



The Art of Asking; or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Let People Help

Amanda Palmer

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Rock star, crowdfunding pioneer, and TED speaker Amanda Palmer knows all about asking. Performing as a living statue in a wedding dress, she wordlessly asked thousands of passersby for their dollars. When she became a singer, songwriter, and musician, she was not afraid to ask her audience to support her as she surfed the crowd (and slept on their couches while touring). And when she left her record label to strike out on her own, she asked her fans to support her in making an album, leading to the world's most successful music Kickstarter.

Even while Amanda is both celebrated and attacked for her fearlessness in asking for help, she finds that there are important things she cannot ask for-as a musician, as a friend, and as a wife. She learns that she isn't alone in this, that so many people are afraid to ask for help, and it paralyzes their lives and relationships. In this groundbreaking book, she explores these barriers in her own life and in the lives of those around her, and discovers the emotional, philosophical, and practical aspects of *The Art Of Asking*.

Part manifesto, part revelation, this is the story of an artist struggling with the new rules of exchange in the twenty-first century, both on and off the Internet. *The Art Of Asking* will inspire readers to rethink their own ideas about asking, giving, art, and love.

The Art of Asking; or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Let People Help Details

Date : Published November 11th 2014 by Grand Central Publishing

ISBN : 9781455581085

Author : Amanda Palmer

Format : Hardcover 339 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Autobiography, Memoir, Biography, Audiobook, Music

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Elizabeth says

Someone I know apparently knows Amanda Palmer and had a draft copy of this and offered it to me to read and do big-picture level edits. I thought but did not say, "Amanda Palmer is really problematic, so I don't want to be involved in supporting her in any way." The second time I was offered the manuscript, I said yes, because I was curious.

It opens with a tampon story and ugh, not all females menstruate and not everyone who menstruates is female. Amanda, I'm sure you have trans* friends ... be a little more thoughtful with your language, please? I considered just quitting the book right then.

There were a couple other moments in the book that I was displeased by, but on the whole, there's not much I found especially troubling/problematic.

In my first reading I got to page 64 (of 201) and was reflecting on how much more positively I felt toward her reading this manuscript -- and holding that tension with my prior negativity about her. I'm quick to adopt "the Internet told me to hate this person," and I feel like I have a much fuller understanding of her now having read the book -- and I can say that and still not want to support her endeavors.

I think there's a lot of value in the stuff that she conveys here about gift economy, vulnerability and asking, etc. -- though in reflecting on it a week after I finished reading it, I wonder whether it couldn't have been more effectively condensed into an article. The book is interesting, as it tells a lot of her story, but because there's so much of her story, the actual takeaways pop less in my memory. (Admittedly, she wrote the book after giving a 13-minute TED talk, so it would be interesting to watch that and see if I think the book adds anything important to it; she says somewhere in the manuscript what she decided to do for the TED talk, but I have since forgotten.)

Annamaria says

Asking for help with shame says:

You have the power over me.

Asking with condescension says:

I have the power over you.

But asking for help with gratitude says:

We have the power to help each other.

First off a 5 star rating is an odd thing for me to give (unless we're talking about Harry Potter of course) but it was the realest rating I could think of when it comes to The Art of Asking. Listening to Amanda's voice on the audiobook was just so calming, relaxing and inspiring that now any other audiobook I'll listen to will sound strange and unsettling.

I discovered the Dresden Dolls' music when that fanmade trailer for the Netflix "Series of Unfortunate events" came out (watch it here, it's so cool!) but what I did was just to add the song to my playlist on

Spotify and just carried on with my life. Lately though I was looking for some new group to discover, for a new music genre to get inspired by and since I am a sucker for Tim Burton when I saw on Youtube the video of Coin Operated Boy with its white make up and quirky characters I was hooked. Plus I used to listen to that song when I was younger so it all came full circle. I started listening to their songs, reading their lyrics and now I even have a picture of the duo on my desktop:

^ It makes me so happy!

Then I saw that Amanda Palmer, one half of the group, had given a TED talk, watched it, found her charming and discovered that she was the author of that book I kept seeing everywhere on BookTube a couple of years ago. I marked it as to-read, since I was already reading "Neverwhere" by Neil Gaiman and then discovered that **that** very Amanda Palmer was married to him. Again, it all came full circle and I interpreted it as a sign of the Universe. JUST READ IT ALREADY!

"Some days it's your turn to ask. Some days it's your turn to be asked."

And after my life story let's talk about The Art of Asking. It basically covers Amanda's life ever since she started earning a living as a living statue. She played the Bride and, with every coin left in her case, she would give the pedestrian a flower. From this experience she found herself thinking about the concept of giving/receiving without the act of asking to be perceived as an act of begging. How do we differentiate the two? How can artists sustain themselves **and** feel free to ask for help in doing so?

"The music is the flower."

The story carries on and Amanda walks us through the highs and lows of her career and private life, she tells us how she carefully built her relationship with her fanbase and how it has often led to some backlash on the Internet. She deals with the concepts of love, trust, loss, communication and, most importantly of course, of *asking*. Only communicating with people, trusting them and letting them actually *see* us will make the overall exchange of giving/receiving less shameful and more natural. Rejection is of course taken into account but what Amanda teaches in her book is to never lose faith in humanity and in what it is capable of doing.

"To erase the possibility of empathy is to erase the possibility of understanding."

I found this journey fascinating, this book feels like a diary, like a glimpse into someone else's life, sometimes the glimpse catches something way too intimate and you'll feel like looking away, like that's not something you should have noticed, but Amanda doesn't care, she put the detail there for you to see and for you to understand. Gosh, I loved this book!

I believe that The Art of Asking is for everyone, the way Amanda describes her tours and shows never ostracise those who just don't know what she's talking about. The underlying message is its strenght. I would advise though to dive into it being open-minded and not expecting a self-help book, this feels more like a biography after all.

Leah says

4/25/2018

Still all the fucking stars...

11/10 - 11/26/2014

5 Fucking Stars and Hugs For All

A little background, because I feel like I need to put this here: I love Amanda Palmer's music. I received a burned copy of The Dresden Dolls my senior year in high school (late 2005/2006). I fell in love with her lyrics and their music back then, and I've continued to support both Amanda Palmer and Brian Viglione whenever I can.

That has included supporting AFP's Kickstarter. Honestly, I pretty much ignored any negative story on the subject, because I just didn't care what the Negative Nancy's had to say. I wanted to support an artist that I loved and had a lot of respect for. It was as simple as that for me. Anything else was just noise.

When AFP first started blogging about **THE ART OF ASKING**, I was uber-excited for her to be writing about her life, her art, her thoughts, and anything else that came across her mind. To me, she has always seemed genuine and real, and I will admit to being extremely moved with her speaking engagement on TED Talks. Knowing that this book was going to be a more in-depth conversation of that, while adding in her experiences over the years, I knew that I would definitely be getting a copy of this book when it came out.

And I wasn't disappointed with what I read at all.

The writing itself is fantastic. But then, knowing her lyrics, I knew that AFP could spin her words and make them feel real as hell, because well, that's what they are. She's this open artist that writes what's on her mind, without needing or wanting to filter herself. And I love that.

AFP's life has been so full and fascinating, and she is incredibly open about her experiences. From her art/music career, her life experiences in college and her marriage, AFP didn't seem to hold anything back - she bared herself to the world, and has asked us to see her. I definitely do.

If you're wanting to read this book as a "How to Guide" on Asking, then it falls extremely short, because that's now what it's for. This was yelling at me - that it's OK to ask! To not be ashamed to ask, and that asking and giving can create these amazing human connections.

And To just fucking ask.

Finally, on a personal level, **THE ART OF ASKING** has inspired me to start creating again. To bare my

soul and start writing, because this life is freaking short, and I need to remember that. I should be living my life for me, my goals and passions and loves, and hopefully by doing that, I re-open myself to everything that's awe inspiring around me. I've been pretty closed off from human connections for too long, and in 2015, I'm planning on really changing that. I've missed the connection.

Laura Roberts says

Amanda Palmer is a pretty polarizing person. Some love her crazy theatre-girl ways and commitment to a bohemian lifestyle of art at any costs. Some think she's a poseur, a sell-out, a scammer. I'm somewhere in the middle, curious about what she does, interested in her artistic output, but not particularly keen on following in her footsteps.

When I heard she had a book coming out, I definitely wanted to read it. So I grabbed a copy, and tore through it in a couple of days. It was one of those books people like to refer to as "unputdownable" (though I really hate that word) or maybe "gripping" -- as in I was gripping the covers, refusing to let anyone pull it out of my hands.

I really enjoyed the book, as it gave me a lot of insight into Amanda's mind and personality, two things that fans will definitely have a lot of insider information on already. But guess what? The stuff she does won't work if she's not at the center of it all. She's found her tribe, and she's pulled each member in close by being real with them, one on one. Whether that was at live shows, in the signing line, via email (back when email was new and weird), on Twitter, or through "ninja" shows that she throws together at a moment's notice or by crashing at their house with her band, her success has clearly come from connecting with her people -- the people that get what she's doing and support it. And all of that is intensely interesting, as she details how she did all of this and why.

Some reviewers have noted that this is a book that will give you a lot of info about how things work for Amanda, but not for anybody else, and I would agree with that to some extent. However, that's also the point: this isn't a self-help or how-to book. It's a memoir.

That being said, if you think there's nothing you can apply to your own life after reading this book, you should read it again. There are lots of great things you can take away from Amanda's story (and the various mini stories woven in throughout), whether you're an aspiring artist, a struggling artist, a world-famous artist in need of some human connection, a fan or even a hater. It got me thinking about how I used to write, back before I went to school to study creative writing and "learn" how to be an artist. And it's got me pondering other things, too, like why it's so frustrating when people stand there staring at me instead of just saying, "Hey, can I ask you something?" or why my first reaction, a lot of the time, is annoyance instead of acceptance or compassion. Why I rebel against sappiness and oversharing, but also avoid those too clever for their own good. Why it's important to me that people be "real," but I am terrible at spotting the phonies. Why asking for things is, indeed, so difficult -- even when it will help, even when it's necessary.

Am I one of AFP's rabid fans? No. But this book certainly made me see her in a different light, and within its pages she has given me plenty to ponder, and therefore it is completely worthy of all 5 stars. Well done, Amanda. And thank you.

P.S. I love the "blender setting" analogy used towards the end of the book. It's a great way to explain fictional works to those that insist on reading them nonfictionally, and especially autobiographically.

Gina Boyd says

She's a fine writer, and talented in other ways, and I agree with a lot of what she says about asking for help. "But asking for help with gratitude says/We have the power to help each other." This is true, and I think it's something worth talking about and trying to convince people of.

That said, I didn't finish the book because I was often bored, annoyed, or a little of both.

These hangups are purely my own, and I don't want to trash Palmer--she is who she is--but she's hard for me to spend time with, because she seems to want so much from everyone around her. I do like that she has me thinking about art, though. Is art simply making connections? Do those connections have to be felt by more than one person? Is her art (I'm thinking of the bride, here) really the thing as Josh Bell's playing his violin? His art is a skill and craft, created from years and years of study and practice. She dressed like a bride and stood on a box, based on a need to be seen and the desire to avoid having a regular job. But if she and Bell felt they were expressing themselves and making connections, does that make them the same?

Was she creating art or was it therapy, and does it matter?

I think this is just going to have to be a case of *Good for her; not for me*.

kat says

I wouldn't call myself a fan of Amanda Palmer. The Dresden Dolls was never really my jam; when she ended up on my radar it was because she married Neil Gaiman -- of whom I definitely **am** a fan, and whose blog and Twitter I've followed for years and years.

The vast majority of what I know about her is what I've learned through the words of a fantastic writer who loves her. Thus, I already want to like her... but while I don't dislike her, I'm not sure I like her. It's complicated.

What I think of Amanda Palmer is this: She's fierce. She's independent. She's brave. She's imperfect. She doesn't always practice what she preaches (showing up, really hearing what others are saying to her, being compassionate). She's raw. She's unapologetically herself (for better or for worse). She puts herself out there. She's contradictory.

I know she's said some bullshit. I know she's fallen into the trap (seen often with stand-up comedians, but a danger to any performer) of, secure in the reality-distorting bubble of her fanbase, writing off those who point out problematic behavior as trolls or haters merely looking for something to be offended by.

I also know that a lot of the criticism of her is distinctly gendered. She's loud. She's unashamed of her body. She doesn't do what she's told, she doesn't know her place. She breaks the rules. She's emotional, self-absorbed, confrontational.

For better or for worse, AFP is indeed a Personality. But unequivocally, I do like what she's preaching:

radical empathy, vulnerability, gifting instead of profit, opening up to each other instead of closing each other out. The radical notion that authentic human connection is more valuable than money.

In the end I do want to like her. Because Neil loves her, because of the odd song or story that speaks to me, because I think her anti-capitalist radical empathy is revolutionary and interesting and important. But I mostly want to like her, somehow, paradoxically, for all the reasons she makes me uncomfortable: because she's abrasive, she's messy, she overshares. Because I disagree with her about some things. Because I'm not sure I "get" her. Because parts of this book *did* strike me as disingenuous, self-indulgent, or myopic. Because I'm maybe a little jealous of her fearlessness and her honesty, of her willingness to confront the world head-on. Because I can't easily sort her into a neatly-defined little box.

I realize this is more a review of the person than the book, but hey, it's a memoir, so the lines get blurred.

Lily says

It's been a while since I felt quite so conflicted over a book, so consider those three stars to be an average between a squished heart and a raised eyebrow.

Prior to reading this book (which is the first celebrity memoir I've ventured into), all I knew about Amanda Palmer was what could be gleaned from the blog posts of her husband, Neil Gaiman. I had a vague awareness of a few of the storylines, so I welcomed the chance to get a more complete picture in Palmer's own words. She narrates the audiobook herself, and does a beautiful job of it: it's like she's sitting next to you and talking to you about life. The other great thing about the audiobook is the inclusion of music. I enjoyed every song that was included. I cried a *lot* during *Lost*.

*Nothing's ever lost forever
It's just hiding in the recess of your mind
And when you need it
It will come to you at night*

So much hope, comfort, and terror in a pretty little bundle of words.

She has some interesting things to say about the creative process and the role of artists in society. I loved how she described art as a process of collecting the dots and connecting the dots. Artists go about it in many different ways, with their "blenders" at different settings. She also makes a powerful case for why "Get a job" is *not* the appropriate response to give to an aspiring artist. A "job" can have a much wider meaning than its conventional, narrow-minded definition; she gives a detailed account of what it's like to have a job as a living statue in a city square.

This sense of discomfort over career legitimacy leads into one of the book's recurring themes: impostor syndrome. I've struggled with that a lot, in the soul-crushing wasteland of academia. But it was interesting to hear about how someone with a very different personality and career path ran into many of the same problems. For her, the key to overcoming it was to look for the ways that her work positively affects people's lives.

It's that need for connection that drives a lot of this book. The emphasis is on being able to ask for help, accept help, and in turn be ready to give when it's your turn to be asked. She provides many examples about

how the simple act of asking - not demanding - opened doors and forged connections, particularly between herself and her fans. I liked how she presents asking as an invitation to collaborate, rather than an act of weakness or inadequacy, as people often seem to see it.

As much as I liked the basic idea, I wasn't completely on board with how it was executed. In particular, the distinction between "asking" and "begging" rubbed me the wrong way. She delineates the two because her artist friends were having difficulty asking fans for help (e.g., via Kickstarter campaigns). For them, it felt too much like begging. She and her fans have this to say about it:

"I always thought of street performers as beggars. But now I see them as artists, so I always give them money."

If asking is a collaboration, begging is a less-connected demand. Begging can't provide value to the giver; by definition, it offers no exchange. Here are the words that blog commenters used when trying to describe begging: manipulation, desperation, base, animal, last-ditch, manipulative, guilt, shame. The key words in relation to asking: dignity, collaboration, exchange, mutual respect, comfort... Asking is like courtships; begging, you are already naked and panting.

For one thing, people who have to beg are probably at a pretty low point already, and don't need to have additional negative descriptors hurled at them. Palmer should be able to support her argument - that artists shouldn't be ashamed of asking for help - without disparaging people who fall outside her world of comfortable artistic exchange.

It's also a very black-and-white way of looking at things, which extends to the way that Palmer talks about fans and haters. She doesn't leave room for anyone in between. It's possible to respond critically to a piece of art without hating it, or having any ill will towards the artist, and I'm honestly curious about what Palmer thinks of people like that.

Despite these issues, and the occasionally rambling and repetitious writing style, I thought this book was interesting and informative. It's not my usual fare, but looking through a window into another person's life can sometimes be insightful.

Michael says

While Amanda has a few decent points, which are easy enough to grasp within the span of the first chapter. Her anecdotes are so remarkably self-centered it becomes hard to bare. When this book isn't Amanda bragging about how she has asked people for things and returned the favor with her majestic presence (i.e. "I asked people on twitter if I could stay at their house, and in return they got to hang out with me") it is indignant narcissistic drivel about being treated poorly by her label. If it's not that it's delilah-esque sentimentalism, saying things like "I loved the old Japanese man who stared at me for hours". Please, you love money.

Ariel says

Anyone who is an artist sharing any of their work online should read this. It took me a few times to get into

it, but if you stick with it, you'll fall into Amanda's powerful story and insights. I'm really glad that I read this, and I think reading it right after graduating was the perfect moment to take in her story. I'm honestly going to miss listening to Amanda's voice speaking wisdom to me. (I listened to the audiobook and it was excellent.)

Debbie "DJ" says

Won through Goodreads Firstreads, Thank you!

Big confession. I entered this giveaway because I'm at a point in my life where I need to learn to ask for help. I truly thought this was more of a self-help book, and had never heard of Amanda Palmer. Turns out, Amanda Palmer is a pretty big deal, and she really did help me learn to ask for help, just not in the way I had expected.

Palmer is true artist. Beginning her profession as a statue in a wedding dress, standing on a box at various street corners, with a tip jar placed before her. If someone places money in her jar, she reaches down to hand them a flower. But what she also gives in return, is a piece of herself, a connection, a chance to truly be "seen."

Palmer took me on an amazing journey throughout her life. She is a driving force of crowd funding, and what social media can do. She forms a band called "The Dresden Dolls," relying solely on fans and what they can give. She couch surfs, crowd surfs, and forms real connections with her fans. Her whole philosophy is "If you love people enough they'll give you everything."

Her outlook on life is big and fearless. When she is signed by a record label, she soon realizes the profound differences in philosophy. Producers focus on art as a product, forcing people to pay. She sees it as relationship, asking people to pay. She does everything she can to get herself fired, and finally has to lie, saying she wants to have children. That's what it took for the label to fire her!

Once back with her fans, she shares her experience. In fact, this is her way of life, constantly emailing, twittering, and always asking for what she needs. She'll randomly tweet "pillow fight" at such and such a place, and two hundred fans will show up, armed with pillows, having the time of their life. Once, stuck in Iceland, she tweets, and is instantly helped by fans who arrange her pick up from the airport. The woman who arrives, not only gives her a place to stay, but a tour of Iceland. She gives back by performing a live show, not knowing just how many fans she has worldwide, as hundreds show up. Palmer not only asks for herself, but for fans in trouble as well. She got the word out when a fan lost her houseboat, and people from all over sent money, clothes, etc.

Her degree of trust astounds me. Staying with people she has never met, opening her own home to do the same for others. Here is what she has to say, "When you openly, radically, trust people they not only take care of you, they become your family."

This is a whole different view of asking, it's about believing what you have to give is important. It's about getting rid of all the old concepts, especially that of "get a job." Knowing that who you are and what you give, no matter what that may be, is important. That people will help you if you ask. She discovered, "it isn't so much the art of asking that stops us, but what lies beneath the fear of being vulnerable, the fear of rejection, the fear of looking needy or weak. This points fundamentally to our separation from one another."

A quick personal experience. I worked with a best friend and her husband, he being on the leading edge of online music. Free music was played all day every day, and listeners were simply asked for their support. It was, and continues to be a huge success.

As this is not how America usually does business, Palmer receives lots of hate mail...who did she think she is? She actively posts the good with the bad. Not in an attempt to divide, but in a courageous act of letting others into her world. She shows how we are all connected. How both giving and receiving are gifts, and how often receiving is the tougher of the two.

I'm really impressed with this woman. This book, while going on and on a little too much for me at times, is absolutely who she is. A woman with a lot to share and a talented writer as well. She holds nothing back, including her love life, and marriage to Neil Gaiman.

I can't believe how much I enjoyed her story, and her book. It opened my mind to a new way of thinking. Highly recommended.

Mariah says

One of my favorite ways to learn is by picking random autobiographies of people I have never heard of and reading them. That is what happened in this situation. This book was suggested to me through Overdrive because I like "strong women." I didn't have to put it on hold, so I thought, why not? This is the second book this year that I read a book about someone I had no idea who they were.

I rated this book a 3 out of 5, because it was an easy read and somewhat entertaining. The book definitely could have been a lot shorter than it was. She repeated herself a lot...

However, I enjoyed hearing about her amazing connection to her fans and how she feels comfortable enough for them to ask to help her financially for different musical productions. It was really interesting to hear how even very successful musicians still struggle financially.

I also enjoyed hearing about her experience of dressing like a bride statue and giving out flowers to everyone that gave her money.

And lastly, it was super interesting finding out that she is married to Neil Gaiman. He is one of my favorite children's author.

All in all, this was an interesting book and I'm glad I took the time to learn about Amanda Palmer.

Richard Butchins says

This book started off being pretty much what I thought it would be. A book to appeal to Palmer fans and indirectly to Neil Gaiman fan's (her marriage doing much to increase her online reach). A book about being a piano thumping, underwear flaunting indie rocker. It is that book and it's something else as well. I have an interest in crowd funding having run a reasonable campaign myself in 2011 or so. I have never been a lover of Ms Palmers music but I am aware of her careful nurturing of a fan base and when she finally used crowd

funding I was not surprised in the slightest that she netted a million dollars and it's a book about why that happened.

But what about the writing? Well, there has obviously been a lot of work put into this book by editors [and you can't do much better than to have Neil Gaiman to help you] but it surprised me because about halfway through it starts to get interesting, she starts to write more from the heart - it feels truer and more honest. Less rock 'n' roll memoir and more about a real human being. I was particularly interested in what she didn't say - no more than a fleeting mention of her own family, sisters and a brief account of a conversation with her mother. But nothing about her childhood or adolescence. Interesting I thought. She is candid about her marriage to Gaiman and her friendship with a man a lot older than herself and this made me wonder about her relationship to her own father of which there is no mention.

Of course, she doesn't have to write about that, or anything else. It's her book and she can write what she likes. In all it has moments of emotional candour that touched me and other moments of self indulgent waffle that irked me. But if you are interested in crowdfunding and Gaiman and Palmer it's a good read. You should ask someone for a copy. Amanda may approve.

Jill says

I see you, Amanda Palmer constantly repeats, in this book and on her social media. *I see you. We are exchanging. There is meaning to every interaction. There is meaning to the artist-fan relationship.* I see you.

I was a massive Dresden Dolls fan ten years ago. I remember waiting in an autograph line with a friend after a Dolls show -- a line just like the ones she describes in [The Art of Asking](#), with amazing people on either side of us, chatting about music and cheerfully clutching CDs to our chest. And then, it was my turn. Amanda Palmer & Brian Viglione sat in front of us. I held out my CD, said something admiring, eyes alight

and Amanda Palmer took the album out of my hand, turned to Brian, giggled, and stared at him the entire time.

When she gave me back a CD with silver scribbles on it, she clearly hadn't heard a word I'd said. She didn't see me. She looked right through me.

This interaction has admittedly coloured my subsequent, very conflicted following of Amanda Palmer. As, frankly, hurt as I was by that experience, I'm generally pretty good about separating the art from the artist. But, while I continued to appreciate her undeniable talent, always finding a few good songs on anything she'd release -- I found her public persona troubling. "I'm one of you," she calls from the Twittertops, "crowdfunding and it-would-never-happen-without-you and can I crash on your couch?" Fine. I can believe it was a bad night, or that she was sick of hearing praise, or whatever. I don't doubt all these amazing stories from fans with whom she's connected, for seconds or a lifetime. I can't and wouldn't hold a grudge, because who am I to her, anyway? She doesn't remember me. But I think that's the crux of it: the way she views this *asking* thing is more one-sided than she wants to believe.

The Art of Asking is a rambling, generally incoherent mess. In some ways, this works to the book's advantage. Palmer's social media feeds are equally stream-of-consciousness-esque; her fans are prepared and ready to accept a little jumping around to get to the point -- and she does, eventually, get there (though man, I'd love to get a word count on the number of "ask"s -- Jesus Christ, my eyes are tired of reading it). I can see uber-fans ravenously praising this book, which basically amounts to a series of anecdotes, as honest, genuine, brilliant, touching, revolutionary.

I do think it's honest -- though any other of those qualifiers'd be a heavy stretch.

Palmer is not a good writer, let's just please agree on that. She's not a *bad* writer, just not a good one, or at least not yet. The book *itself* is seriously flawed. It's as if she took exactly what was in her brain and typed it out on the page -- great for ~getting to know an artist~, not so great for literary merit. Personal revelations, decent grammar, and a few good turns of phrase does not an author make: if that were true, I could publish my old LiveJournal entries and make a mint. This book, Palmer proudly proclaims, was written quickly: it shows (& translates to a quick read; easily finishable in an evening). It's generally engaging, but engaging like listening to a friend tell a long....long.....frequently derailed....story about themselves. At a bar. Over wine. You know: you're into it, but it only makes sense cause of the booze.

So okay sure, honest. But with that honesty comes some traits of which I think Palmer herself is unaware. Pride, superiority-masquerading-as-inferiority, narcissism -- complaints all tossed her way and angrily batted away by the fans, as drunk people were from her Eight-Food Bride statue. And there lies the problem: surround yourself with a community of staunch defenders, and you rarely have to look at what might actually be wrong with the picture. This comes to light many times throughout the book -- not saying AFP's not gone through the ringer in her own way, but she's evidently been told she's a special snowflake for her entire life. That's given her a particular perspective on her situation, her critics, and her personal voice -- and not a particularly attractive or humble one. Strangely, the start of the book is more infuriating than the latter half -- as if she has matured, sort of, but in revisiting her days as a bohemian twenty-something, she turns back into a pretentious artiste.

It frustrates me to write a review so centered on the author as opposed to the text (I guess I'm not as good at separating art/artist as I thought) -- but that's what memoir calls for. Do I feel like I got to know Amanda Palmer better? Sure. Am I less conflicted about her? Not really. Do I feel this book added anything to my life? Not at all -- but then, the lessons she's learning aren't the ones I am, and her book will undoubtedly connect with many other fans (and non-fans). I don't think her actions will change the way music is marketed, nor do I think she's written anything particularly profound -- but maybe that speaks to her own message. Art is there for the taking, but only those who respond to it will give -- praise, or anything else.

I will keep following Palmer on Facebook. I will keep rolling my eyes at her sometimes, and feeling tears well up others (occasionally simultaneously). I will never think she deserves all the praise she gets, nor all the criticism. I don't think, in the end, she should be as polarizing as she is -- for all that, she is just...one of us. And when she really starts believing that, when she stops "giving gifts" of her talent and starts just being present in the encounter, without all the sidestory ----- that will be something *actually* special.

Kristin says

Ok, so this isn't my type of book, but it's Amanda Palmer, so I'm naturally curious as hell to read this. Please come through Netgalley.

I mean, if not the book, I'll take the coin-operated boy that I have been waiting for...

2015 {YES I AM BEHIND...stuff it} PopSugar Challenge with my fellow crustaceans Karly, Jess, Heather, and Nenia

A memoir - The Art of Asking; or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Let People Help - Palmer, Amanda

Attempt 1: Netgalley sucks

Attempt 2: Started by my Library loan expired, crazy waitlist on it.

Attempt 3: The generous Debbie gifted her copy to me. Changed jobs and life became crazy, never got to.

Attempt 4: Broke down and got the audiobook from Overdrive. Best decision EVER.

Circa 2011 I found this freakishly strange video, Coin-Operated Boy, that I was curiously drawn to. Who was this crazy lady with the designed eyebrows?! Ever since then, Amanda Palmer has fascinated me. It wasn't even until recently that I learned who Neil Gaiman was and that she was married to him (I have to say, seeing him through her eyes makes me want to try his books again).

Needless to say, I knew I had to read this book, and I am so glad I did. Regardless of what you think of her, her lifestyle, her music, her crowdfunding, I think you would be hard pressed to find a more authentic individual. And even though she is who she is and flaunts it, she has the same fears that we all do, what people think of her, of being judged, of being hated, not being seen.

"There's a difference between wanting to be looked at and wanting to be seen . . .

One is exhibitionism, the other is connection.

Not everybody wants to be looked at. Everybody want to be seen."

And connection is what she gives. Unlike so many artists and celebrities, she connects with her fans, creates real world friendships, loves them, hugs them.

How many of us fail at asking the ones we love and trust for what we need? I know I do, on a daily basis. But have we ever stopped to ask why that is so hard? Why it makes us feel like such a burden?

"I think people are fundamentally generous, but our instinct to be generous gets broken down.....American culture in particular has instilled in us the bizarre notion that to ask for help amounts to an admission of failure."

In the Art of Asking, Amanda makes you examine these so-called failures and asks you to question your reasoning, implores you to be just as open and prepared for a no, and that's ok. There is no shame in asking.

"I've often wondered: are there women who are just TOO embarrassed to ask? Women who would rather just roll up a huge wad of toilet paper into their underwear rather than dare ask a room full of strangers for a favor? There must be. But not me. Hell no. I am totally not afraid to ask. For anything. I am SHAMELESS.""

So I know this review is bombarded with quotes and not much else, but these are all lines that truly spoke to me, made me think, made me question.

“Artists are not useful.
Grownups are not artists,
Artists do not deserve to make money from their art.
An artist is not a real job”

“Everybody out there is winging it to some degree, of this we can be sure...

In both the art and the business worlds, the difference between the amateurs and the professionals is simple:

The professionals know they're winging it.
The amateurs pretend they're not.”

Amanda Palmer, I see you, and I want a hug.

Jessica says

I was sort of inclined not to like this book from the beginning; Amanda Palmer's "stop pretending art is hard" thing has always rubbed me the wrong way, and then when she decided to write a book it seemed like just another manifestation of that ("what, like writing a book is hard?"). But the book itself? Is really good.

That's not to say it isn't problematic. It is. But the problems are in the concept, not in the execution. Palmer's a really good writer, and her stories are all raw and interesting, if almost always verging into the realm of TMI. (If you're surprised by this, I am willing to bet you've never heard of Amanda Palmer before.)

The Art of Asking was roughly conceived as a longer-form version of Palmer's wildly successful TED talk. Certainly, the book examines Palmer's successes (and occasional failures) in asking for and receiving help of all sorts by, essentially, believing it will work. Often, Palmer believes, people want to help, as long as they feel like they're part of something - and she is very good at building community. She treats her fans like friends, and for the most part, that's how they act. Friends let you crash on their couch when you're in town (Palmer and her band often find lodging on their tours by posting on Twitter); friends volunteer to bring food or help sell merch; friends are happy to chip in toward your crowdfunding project (Palmer's Kickstarter made history by being the first music project to reach one million in funding).

But if you're looking for something to explain how to apply these principles to anything that doesn't have the initials AFP, you'll be disappointed. There's a lot of How This Works for Amanda and precious little How This Works.

Heidi The Hippie Reader says

Amanda Palmer is an extremely talented artist who has done it all- from performing in a punk rock band to posing as a statue on the streets.

I can see why readers are passionate about this book and the author. She just didn't strike a spark for me.

Memoirs can drag on and become self-indulgent and ridiculous. I feel like that was a problem with *The Art of Asking*.

The tipping point for me was when she formed The Dresden Dolls with her friend and said (I'm quoting from memory here since I was listening to the audiobook): "I finally had the strongly emoting band I'd always dreamed of" or something like that.

I realized, I was strongly emoting on this book, but not in a good way.

I understand her internal struggles in forming a relationship with Neil Gaiman must have been difficult for her, but her "should I date him, he's older and richer and more famous than me" just came off as silly and very first-world problems.

I get that she loves her fans, her art, her lifestyle- but it just come together to make a read that I enjoyed.

My apologies to her fans. If it helps, my favorite parts of the audiobook were the songs she put between some of the tracks. Those were actually pretty awesome.

And the over-arching theme of *The Art of Asking* was good too.

Society isn't comfortable with asking. We don't know how to do it, don't feel comfortable with it and it prevents people from making the art that they were born to make.

You can get that part of this book by watching Palmer's TED talk. Maybe you should do that instead of reading this.

Here 'tis: https://www.ted.com/talks/amanda_palm...

Bradley says

I should be too old, too jaded, too well-read, and too involved to get sucked into book that MAKES ME WANT TO BE A BETTER PERSON.

But...

well...

It happened anyway.

So before I get into the review, I just want to thank the writer for her openness and honesty. I want to thank her for revealing such heartbreaking intimacy to us. I was already a fan, but I wasn't part of the fan. That has changed. I saw something that spoke to me and revealed a level of courage that was more compelling than practically anything I've ever seen, heard, or experienced.

The key concept here is being courageous in telling the truth, regardless of the consequences. Secondly, it's about asking for help and being able to receive it, but just because I've put this as second doesn't necessarily make it less important. It just means that its message might have been lost if it wasn't for that moment where the pages bled and my fingers smeared Amanda's blood all over my furniture and on my shirt and in my eyes as I unsuccessfully tried to wipe away my tears.

On to the review.

The message eventually ramped up to revolve around the revolution of Kickstarter, and I assume it was also the impetus that made the publishers want her story. Little did they know they'd be getting something so very human and encouraging, showing the rest of us introverts and artistic types that we aren't wrong in wishing for a world of connection on our own terms, that being dissatisfied with accepted modes of living isn't a sign that we'll never be able to be true to ourselves.

We are not meant to be lost and unable to cope with our lives. We are meant to find our real kin and be a part of their lives, as they will be a part of ours. The only way that is possible is by opening ourselves up and being truly able to receive the help when it comes. I know it sounds cliché, perhaps vaguely mystical, but in this book, it's absolutely emotional and breathtaking and visceral.

I want to be seen. I want to be in love with every human connection I make. I see you.

So simple, so persuasive.

And ultimately, it is the most personally rewarding book I've read in a long time that doesn't set its feet in the airy world. I feel as if I had a long and wonderful conversation with a true friend.

Fuck the review. I'm just going to say, again, "Thank you, Amanda."

If you ever read this, assume I'm giving you a hug.

Brad K Horner's Blog

madamereadsalot says

So tbh, I went into this book without really knowing about Amanda Palmer. I was just interested in reading memoirs from women I might find inspiration from for my own life. Reading 'Yes, Please' and 'Year of Yes' had me left wanting to read more from strong, independent women who made their way. What perked my interest in this book was the title 'The Art of Asking'. The reason for that is simple... I haaaate asking others to help me. Even as I struggle (and sometimes realize I'll fail without help) I'll seldomly ask others for help.

Not because I'm a strong independent woman and can do everything by myself just fine (which luckily I indeed can do) but because I haven't mastered the art of asking just yet. And I think I should. I think it would not only make things easier for me, but also make me more approachable. That is why I got interested in the book in the first place. And although it was not exactly what I expected (like some kind of step by step 'how to...' Instruction) I wasn't disappointed in the least. While often having to laugh out or smile to myself while both listening to the audiobook and browsing the hardcopy for photos, it also conveys how human and full of faith in humanity Amanda Palmer is. Despite also having a lot of negative backlash, this faith and trust in other people remains, and while I struggle with mistrust ('can I really ask them...' 'Can I confide in them, won't they breach my trust..?') her faith is contagious in all the best ways. If you need anything, just take the donut! ;-) you never know, you might find allies, you might find friendship and sure, you can also find disappointment. But most times, humans are good. Most times you might be surprised! That is what this book conveyed to me. Not to have courage in myself (which all other memoirs I read so far conveyed to me) but to have trust in my fellow human beings.

I think this is a really beautiful and important message and I'm grateful to Amanda for writing down her story!

Fun fact towards the end: I recently started reading books by Neil Gaiman on recommendation of a bookstagram friend and fell in love with his writing! Again, I didn't know anything about Amanda Palmer, so finding out she is married to Neil Gaiman somehow was such a fun surprise! Also that she speaks German, wie cool ist das denn?! Als Deutsche freu ich mich sehr darüber, wenn jemand unsere Sprache lernt, sonst ist es ja meist umgekehrt! :-D

Anyways: great book, Thumbs up, especially recommend the audiobook since You can listen to the songs listed in the book! Only 'negative' point for me, was that I sometimes couldn't follow the timeline properly and wondered if it's even chronological. But since Neil Gaiman edited the book, I'll shut up now. Everything probably is exactly as it was supposed to be and the book is great!

Ksenia Anske says

Asking. It seems like such a simple thing. We do it every day. We ask, "How are you?" and "Do you mind if I sit down?" and "Can you please hold this?" and "Do you remember that song?" We ask and ask and ask and most of the time don't think much about it, until it comes to asking for big things. Money. "Can you loan me \$1,000?" A place to live. "Is it okay if I camp out at your apartment for a couple months?"

Transportation. "May I borrow your car?" Fundraising. "Please contribute to our cause?" Help. Any kind of serious help. Anything going beyond the doughnut. Anything that involves a serious risk on the other side of the party, or serious trust in us. And why would someone want to trust someone in this life where we have learned not to trust strangers? Where since we were little, since that moment when we gave away all our toys to that neighbor kid and when our parents scolded us and told us, "You don't just give your things away like that when someone asks!" Or when we asked someone for that candy and were told, "No, that's mine. Go away. Go buy your own candy." It was not until that moment that we have started being ashamed of asking. We were told it was wrong. We were brought up to rely on ourselves. We were supposed to become self-sufficient adults. Only many of us self-sufficient adults later break down, understanding that we can't possibly survive on our own. We need help. We can't live without help. And we don't know how to ask.

The Art of Asking is a beautiful story that is exactly that, a piece of art about asking. Amanda drew a painting with words, or maybe made music with words, or simply took out her thoughts and dropped them on paper as they were, illustrating her own path to learning how to ask, what it means, why there is so much fear, in her, in people around her, in all of us. And it's bare, this story. Holding this book you're holding

Amanda, bare, because she trusts you, the reader, to see her. And you, the reader, will see this story if you trust her. It's human. It's touching. It's raw. It's messy. It's all what life is. It's vulnerable. It will make you pause and think and examine your own life, your own messiness and fears and everything human that is in you. You might connect with it, you might not. But I hope that on fundamental level, on the level of your heart, you will. And perhaps you will ask people in your life for things you were always afraid to ask for. Just like I'm asking you right now to read this book.

Vanessa says

I don't think I would have picked up this book if it wasn't for the lovely Jen Campbell. I've never particularly been a fan of Amanda Palmer before, not because I disliked her but because I never really knew much about her. Of course I knew of her, and I'd heard a couple of Dresden Dolls songs years ago when they were still around, and of course I was aware of her marriage to Neil Gaiman. Anything else though was a mystery to me, and I mainly picked this up as it had been billed as a kind of self-help book (and lord knows I'm a sucker for those).

I decided to go with the audiobook on other people's recommendation, and I'm so glad I did. Amanda Palmer is an excellent narrator, her voice full of emotion and conviction as she relays her many stories, and the audiobook features the inclusion of several songs that I enjoyed listening to. I feel like getting into her music now!

I'd say this book does fit the bill in some ways as a self-help book, but it is more of a memoir that teaches lessons based on various events in Amanda Palmer's life. I found it a little difficult to get into at first, as the first sections on Palmer working as a human statue went on for quite a long time I felt, and could be a little repetitive at points. However, as soon as her music career began, I was hooked. I binge-read/bing-listened (whatever you want to call it) this for hours at a time, and I loved hearing about how Amanda overcame her fears and worries about a variety of things (including allowing her husband Neil Gaiman to help her out financially - something I have always had trouble with).

I loved her depiction of her marriage to Neil, and it was great to see their little relationship quirks. The way she spoke about him and their relationship was beautiful and heartwarming, and I loved having an insight into Gaiman too as a person outwith the novelist domain.

I'd recommend this as an audiobook specifically, whether you're a fan of Amanda Palmer or not. I wasn't particularly, and I think I've now been converted. Also, I watched her TED Talk as I was reading this, and it was very inspiring and entertaining, so I'd recommend that too.
