

Enough to make it worth coming back the next day, enough people to help me make rent and put food on the table. Enough so I could keep making art.”

Amanda has come a long way from her street-performing days, but her career remains dominated by that same sentiment—finding ways to reach “her crowd” and feeling gratitude when she does. With her band the Dresden Dolls, Amanda tried the traditional path of signing with a record label. It didn’t take for a variety of reasons, but one of them was that the label had absolutely no interest in Amanda’s view of success. They wanted hits, but making music for the masses was never what Amanda and the Dresden Dolls set out to do.

After leaving the record label in 2008, she began experimenting with different ways to make a living. She released music directly to the public without involving a middle man, releasing digital files on a “pay what you want” basis and selling CDs and vinyl. She also made money from live performances and merchandise sales. Eventually, in 2012 she decided to try her hand at the sort of crowdfunding we know so well today. Her Kickstarter project started with a goal of \$100,000, and she made \$1.2 million. It remains one of the most successful Kickstarter projects of all time.

Today, Amanda has switched gears away from crowdfunding for specific projects to instead getting consistent financial support from her fan base on Patreon, a crowdfunding site that allows artists to get recurring donations from fans. More than eight thousand people have signed up to support her so she can create music, art, and any other creative “thing” that she is inspired to make. The recurring pledges are made on a “per thing” basis. All of the content she makes is made freely available under an Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike license (CC BY-NC-SA).

Making her music and art available under Creative Commons licensing undoubtedly limits her options for how she makes a living. But sharing her work has been part of her model since the beginning of her career, even before

she discovered Creative Commons. Amanda says the Dresden Dolls used to get ten emails per week from fans asking if they could use their music for different projects. They said yes to all of the requests, as long as it wasn’t for a completely for-profit venture. At the time, they used a short-form agreement written by Amanda herself. “I made everyone sign that contract so at least I wouldn’t be leaving the band vulnerable to someone later going on and putting our music in a Camel cigarette ad,” Amanda said. Once she discovered Creative Commons, adopting the licenses was an easy decision because it gave them a more formal, standardized way of doing what they had been doing all along. The NonCommercial licenses were a natural fit.

Amanda embraces the way her fans share and build upon her music. In *The Art of Asking*, she wrote that some of her fans’ unofficial videos using her music surpass the official videos in number of views on YouTube. Rather than seeing this sort of thing as competition, Amanda celebrates it. “We got into this because we wanted to share the joy of music,” she said.

This is symbolic of how nearly everything she does in her career is motivated by a desire to connect with her fans. At the start of her career, she and the band would throw concerts at house parties. As the gatherings grew, the line between fans and friends was completely blurred. “Not only did most our early fans know where I lived and where we practiced, but most of them had also been in my kitchen,” Amanda wrote in *The Art of Asking*.

Even though her fan base is now huge and global, she continues to seek this sort of human connection with her fans. She seeks out face-to-face contact with her fans every chance she can get. Her hugely successful Kickstarter featured fifty concerts at house parties for backers. She spends hours in the signing line after shows. It helps that Amanda has the kind of dynamic, engaging personality that instantly draws people to her, but a big component of