famous. I was on a really slow climb from the time I started as a songwriter as a



teenager, to solo-performing, to meeting Brian and starting the band, to touring locally for three years, to ultimately getting signed.

So I had a lot of time to sort of look around and gauge who I was and which bands I really admired and kind of what forms of success were available to me because, when I was 18, there was only one thing. It was, like, get on MTV, be famous. That was success.

But then, as I grew into my 20s, I realized there were a lot of artistic choices and a lot of lifestyle choices open to me, and I was master of my own fate. I was allowed to choose whether I was going to be the kind of artist who spent two hours getting ready before shows, doing massive hairdos, putting on makeup, getting into fashion, trying to work with pop producers, putting dancing in my videos, really trying to sell myself as someone who could hopefully ultimately go platinum and sell four million records.

And part of the curse is, if you wanna look at it that way, which I don't, but it was like I learned too much too soon, and I knew that going the Lady Gaga route or whatever and taking the bare structure of my songs and handing them over to a pop producer to turn them into dance hits wasn't necessarily gonna make me a happier person. I just sensed it.

And I don't want this to come across sounding pretentious or anything because I think there's really different ways of being happy. And I think it's very possible that Lady Gaga is happy, and I don't know because I don't know her.

But I looked at my life as a long expanse of time, energy, choices, and who I was gonna get to hang out with. And I was, like, you know, I think it may mean less chart success, radio success, less chances of getting on MTV, but I know if I make this choice and this choice and that choice, it's more probable that I'm gonna enjoy my day. And so those are the choices I kept making and –

Tim Ferriss: Oh, I'm sorry. Is that what you mean by lifestyle choices? Is it a quality-of-life thing, or is it something else?

Amanda Palmer: Well, it's both. The choice to – and there's just some certain things, especially if you're talking about pop life, there's certain choices as a woman where, like, some shit just comes down to time and energy. I got into a conversation about this on Facebook.

I have never spent any time doing my hair. And it may seem stupid or like a kind of irrelevant thing, but I actually know, for the pop stars out there who kind of want to do the fashionista thing and take that particular fork, it just takes time out of your day if you want to go in that direction and do fashion and always look photo-ready and vogue-ready on stage. I know what it takes. I've done it for video shoots. I've done it for photo shoots. You need to sit in a chair for two hours.

And I sort of looked at that and was, like, I don't wanna sit in a chair for two hours. I wanna spend that two hours going out to dinner with my friends in Philadelphia and hearing about their art projects. And I wanna spend that two hours meeting and greeting with fans before the show. So I get that it's kind of a sacrifice, and I get that I won't look like Katy Perry on stage, but it's okay. I'll give that up. I'll make this choice and not that choice.

Tim Ferriss:

So I've been fascinated with your story on so many levels, and one of them, if you're able to discuss it, relates to crossroads that I find myself in, which is being tired of the charts, the New York Times bestseller list. I'm just fatigued by it. I've been through that game several times. It's exhausting. It's not objective. It's really – there is a very subjective kind of editor's choice element to it that I dislike because I don't feel it's – I feel that it's not a real reflection of the true success of any given book.

And I was hoping maybe we could chat about the rebellion and splitting with Roadrunner Records, if you're able to talk about that, because if you could give people a little bit of context on that – I'm thinking of going completely indie as a writer potentially, moving forward. And there's a certain appeal in the simplicity of that, and we'll see if I have the fortitude to do it.

But are you able to give people a little bit of context on what happened with Roadrunner and then what you learned from that?

Amanda Palmer:

Sure. Well, the rebellion specifically was this hilarious moment in my career. This would have been 2008. I had put out my first solo record, "Who Killed Amanda Palmer?" I was really proud of it. I still am. I think it's a great record.

And there was a song on it called "Leeds United," that was like a big-band, crazy, drunken, brash – it was sort of one of the poppiest songs on the record. And I decided to make a video for it. I made the video in London. It was really fun.

And the record label at the time, I was still on Roadrunner Records. Things with them had just started falling apart because they'd barely lifted a finger to promote the Dresden Dolls' second album, and that left us feeling really disillusioned. But I sort of gave them a chance to make good on my first solo record, which came out right after that. And they didn't, by the way, long story short.

But, somewhere in there, this video got shot, and the rough cut was sent over to the label. And I, in the time in between, had made my way back to New York. And the A&R guy called me into his office.

Tim Ferriss: A&R is advertising and something else?

Amanda Palmer: Technically, in old-school terms, it meant artists and repertoire. But, in laymen's terms, your A&R guy is basically your representative, your dude – because it's usually a dude – but your dude or gal at the label who is the artist's liaison, basically.

Tim Ferriss: Your point of contact, got it.

Amanda Palmer: Yeah, your person. So my person, Dave Rath – bless his heart because he had to speak for the trees – and he called me into his office and tried, as delicately as he could, to tell me that the label had had a meeting, and they thought that I looked too fat in the video, and would I be willing to cut the shots that showed my bare midriff?

And I was astounded at this because I am vain, and I had seen the rough cut, and I thought I looked fantastic. I was really thrilled that, you know, I had been a little – because, you know, I'm not trim, but I have my little pot belly. But some pot belly can be attractive, as long as it's not hanging out over your pants. And I was actually really thrilled when I saw the rough cut because I thought I looked fantastic.

And so I sat there with my jaw dropped to the floor, going, like, "You're kidding me. No. Like, what shots are you talking about – because I think I look great, and I'm a vain motherfucker. So we just clearly disagree." And, at that point, I had kind of had it with the label, and I had sort of decided at that point to just probably split off and go my own way.

So I basically did – I did an act of war, and I posted to my blog – I posted this story to my blog, knowing that my fans would all be

aggrieved, and everyone would be sad on my behalf. And, at the end of the day, the label backed down. They put the video out. They, of course, did nothing to promote it, which I was probably shooting myself in the foot, but who knows? And this was also at the point where the video was basically internet-only, so it was up to me to do any promoting that was gonna happen.

And this beautiful, organic internet moment happened where I shared this story, and that was it. I gave no directive. And then, on their own, the fans created this movement where they started a page on the band forum, uploading selfies of their own stomachs with messages written on them to Roadrunner Records, saying things like, "This is what a normal belly looks like," and, "Fuck the label," and, "Long live –" and they gave the movement a title, which was "The Rebellyon –" get it? – because their belly was in the middle.

Tim Ferriss: Rebellyon, got it.

Amanda Palmer: But this wasn't just a couple people or even just a couple dozen people. This was like hundreds of fans did this. And it was hilarious because it was a lot of huge man bellies and teeny little baby bellies, and people wrote on their cats. It was just – it was fucking hilarious.

And someone even – one of the fans even collected all of these photos and published a little chat book and, with my permission, which they didn't even need, printed up 1,000 of these books and just offered to send them to people.

And it just – it was one of those moments where I stood back like a proud parent and looked at my fan base, and I was, like, "You guys are awesome. I just love that you fucking did this. You're creative, and you're weird, and you're all with me."

And that was just – it was also one of those moments where I looked at them, and this was my demographic. These were my fans. These were the people for whom the video was made. And they were all so proud of me and, also, so happy for me to be authentic.

And I sort of looked over at the label, who were, like, "Well, you know, Amanda, if you really wanna be successful, you have to X, Y, Z," and I was, like, "You know, I really don't think you guys get it. This is my audience. This is who I'm making the video for.

This is who I'm making the music for. They understand. You guys don't seem to. I think this relationship has come to an end."

But it was also – if you look back at internet history, it was one of those moments where – you know, in 1995, that wouldn't have happened. But these people all found each other, grouped together, and could create their own moment. And it is one of the blessings of the internet, which is the paradigm shifts that people in power, really, everything is called into question.

And it's very possible that, in 1995, I might have believed the label. I might not have understood that my audience really did just want me, the authentic me, not the airbrushed one. And this is why it's sort of been a lifelong conversation, a dialogue with my fan base. It's not just me, the artist with a megaphone.

Tim Ferriss: If you had to choose one way online to communicate with your audience, what would you choose, as it stands right now?

Amanda Palmer: If I only got to use one social media platform?

Tim Ferriss: Yeah.

Amanda Palmer: Or do I have to choose between Twitter or email?

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, you have to choose. So it would be one online tool, whether social network or otherwise. What would you choose, and why?

Amanda Palmer: If I could only communicate one way on the internet, you know, probably Twitter because Twitter has direct-messaging, so I could mini-email people.

Tim Ferriss: That's right, yeah, that's true, you could. It's a two-for-one.

Amanda Palmer: Because email can't, for lack of a better word, email can't – it's only person-to-person, so it can't collect. You can't create a movement on email, unless – if that were the case, I would probably find myself kind of on massive chain group emails with 900 people all bcc'd into conversations, if you know what I mean.

Tim Ferriss: I do. Let me ask just a couple of fan questions, a couple of listeners who were very curious to know, what is the dynamic like, having two creatives in one household? So your husband is, of course, a very prolific writer. You have many different creative endeavors. Do you work together? Do you work separately? Do

you ask each other advice? Is there collaboration? How do your creative tempos differ?

That's a lot at once, so you can kind of answer it however you want. But I'm just so fascinated to know how you guys make that work.

Amanda Palmer: Oh, boy, well, that's a huge question. I mean, that's a huge lot of questions. I think the biggest blanket answer is we help each other a lot. But we also have private areas and rooms where we really don't fuck with each other.

And we've learned the hard way. I have learned – if nothing else, Neil and I have found that we are insanely similar, and we both constantly make the mistake of thinking that the other one has thicker skin than they do, when the truth is we are both, at our core, really fragile artists. And I think most artists, at their core, may seem thick-skinned, but when it comes down to it, we really want people to love and understand our work.

And so I've learned – I've been with Neil for six years, and I still am constantly fine-tuning how honest to be with him about something he shows me, and vice-versa. Neil read me something he wrote a couple weeks ago, and I gave him my honest opinion and immediately wanted to take it back because I was, like, "You should have just not – you should have –" oh, God, Amanda, why did you say that? Now, he's gonna be depressed for three days, and he was, because I didn't particularly love this or that and was totally blunt.

And I would have wanted the same thing from him if I had written a piece of music and played it for him, and no one had heard it yet, and I was feeling my small, fragile self, crawling out of my little art cave, waving my watercolor around.

That's the way I think. Even when you're 54, I totally think that, whether it's a novel or a song or a poem or an opera or whatever it is, to me, you're still five, showing your mom a watercolor, going, "Do you like it? Do you like it?" And the only answer is, "Yes, you're a genius. I'm putting that on the fridge. It's your watercolor. I don't know what it is. It's totally abstract. I know it's supposed to be a tree, and it doesn't really look like a tree." But every artist in that way is kind of five, and you really do have to choose your words carefully.

And, on the other hand, the reason Neil and I love each other and respect each other so much is we don't really bullshit each other. And we speak the language. We know that there's a difference between, "Holy fuck, I think that's the best thing you've ever written," and, "Yeah, that's really good." And those are basically two ends of the spectrum.

And you really, if you're trying to be kind and a good, attentive art spouse, you're really not supposed to go into, "Yeah, I think I get it, not your best work. I didn't really dig it." You're just not allowed to say that.

Tim Ferriss: It's more like a Japanese tea ceremony exchange.

Amanda Palmer: Exactly. And that's with the work itself. We also help each other with more of the nerdy stuff. We edit each other on social media. There have been nights where one of us has – and this has happened in both directions where one will text the other and be, like, "For fuck's sake, delete that Tweet before you find yourself in the middle of an internet shit storm tomorrow because you have press tomorrow, and you're too busy to spend all day writing a blog, defending your right to X, Y, Z." And 90 percent of the time, the person will be, like, "You know, I knew not to do it. I just wanted – no, fuck it, you're right. I'll delete it."

Tim Ferriss: So, "for fuck's sake" sounds distinctly non-American. So I'm guessing you get a fair number of those.

Amanda Palmer: We both do that for each other. And we not only text each other and say, "Hey, delete that Tweet. You're an idiot," but we'll also – we'll run things by each other.

Neil and I have both stepped in the middle of controversies unwittingly, Neil more recently than me. He got himself in an internet shit storm with the title of his most recent book. And we sat in bed and had long conversations about, "Is this really a good idea?" and, "When people come yelling at you, how are you gonna deal?" and, "Why don't you actually write something in the introduction of the book to explain it, so that you can kind of proactively blah, blah, blah."

Like, we sit there like a couple of marketing managers, dealing with the kerfuffle before it actually blows in the window. But we've both been there, and we've both been there, holding the hand of the other, while the other stands in the internet shit storm,

having to deal with the op-eds and the angry Tweets and the angry Tumblr people.

And there's something really wonderful about having a spouse who really fundamentally understands you and has your back. We deeply understand each other, and we deeply share a philosophy about life work, freedom of speech, and compassion that, even if we express it differently, is one of the reasons we were so attracted to each other to begin with. It was, like, "Oh, you're one of me. I see what you're doing over there, got it."

And there's something really comforting about that because it can be a really lonely job when you're out there trying to explain how your work was misunderstood, how your book title was misunderstood, how your intention was misunderstood. It's nice to deal with that kind of bullshit on the internet all day and then sit down to dinner with someone and have them deeply understand, not just the intellectual bit of it, but how it emotionally feels to go through a day like that.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, someone else who's been deployed to the internet before, had to contend.

Amanda Palmer: Exactly, exactly.

Tim Ferriss: Last questions: You walk into a bar. What do you order from the bartender?

Amanda Palmer: What temperature is it outside?

Tim Ferriss: It is Boston in the winter.

Amanda Palmer: Oh, I order a red wine or a hot toddy.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, hot toddy, good choice. If you could give one piece of advice to your 20-year-old self, what would it be?

Amanda Palmer: Leave college.

Tim Ferriss: Okay.

Amanda Palmer: Leave, transfer while you're still a sophomore, and go to art school in New York is what I would tell myself. Leave the liberal arts bubble, for God's sake. Run while you still have time, although in the back-to-the-future time/space continuum problem, would I be



talking to you right now about my wonderful marriage to Neil Gaiman and my bestselling book? I don't know.

Tim Ferriss: It's dicey time travel.

Amanda Palmer: It's dicey time travel. I think, you know, I've got no regrets. But I'm sure, if I had escaped my shitty situation at 20, I might have just jumped into another shitty situation, so you never know.

Tim Ferriss: Well, this has been so much fun. I wanna be respectful of your time. Perhaps we can do a Round 2 sometime.

Amanda Palmer: Oh, I would love to. I could talk for hours.

Tim Ferriss: This is really fun. Where can people find you on the internet and say hello and learn about what you're up to, and so on?

Amanda Palmer: People can find me in the obvious places. You can Google up Amanda Palmer on pretty much any social media site, Amanda Palmer on Twitter, and I'm on Facebook.

And I actually – one cool thing that you might not find Googling is I just created a special page of my website for people who aren't familiar with my music because I've had so many people coming to me as blog readers and as readers of the book and as followers of me on Twitter, who actually didn't come through the music, but came through some other avenue and really want to get to know the music, but are kind of overwhelmed by the whole catalogue.

And so I created a page on [AmandaPalmer.net](http://AmandaPalmer.net), and it's called, "A Walk Through Amandalanda." It just starts with the beginning of the Dresden Dolls and kind of walks you through the basic albums and what the singles on the albums were and what the best videos are. And it's a really good primer if you wanna just go in and sample the last 13 years of albums and music and stuff, and it's pretty funny. I wrote it.

Tim Ferriss: Beautiful.

Amanda Palmer: And I think, if you Google "Amandalanda," you'll probably find it, or just go to [AmandaPalmer.net](http://AmandaPalmer.net) and kind of have a browse around.

Tim Ferriss: And your name on Twitter is?

Amanda Palmer: It's just @AmandaPalmer.

Tim Ferriss: You got the name. That's a good one to have. Awesome. Well, Amanda, thank you so much. Everyone who's listening, of course, I'll put links to everything that I can track down that we've talked about in the show notes, the books, Amandalanda, and everything that was mentioned.

Amanda Palmer: Amandalanda.

Tim Ferriss: And I will let you get on to another creative day, I'm sure. So thank you so much for the time.

Amanda Palmer: Yeah, thank you, Tim. I think you are awesome. And if you decide to fly solo, Godspeed.

Tim Ferriss: Thank you.

Amanda Palmer: It's a lot of work, but, boy, is it satisfying.

Tim Ferriss: Gotta jump off and grow wings on the way down, yeah.

Amanda Palmer: Yeah. I mean, one final thought on that – because I wanted to say something when you said that – I think, you know, I went solo and did solo music everything once I dragged myself off the label. But then I decided to put my book out with one of the biggest publishers. And I think the freedom to pick and choose is more important than the freedom of being independent.

Tim Ferriss: That's a great point.

Amanda Palmer: And it really is. It's like work with the man when you're digging the man and the man can actually help you make your art, and then don't when you don't want to. But there is no such thing as true freedom because you're always trading something for something else. And having tried to run my own record label and all of that, you really do appreciate the people sitting in offices, shuffling the papers that they do shuffle.

So, when in doubt, and if you go through Round 1, 2, 3, and 4, just remember that, at the end of the day, you get to do whatever the fuck you want, whether it's work with a publisher or work with yourself, and you get to change your mind ten times if you want to –

Tim Ferriss: Hear, hear.

Amanda Palmer: – because I have.

Tim Ferriss: Well, I wish you and yours many more adventures, and I hope we get a chance to have a hot toddy in person soon.

Amanda Palmer: I would love that. And we can invite Neil, and he can talk British at you.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, I would love that. I want him to narrate my entire life with all of his free time, just, like, so soothing.

Amanda Palmer: [Inaudible] I want Neil Gaiman to narrate my entire life.

Tim Ferriss: Doesn't pay well, granted, but we could talk about that over alcohol.

Amanda Palmer: No, but you could create the app. All you'd have to do is get him to read the entire Oxford English Dictionary.

Tim Ferriss: That's it.

Amanda Palmer: And then you could make gazillions on the Neil Gaiman Narrate Your Life app.

Tim Ferriss: That's true, that's true. All right. Well, Amanda, you're very sweet and very generous for taking the time. I really appreciate it.

Amanda Palmer: You're so welcome.

Tim Ferriss: And you're an inspiration. Thank you.

Amanda Palmer: You are, too. Take it easy, Tim.

Tim Ferriss: Bye.

Amanda Palmer: Bye.

Tim Ferriss: This episode of the Tim Ferriss Show is brought to you by 99Designs. 99Designs is the world's largest online marketplace of graphic designers. And I have used 99Designs for years, including to get cover concepts for The 4-Hour Body, which went on to become No. 1, New York Times, No. 1, Wall Street Journal. It was a huge hit.

And here's how it works, and you can check everything out, including some of my competitions – you can see these book covers and so on – at [99Designs.com/Tim](http://99Designs.com/Tim).

Whether you need a logo, a car wrap, a web design, an app, a thumbnail, a T-shirt, whatever, you go to [99Designs.com](https://99designs.com), you describe your project, and then, within a week or less, you have tons of designers around the world who compete for your business and submit different ideas and designs and drafts. You have an original design that you love, or you pay nothing. It is fantastic. I have used it. I have mentioned it before, including in [The 4-Hour Work Week](#), as a resource.

Check it out, [99Designs.com/Tim](https://99designs.com/Tim), and if you use that link, you'll be able to see what I've done on the platform. You will also get \$99.00 as an upgrade for free, which will get you more designs, more submissions. So check it out. And, until next time, thank you for listening.