

trash 'n' vaudeville

Doll-a-rama

Dresden Dolls' DIY arts community By **BRYAN BORZYKOWSKI**

DRESDEN DOLLS with **PANIC! AT THE DISCO** and the **HUSH SOUND** at Molson Amphitheatre (909 Lakeshore West), Saturday (July 15), 7:30 pm (doors 5:30 pm). \$22.50. 416-870-8000.

AMANDA PALMER as part of Fuck The Back Row: A Night Of Short Films And Dadaist Vaudeville with the **DRESDEN DOLLS & CO.** at the Bloor Cinema (506 Bloor West), Saturday (July 15), 9 pm. \$10. 416-516-2330.

ON JULY 4, MOST AMERICANS ARE pounding back beers, chowing down barbecue and saluting their flag. Nobody's thinking about work, unless of course, you're in a much-sought-after pop band like the Dresden Dolls.

"I don't own a barbecue," says Amanda Palmer, lead singer of the Boston-based duo, "and I've never been much of a July 4 person. Last year we shot a video on the 4th and worked until 1 am."

This year, Palmer's spending Independence Day conducting interviews from New Hampshire, where her eclectic pop-rock-meets-German-cabaret-act is playing. She's clearly not upset about missing her country's birthday celebrations, although she does have a soft spot for July 4th fireworks.

"I like the fireworks," she says over the phone, "but I hadn't seen the Boston fireworks until I was in my mid-20s. I was really impressed."

Watching Boston's finest pyrotechnics is probably a little like seeing the Dresden Dolls for the first time. Besides the group's odd combination of piano riffs, frantic yelling and fierce drumming, Palmer and drummer

Brian Viglione dress up like cabaret goth punks and buzz around the stage like chickens missing their heads.

"Those who see this band and connect tend to connect immediately," says Palmer, who's currently promoting the Dolls' superior sophomore effort, *Yes, Virginia* (Roadrunner). "Even those who don't get the music right away know that something about our show turns them on."

Their connection with their fans goes beyond their 45-minute performances, though. Palmer and Viglione are building an "artistic community" whose members are encouraged to send art and videos to the band. The art gets displayed on their website, and the videos have found a home in the form of a touring film festival that coincides with the Dresden Dolls' current tour.

"We have an incredibly creative fan base constantly sending us work in all kinds of media," says Palmer. "Over the course of the past few years, we've had enough Dresden Dolls-oriented films and videos that I wanted to put them together so people could see the stuff on a big screen instead of YouTube."

Palmer enlisted her roommate, video director Michael Pope, to narrow down 100 submissions to 20 Dresden Dolls-approved vids.

"We worried that we'd be showing eye-roll-inducing, film-school-quality filmmaking, but we actually got enough incredible stuff to fill up an hour and a half, and not a minute of it is wanky," says Palmer, who's playing a solo set at the end of each showing.

It's rare for a band to pay so much at-



Brian Viglione and Amanda Palmer are bringing their fans' films on the road.

attention to its fans. everyone's got websites and message boards, but fostering this type of intimacy isn't the norm. Palmer takes her fan base seriously enough to share very revealing thoughts in her blog at dresdendolls.com.

In a recent post, she called out Panic! At The Disco fans who told the band to "get the fuck off the stage," and she often writes about feeling isolated on the road.

"I'm sort of an honesty fetishist,"

she says. "I really like the idea of breaking down those stereotypes that people have about performers and rock stars and women. I find it a great challenge to be as honest and forthright as possible about what we're going through. What we're going through is pretty interesting – and it's more interesting to put the truth out there and not to create a persona."

At the same time, Palmer knows the art-projects-and-honesty combina-

tion isn't for everyone. So if you're just into the band's music, don't worry, there's still a place for you in the Dresden Dolls family.

"It's not about dressing up. It's not about makeup. It's not about being part of some aesthetic cabaret clique. You're just as welcome to stand in a corner and watch. You're welcome to do anything you fucking want to do, and that's really the point." ©

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