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# Amanda Palmer On Being Online: "I Sometimes Feel Like Reality Itself Is Passing Me By"

*Chris Hall*

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- Shervin Lainez

[Amanda Palmer](#) is one of the best examples of how the Internet and social media have brought celebrities down from Olympus. Where Robert "I am a golden god!" Plant and his bandmates were basically accessible to only selected groupies and rock journalists, Palmer is an enthusiastic -- almost obsessive -- user of social media, keeping in touch with her fan base constantly. For her, the Internet is not only a way to bypass traditional media, but to dispense with the entire infrastructure of funding and distributing music. Her newest album, *Theatre is Evil*, was funded as a Kickstarter project that initially asked for \$100,000 and wound up raking in \$1.2 million. But that success came with controversy: after bringing in 1200 percent of her original goal, Palmer also tried to crowdsource backup musicians on her tour by asking professional-grade string and horn players in each city to play in her show in exchange for beer and schwag. After a huge backlash from unions and professional musicians, Palmer agreed to pay her volunteers.

***See also:***

\* [Why I'm Fine With Playing For Amanda Palmer For Free, By S.F. Cellist Unwoman](#)

Amanda Palmer and the Grand Theft Orchestra perform at [the Fillmore](#) on Wednesday, Sept. 26. We got a chance to ask her about social media and art in the 21st century.

**You got the money for your latest album from a Kickstarter**

**project that was really successful. Do you think that's going to be a good long-term option for funding music?**

Going directly to the fan base for money to make music?

Absolutely. Whether it'll specifically be this kind of crowdfunding, I don't know. But certainly the idea of going back to an old-school label seems laughable.

**Why is that?**

Because it was so inefficient. And such a rip-off. Not only were the odds incredibly skewed in favor of the label in terms of the finances, but it was such a struggle to make art. Every choice I made about, you know, about how to package the record, about everything right down to imagery was always an argument. And I had no interest in arguing. I just wanted to do my thing, make my records, put them out, have people buy them. It always seemed very simple to me, but it was always a struggle with the label. I'm very happy now, saving all that energy and putting it into the art instead of arduous, argumentative phone calls.

**Do you think that this is a system that could work for musicians in general?**

Absolutely. I think the system can work for anybody. The important thing to keep in mind is that not every musician or artist is going to want to run their own business. It's boring. Hopefully in this new culture of direct support, all artists will be able to go to their

audiences and ask for capital and help. But they may need to do a little bit more office work, do a little bit more legwork, and enlist the help of those around them. For every small indie band running a Kickstarter, there are a handful of boyfriends and girlfriends and pals coming over to help stuff envelopes and drink beer. And that is certainly scalable. I'm not sending my 20,000 packages out using random friends and random help in my kitchen over a pizza party, but that is the way I used to do it.

Everybody keeps asking me if I think that record labels are a thing of the past, and I think that as we know them, they certainly are, but artists are always going to need help. Especially if they're doing business, and selling product, they're going to need a lot of help. Otherwise, you've got an artist sitting in their kitchen all day, stuffing envelopes and not making art and not being able to tour.

**You seem to have an incredible amount of energy for keeping up on social media and interacting with your audience. You're "onstage" a lot more than previous generations of artists. Does that level of interaction ever get exhausting?**

Umm.... I don't think so. I feel like I'm in control of it all. If anything, it's not so much exhausting as it is addictive. It's such an exciting, inspiring benevolent place to go and share thoughts and opinions and information. I don't ever feel exhausted by it, but I do sometimes feel like reality itself is passing me by, because I'm so tuned in to the Internet frequency that I don't notice the passing clouds. And I think that's a kind of a universal problem right now. I

often feel really hypocritical, because I'm constantly trying to be mindful and stay in the moment, and remind everyone to be present, especially at shows, and yet, I sometimes find myself out to lunch, sitting with my best friend and wanting to check my Twitter feed. So I try at least to recognize and be conscious of it.

**Talk to me a little more about reality passing you by. Is that a problem? Does it cause any sense of regret at interacting so much online?**

You know, if it didn't pay me back in such abundance, I think I'd feel more regret. But the artistic and the spiritual dividends paid back to me due to all the networking and discussing and sharing that I do on the net are so inarguably awesome that it's really too hard to feel too bad about it. I feel so genuinely touched by and entertained by and inspired by the things that go on in there that I really have a hard time seeing the down side.