

The Art of Asking Everything

Tim Minchin: Accidentally Brave

Amanda Palmer 00:36

This is The Art of Asking Everything, I am Amanda Palmer. This week's guest, Tim Minchin, starring in Accidentally Brave.

Oh my god, Tim Minchin, I do not even know where to start with this weirdo genius weirdo man. I can't remember the exact first time I encountered a Tim Minchin song, but it was probably on YouTube, I don't know, 10 years ago, and it was probably footage of him singing at a piano with his crazy black guyliner, and questionable dreadlocks, singing a song, [Prejudice](#), and I'm gonna play you a clip of it.

MUSIC CLIP - Prejudice by Tim Minchin

A couple of Gs

An R and an E

An I and an N

Just six little letters

All jumbled together

Have caused damage that we may never mend

Amanda 01:30

And I was like, okay, this is my person. I just love this man. And you may know him as the songwriter for the hit [musical Matilda](#), or you may have seen his very weird, funny, beatnik inspired anti-new age, pro-science animated film [Storm](#), on YouTube, which is hilarious, and slightly mean, and you may also just be an old school Tim fan who knew him before anyone else.

If you don't know Tim, he is an Australian, he's from Perth, and he is part comedian, part song satirist, but he is also a really serious, soulful, empathetic songwriter. And you never really know quite where he's going to take a song, which is one of the genius things about him. And he is not afraid to write [a jaunty, jingly song about systemic child abuse within the catholic church, with lyrics like 'Fuck the motherfucking Pope'](#). But then he goes and writes a song like [White Wine In The Sun](#), which is a slightly funny, but mostly profoundly sincere song about Christmas values, centring around ritual and family, instead of around organised religion. A song which literally brings me to tears pretty much every time I hear it.

And I find artists like Tim really inspirational, especially as I am writing songs. Because he reminds me that humour, and darkness, and soulfulness, and satire, and science, are all allowed in the exact same arena, you do not need to compartmentalise them, and that your

audience is smart, and they can take it, and they can think one moment and laugh the next, and cry the next, and it's all allowed.

So I've obviously been a Tim Minchin fan for years now, and like it happens when you tour the world and you get to hobnob with the well-known people that you admire because you're also kind of a well-known person, well-known enough that they will return your emails because they've heard of you, I made a point of going and making friends with Tim about six years ago, and recently convinced him to do this podcast with me. And we sat down in a recording studio in Sydney, the day of my show in Sydney, at the Enmore Theatre.

And Tim had just recently moved back to Sydney after living with his family for a long stint in LA, and I had just seen his new touring show, which was called Back, at the Palladium in London a couple months before, and in this show he sort of pulls out his greatest hits, but he also played some really great acerbic new material he had written about America, and about leaving the States, and how he felt. And we get into that, and a lot of other stuff around songwriting and politics, and authenticity, in this conversation. And man, does he have some strong feelings about America, and what is happening there, and given what is going on in my country right now, it was a very prescient conversation, and I think you're gonna love it.

Without further ado, please welcome Tim Minchin.

Amanda 04:38

Hi Tim Minchin, I love you.

Tim Minchin 04:40

Hii, Amanda Palmer. I love you, too.

Amanda 04:43

Thanks for doing my podcast.

Tim 04:44

Sure. I can't believe you have a podcast as well.

Amanda 04:48

I mean, doesn't everyone?

Tim 04:51

Not me!

Amanda 04:52

I like talking.

Tim 04:54

Yeah I like talking too, except I think talking's... The more hours I spend talking in public, the more chances I'll say something wrong and get in trouble.

Amanda 05:04

That's a really good point. I think the reason I started a podcast, and I'm not kidding, and this is a perfect example, is there are just people that I want to talk to intensely, and this is just a perfect excuse to do it without having to do any chit-chat first.

Tim 05:19

Yeah. Well, I'm the right person for that. Because I'm bad at small talk.

Amanda 05:24

Good. Are you anywhere on the spectrum? Have you ever tested?

Tim 05:28

No, I don't think so. I mean, we all are, because it's a spectrum, but I've got a few people in my family who recently have got, at my age, in their 40s, have finally got diagnosed with a bit of inattentive ADHD or something, and I have a relation who's very autistic. There's various other stuff in the family, but I don't think... If I am on the spectrum, then the spectrum's gone too broad, the umbrella's too wide, because I think I'm at the other end, I think I'm highly functional in terms of picking up social cues.

Amanda 06:11

Do you think of yourself as empathetic?

Tim 06:13

I don't think I'm like my sister, who's like an empath. Like, if you tell Katie a sad story, she'll cry, and if you tell her a funny story, she'll laugh till she cries. She's so enrolled in other people's narratives. I'm much more intuitively objective. I think I'm probably averagely empathic.

Amanda 06:35

I mean, where's the difference between being empathic and just being emotional? Because I feel like I know a lot of people who are emotional, and will cry at the drop of a hat, but that doesn't necessarily make them empathetic, or compassionate.

Tim 06:45

Well, I don't know, it feels pretty close to the definition of it. Emotional mirroring feels pretty close to the definition of empathy, when someone can't help but mirror the emotional state of the person they're experiencing. I find it's a bit of a battle for me, like I'm struggling with my daughter at the moment, just because she's 13 and I'm parenting on my own because Sarah's away for a few weeks, and I am so upset by her being upset, that I can't sympathise with her, because it makes me cross that I don't know how to fix it. And it makes me, like last night I did bad. I'm

actually in quite a hyper-emotional headspace this morning, because I just fucked up the parenting last night, when she needed me to say I know that's how you feel, I did the...

Amanda 07:35

Did you try to fix her?

Tim 07:36

You're letting me down, and you're meant to be in bed, and now you're overtired, and this is ridiculous! So my empathy is not hugely functional, I think probably in a slightly masculine way, and also in a slightly, I like to be able to control things, and empathy is a lack of control, because you're at the whim of someone else's feelings.

Amanda 07:58

That's funny that you would look at it that way, though, I've never really thought of empathy as a lack of control. I mean, you can take something on without having to be at the mercy of the thing that you're taking on, you can just sort of use it as a tool. But I mean, just the fact that you have the kind of insight about what happened last night, puts you miles ahead of a lot of other people.

Tim 08:18

Yeah, I hope my daughter knows that. She's just at that age where you're just like, I'm 44, and I'm your dad, but I need you to say that you love me and you appreciate how hard I'm trying, like it's so pathetic that I need that from my daughter, and that's what they can't give you at that age. They are not thinking, what does my parent need from me, and nor should they be.

Amanda 08:41

Yeah, I'm definitely feeling that right now with my four year old. I'm so disappointed in myself when he says something like, mama, I love you, and I missed you, and every cell in my body explodes with happiness and sparkly joy, and I'm like, really Amanda, are you that selfish?

Tim 08:57

We are so needy.

Amanda 09:00

I'm so needy!

Tim 09:00

I'm so needy from my kids. And I think it's really bad. I think it's one of the things that our generation is doing wrong, where we think our kids are a reasonable source of affirmation. And I think that's not what you should be asking for. You shouldn't be giving your kids indicators that you need their emotional buoying up.

Amanda 09:23

I am trying really hard not to repeat that pattern. I mean, I picked some of that up when I was a kid and it's dangerous.

Tim 09:32

It's interesting, there are kids who grew up knowing their parents need them to be more stable. That trauma, I think, can make people develop into really amazing empathic people.

Amanda 09:44

Artists!

Tim 09:45

And artists.

Amanda 09:46

It leads to fantastic songwriting.

Tim 09:49

Yeah, I guess. Sometimes.

Amanda 09:52

I mean, so many of the performers that I know, and the good writers, have a common thread of having some kind of relationship with their parents, where either they just weren't seen, or they had to bring...

Tim 10:08

They gave more to their parents than their parents gave to them.

Amanda 10:10

Right. But I think most of it just all circles back to needing to be seen at a higher volume, and in a way that can, if you manage it right, you could become really talented and good at being seen, in a way where you're not just a taker, and you're just that asshole needing all of that egotistical approval from everyone.

Tim 10:33

Yeah, it can be a force.

Amanda 10:34

Or it can just dump you off the edge of the cliff of ego, and you can die in the mire.

Tim 10:38

Yeah, and that's a spectrum too. There are artists who have all the burn to be onstage, and be heard, and be listened, to just tilt towards just being narcissists, and their work's just not good

enough. And then there's people whose work is so good that, despite their introversion, they get onstage because there's nothing else they can do.

Amanda 11:02

Because they have to make a living too. I mean, that's the weird thing about this job.

Tim 11:04

That's their gift, if you're into the idea of gifts, which I'm not.

Amanda 11:07

You don't think you're gifted?

Tim 11:08

Well, it implies that...

Amanda 11:11

Yeah, who gave it to you?

Tim 11:13

Yeah, it implies a giver. And it also implies that... It's an interesting thing, how to talk about your blessings.

Amanda 11:22

Yeah, I hate that word.

Tim 11:23

But these words are there for a reason.

Amanda 11:27

This woman Marnie said, because she's seen my show, wanted me to ask you about what you think of the concept of having radical compassion for people, especially because you have been talking about the limits of empathy.

Tim 11:40

The phrase radical empathy is something I've been trying to throw out there for a couple of years now, it's obviously in the ether. I haven't seen your show yet, I'm seeing it tonight. And I haven't really read a lot around this subject, although I'm sure there's a lot written about it. But among my many, many frustrations with how progressives are trying to progress, is the fact that people, I'll say our side, as if there are sides, and part of the problem is the false binary, but liberals, whatever, let's call ourselves progressives, we hope to be progressives, right? We hope to change the world for the better.

I know so many people who can easily empathize with a black kid in Texas who's on death row at the age of 19, because at 18 he stabbed a 17 year old in a drug deal gone wrong. And they can have empathy for that kid, because he grew up in the hood, he was used as a runner at 13. And I know people like this, I know people who escaped through being good dancers, or smart people, but we can empathize with that person, and protest on the streets to have him exonerated, whatever the word is, because we don't believe that person should be put to death, because we understand the limitations of his opportunity, and the almost inevitability of where he ended up. But we can't have any empathy for a Midwestern white person brought up in a church, who thinks gays are sinners.

Amanda 13:23

I can.

Tim 13:23

Yes, exactly, but so many of us can't, right?

Amanda 13:27

So I think we're on the same page here.

Tim 13:29

Yeah, that we want to scream at a homophobe, but you go, but that homophobia is a result of their upbringing, and their genes, and their environment.

Amanda 13:35

Totally.

Tim 13:36

We have to do better at being empathic towards people who have views that we find sickening. And then there's harder conversations, the big ones, like empathy for people who have paedophilia, who grew up, grow up, wanting that, and empathy for murderers.

MUSIC BREAK - Remember The Fair Ma

Amanda 13:59

I mean, this gets me in trouble. I just don't think that there's a line you draw. I think you can't say empathy for everyone, except...

Tim 14:07

Except that evil person.

Amanda 14:08

Except that evil person, that paedophile, that murderer, that terrorist, and it's like, I hate to say it, but you're going to have to include everybody.

Tim 14:17

And perhaps this is the important thing to say, there's lots of important things to say, because people very easily misconstrue what you mean. It doesn't mean that you have to think it's okay. You might have to think it's inevitable, part of the human, you have 8 billion humans, there'll be some broken ones, and cancers, and you have a right... I don't think, if someone murdered and assaulted and murdered my child, I wouldn't expect me to feel anything but the desire to kill that person. But that doesn't mean I'm right. It doesn't mean that society in general should advocate for me killing that person. It's perfectly understandable that I want to kill that person, and given a chance, will. But that doesn't mean it's intellectually... That's not how society is going to move forward.

Amanda 15:06

No, we won't. I mean, that's why we have laws, and rules, is because our emotions can't lead the way.

Tim 15:15

Exactly, that's right.

Amanda 15:16

There's also just this assumption that we will, even just the way that you said that, that you would want to kill that person, and there's just infinite examples of people understanding that even though terrible things have happened, people have murdered children, abuse, rape, everything gone wrong, I think we don't actually give people quite the credit that they deserve in general for not being as terrible as we portray ourselves.

And I can't know, because my child hasn't been murdered, and it's almost impossible for me to go there in my head, because it's so dark. I'm not sure I would want to kill a person who killed my child. I think, to me, that would just take it to a new level of darkness. But incredible rage, and incredible anger, and an incredible desire for justice, and to make that person go away from everyone else's children, fuck yes. A lot of that. A lot of, stay away from everybody else. You're bad for us.

There's this friend I have, Dylan, who has a podcast called [Conversations With People Who Hate Me](#), which is great, and [I've done it](#). His motto for this is empathy is not endorsement. And this gets back to the binary of what you were talking about, which is like, this is what's wrong on a lot of social media, this is what's wrong with a lot of people's binary thinking right now, is that you just assume that empathy or compassion all of a sudden means endorsement of someone's actions. And it's like, that has nothing to do with it.

Tim 16:51

So the English journalist Tom Chivers, wrote [an interesting article yesterday](#) about decoupling intellectual ideas from an emotional response to the idea, and he was writing it in response to

this fact that Richard Dawkins wrote [one of his ill advised tweets](#). Because Dawkins has spent his entire life, because of his neurology, and the way he thinks, he is so frustrated by the fact that people can't separate difficult ideas from emotion.

And Dawkins, for his faults, has written beautiful literature about difficult things. He's talked about the fact that humans are really run by genes, by the selfishness of their genes, but he's written about it with incredible beauty. He's actually an extraordinary writer. But he finds it very, very frustrating that people can't separate ideas from emotion, and therefore he drops these bombs on Twitter that are just stupid.

Amanda 17:53

What was the bomb?

Tim 17:54

It was something like, the fact that we have a moral, political, and personal revulsion to the idea of eugenics doesn't mean it wouldn't work. It could work if we wanted it to. And I think that's a very interesting jumping off point for, if we wanted our race to be taller, we could breed for a taller race. So there's a conversation there.

He should know that you just don't tweet that shit, because people are like, well, why are you saying that? But it just doesn't matter why he's saying it. We should be able to just go, eh, Dawks, dropping a bomb, and go away and have a little think about whether eugenics is possible, and we do a gene test at 12 weeks, and we have a choice to terminate the pregnancy based on its result.

Tom's article talked about how some people find it very easy, and I think you are one of these, I'm sure you are one of these, to decouple intellectual examination of idea with its emotional fallout. And some people find that very, very, very hard. They don't understand why you would even discuss, intellectually, the idea of empathy for a paedophile. Why would you even have that conversation? To what end? What's your intent there? They'd find that very strange.

And this connects very much to a sort of broader problem, which is very difficult to talk about, or inappropriate to talk about, as a straight, white, cisgendered, heterosexual, uh, that's a tautology, male, which is that we're in a situation where, certainly online, the person who is most emotionally close to an issue is seen as the most authentic voice to talk about that issue. Now that's intuitive, right? The person who is most emotionally invested in an issue, like what it is to be a person of colour, or what it is to be a trans woman, or whatever, is the person whose voice must be listened to. I agree with that. That's one of the great things about the internet, is we hear the voices of people who have experiences that we don't have.

However, to come back to our problem, if my child gets raped and murdered, I'm not necessarily the best person to make a decision about what to do with with that murderer.

Amanda 20:15

While that voice, or that person, or someone who's marginalized, or someone who is a victim because your child has been taken away, or whatever, that person may not be the one who should go into a court of law and say, okay, this is what should happen to this murderer. But it just feels like there is a really interesting opportunity right now, especially with the internet, for those people's stories to matter in a way that is more important than ever before, without those stories necessarily having to become the law.

In an ideal world, you would get this kind of proliferation of storytelling from the people who are emotionally close to the matter, where it happens on the ground, where it matters, and then all of that information is actually there and available, instead of some expert in an ivory tower, saying, so I've read lots of books about poverty, and you know what I think we should do, and wandering into the State House with their robes and wig going, I've read a lot of books about poverty, and this is what I've decided about poverty, and what we should do with these poor people.

Tim 21:24

Yeah, that hasn't worked.

Amanda 21:25

That hasn't worked!

Tim 21:26

However, a combination of someone who's done a lot of academic study on poverty, regardless of their own privilege, and consultation with people who have lived in poverty. It's very important that we don't throw the baby out with the bathwater. I find myself using that hackneyed trope quite often, even talking about artists who've said things that we don't agree with or whatever, it's just like, it's okay. You don't have to hate everything Dawkins or Morrissey has ever made, because you found out that they're not exactly aligned with all your politics.

And similarly, in Britain with Brexit, and in America with Trump, this drain the swamp notion, this idea that [we've had enough of experts, to quote a British politician](#), is problematic as well, right? As with everything, you need nuance and balance, and we live in a world where nuance and balance seem to be untrendy. And yet, if you talk to any given individual, they'll agree that nuance and balance is important. But the emergent property of the internet seems to be the abolition of nuance, and the increasing separation of two false binaries, or a false binary.

Amanda 22:39

When it comes to making art, and writing songs, because you have gone through so many loop-de-loops in your career, and different media, and songwriting, and shows, and then putting out an album, and choosing to express whatever ideas you have in your self, and especially when you look back to little Tim, who was writing comedy songs in your 20s, do you think that this stuff specifically, especially given literal, raging, burning fires outside, and climate in crisis,

and humanity really in a bizarre, fucked position that it's never been in before, do you find yourself thinking differently about what you want to put out into the world, and when you sit down to write a song, and you just want to make a fart joke, are you like, oh, things are too critical, things are too urgent, I could go down that path, but I'm gonna go down this one, and what do you see it doing to your art head?

Tim 23:31

I don't particularly regard my art as particularly important. I do regard the sum total of art as important, so I think if I was like the Fat Controller of all art, I would... Well, that's the premise you have to give yourself, is that your art does matter, and I think, I really struggle. I made my career on polemic, in the last era before polemic became a norm, before everyone became a raging polemicist. When I was doing it, it was quite unusual for someone to get up and...

Amanda 24:06

You fucking did it first, Tim Minchin!

Tim 24:08

No, well, we were doing it. I mean, lots of artists were doing it, but what I'm saying is, I was just going, fuck this! I was saying things you're not allowed to say with cute tunes. Obviously, there were many, many more outspoken voices than me, but I was someone making money out of saying fuck the Pope.

And now, the world is awash in the noise of people screaming online. My world is, anyway. And so I found myself reflecting the despair of that, reflecting a sense of powerlessness. And also of trying to make sure, despite the fact that because I'm addicted to reading the internet, which I wish I wasn't, despite how difficult the world seems at the moment, it is very, very important to make fart jokes. It's very important to remind people that it's okay to escape, and have joy.

And I've actually got one song that has that battle within the song, I've got a song called Fuck This, which just says fuck America, and fuck Donald Trump, and goes through, fuck progressives, fuck the wealthy, fuck the poor, and then eventually lands on fuck me.

Amanda 25:21

I was waiting... I mean, I saw your show in London and it was amazing, and you played this song, and I was like, Tim is so smart. By the end of this song, I hadn't heard it before, I was like, by the end of this song...

Tim 25:34

It's gonna come in.

Amanda 25:34

It's gonna have to!

Tim 25:36

Because the song starts fuck America, and everyone goes woo! And I'm just like, yeah, so you all agree with me. And then it says fuck Donald Trump, and everyone goes woo! And then it goes to progressives, and everyone's like um... And then, yeah. But in the end, it's a song about self loathing, because the chorus is about trying to find peace, and failing. It talks about baby dolphins drowning and stuff. And I think that that song reflects my state of mind, this desperate attempt to offset anger with humour and peace, and just failing again and again.

MUSIC BREAK - You'd Think I'd Shot Their Children

Amanda 26:18

Sort of like me, and songwriters, in this sort of weird nowhere genre of like, well you're not a comedic songwriter, because you can also be a really soulful songwriter, and sometimes you're not even sure, if you're listening to one of your songs for the first time, I'm like, is he gonna make a funny? Oh no, this is going to be one of the serious songs, but also, there's still time! And do you find yourself sitting in the middle of a song, and ever pulling back from taking it into the realm of oh, it's gonna head into deep irony, or I'm gonna turn this on its head and make fun of myself, because you're like, you know, actually this one is really nice, and I'm just not gonna make the funny? Or do you find yourself doing the opposite? Do you find yourself in the middle of a really, really serious, soulful song, and you're like, but there's this fucking hilarious lyric? Are you self aware as an editor, when you're sitting there, or do you just go into a stream of consciousness and let the song write itself? How much puppeteering do you feel like you do?

Tim 27:14

I think it's a bit of both. I think songs do tend to lead, I let them go where they go, and often that's just driven by a turn of phrase or a rhyme that tickles your fancy. And because of that, a lot of my songs go both ways. I have songs like [You Grew On Me Like A Tumor](#) or [White Wine In The Sun](#), which start quirky and funny and satirical, and land in a place of absolute sincerity, and I like to think one of the things I do that I think you do, that us, we in this quirky nether world of songwriting, I think I get away with that. I think that's my sort of specialty, is I can turn that corner.

I also can start dark and then get funny. But I do sort of think, okay, my instinct here is to undercut myself, and I'm not going to, because I think that's lazy, and you're making an excuse. I have those directorial thoughts a lot, especially when I'm writing for musical theatre. I have to be careful. Even when I wrote Matilda, the director, Matthew, was like, you need to stop winking now at the audience, you have to let them sit in the moment.

Amanda 28:28

Do you think that that's sometimes done just because there's an insecurity, and you need to wink at the audience because you need them to wink back and feel it?

Tim 28:36

Oh, for me, my whole journey is about allowing myself to be an artist unironically, to say the words I'm an artist. Because of my sort of non-artist family, middle class upbringing, my entire early comedy, a lot of it was about, I have nothing to write about because I've not suffered. And so that was all baked in irony.

Amanda 29:01

Oh, you're gonna love my show.

Tim 29:03

Well, we have so much in common in that regard. But I didn't think someone like me was allowed to be an artist, I thought that was pretentious.

I remember a girlfriend of mine, when I was 16, saying that she found one of my songs embarrassing, and I think I took 20 years to get over that.

Amanda 29:20

What was the song?

Tim 29:23

It was like a love song.

Amanda 29:24

So embarrassing not because it was silly, but just because...

Tim 29:27

No, because it was mawkish. Because it was bad, probably. But I don't know, it...

Amanda 29:32

I just want to give you a big hug.

Tim 29:35

But I've got there. And I now, like you, do shows where I flip from absolute silliness, and just self deprecation, and aren't I an idiot, to expecting an audience to be completely focused, and take me totally seriously, and I do that without shame, but it took me 20 years.

Amanda 29:56

That particular professional gesture is really hard to get to. I am dealing with the same sort of thing in my show, where it's like, there's still this kind of like, am I allowed to really just talk about death, cancer, and abortion, and then two seconds later, have everyone laughing, like really, is that allowed?

Tim 30:15

I think it's incredibly important.

Amanda 30:16

And it's totally allowed!

Tim 30:18

It's not just allowed, it's important.

Amanda 30:20

But it's uncomfortable. I mean, that's the nice thing about touring a show, is I think it took me almost 50 shows to get comfortable enough in the show that I could actually start delivering it with confidence.

Tim 30:30

Yeah. Unapologetic.

Amanda 30:33

Yeah, unapologetically. But also, because I do have an ego, and I do want everyone to approve of me, and after 50 shows, I was pretty convinced that the show was really making people feel something different, and also like, okay, no one has come after me, the police haven't come to lock me up and say, Amanda, you're really not allowed to do that, that's just really in poor taste, and enough people have come up to me crying saying, oh my god, I had an abortion too, thank you, I realized, I released, I felt, I cried, it's like, I need a huge fucking stack of that before I can walk away from the fear that I'm being bad at doing something at all.

Tim 31:12

It's a very interesting time to be doing this, because of this idea of triggering and stuff, and it's a problem, it's one of the many, many problems with the internet, and the way we communicate, is that if you put people in a room, you can talk about very tough ideas, and make really tough jokes.

When I first had kids, I used to do lots of jokes about thinking that we're gonna die, and baby death jokes, and I definitely know that I upset some people. When you've got people in a room, whether it's friends around a dinner table, or an audience at your show, you set the parameters of your moral world, and your intellectual world. You say to your audience, you can trust me, because I'm not stupid, and I'm not mean. I'm kind, and sensitive, and good at the piano, that's the world you set up. And you say, so trust me, and they go, we will. And then you make all these jokes, and then you make them cry and feel warm. You might have triggered some people, but you've healed them in the next breath.

Amanda 32:13

You've also made a safe space.

Tim 32:15

You've made a safe space, right? The sort of dystopia that the online world is becoming, is because there is no safe space. When someone comes after me on Twitter, and says, oh, you're just an anti-Catholic bigot, all you ever do is pull things down or whatever, I want to say, well, hold on, go watch Matilda, and see my TV show, and I don't just do anything, but I can't ask people on the internet to have inherited the moral and intellectual world I have built around my work. They can't inherit all that, unless they're fans. And so they walk in...

Amanda 32:52

And they've seen one thing you've said.

Tim 32:52

See me saying one thing, and I'm screwed. And unfortunately, the only place that the internet that does that can go, is towards this ridiculous place where people get canceled, and people get triggered, and you say something, and someone who's never heard you speak before sees that in total isolation from everything else you've ever written. It's not a good place to talk, because there's no windows or doors or walls.

Amanda 33:20

So can I tell you something that upset me greatly?

Tim 33:22

Yes.

Amanda 33:24

The Guardian review of your Palladium show.

Tim 33:26

Oh, I don't read reviews, were they mean?

Amanda 33:30

No, they weren't flat out mean. They doled out kind of the worst sort of criticism that you could, for a show that was as smart and as expansive as yours was, in that way we were just talking about, where it's incredibly comedic and silly one moment, and you're just singing about cheese, and then the next moment, it's incredibly sincere, and you're just thinking about life and death. And this reviewer was like, the show was supposed to be funny, but then there were these moments that weren't funny, what's up with that?

Tim 34:02

Oh right. Yeah.

Amanda 34:05

You are so dumb. I can't believe that...

Tim 34:08

Where does it say it was a comedy show? I haven't advertised, I've never called myself a comedian in my life.

Amanda 34:12

It just spoke to an incredible, I want to say paucity of imagination, but it's not even that, it's almost like, your job as a critic is to have a bigger mind than most people in the room, and hold lots and lots and lots of thoughts and feelings.

Tim 34:27

Exactly, your job is to sit down with your palms open and say, what have you got for me? But that's British comedy critics.

Amanda 34:32

It made me so angry. It was a real hot spot for me, because I have critics...

Tim 34:38

That's why I don't read it, because it would have been in my head.

Amanda 34:40

As someone who's also addicted to the internet, I did that with my book. I was really good with my book, I didn't read any of the reviews. But of course, I've wanted to read reviews of my shows, because also, it's so political, and I really want to hear what people think.

Tim 34:50

Yeah, you need to know what they're saying.

Amanda 34:54

And this tour has been incredible, and all the reviews have been great, great, great. I'm still so angry when someone comes to see me play, and they write a review where it's like, I looked around the room, and all these people loved this show, when I don't fucking get it.

Why would you even waste the ink to look around a room of 2000 people and say, I don't get why these 2000 people are made happy by this person?

Tim 35:17

The only thing you could write is, in that situation, that is authentic, is, I am a critic, and I...

Amanda 35:25

And I have no soul.

Tim 35:26

I've missed something, and I need to figure out what it is.

Amanda 35:28

Well, a good critic could do that.

Tim 35:29

Although I sit in Mamma Mia, I go watch Mamma Mia the musical, and I sit in it and watch people laugh and clap, and I cried when I saw that musical recently.

Amanda 35:40

You cried out of despair?

Tim 35:42

Just like, I've put so much work into of this genre, I obsess over it, and this is what people are happy watching.

Amanda 35:52

Right, but also, I bet you don't...

Tim 35:53

But that's such snobbery, I totally understand that.

Amanda 35:55

No, here's the thing though, Tim, I bet you don't go home and write a long Twitter thread about how...

Tim 36:01

No, I understand it's different strokes for different folks.

Amanda 36:03

Totally. And I even felt that way, I went to see Cats the movie, having enjoyed my entire Christmas reading, the reviews of Cats were like their own art form, and I just loved reading them. And then I went to see it and I was like, oh, you know, it's not that great, my 4 year old enjoyed it.

I had the experience where I sat in a teeny theater in Melbourne, the theater was almost sold out, it was a weekend, it was a teeny theater with 70 people in it, and I watched those 70 people sort of titter, and chortle, and enjoy themselves, and I'm not even sure they loved it, or liked it, or hated it, but I was like, you know, I have no desire to add to the sum pain of the world, and go write some shredding Twitter comment about it.

Tim 36:48

To what end? And art is always an offer, that movie was an offer. And it was a quite radical offer, just like Cats was a radical musical when it came out. And you might not like it.

Amanda 36:58

That is a hard film to make.

Tim 37:00

And the trouble is, it was made out of greed. They just thought, we'll rake it in here, and they fell on their sword.

Amanda 37:07

Watching people fall on a sword that big is just hard to not watch.

Tim 37:10

And it's hard not to rejoice in, because it felt cynical, but the artists who made it weren't being cynical. And when a reviewer comes to my show now, I literally did comedy for six years, and the things that I've done in the world that are the most engaged with art in the world, are a speech at university that I made about how to live life well, that has been watched by 70 something million people, a children's musical that's been seen by millions of people worldwide, that is about standing up for yourself, and how books and stories can emancipate you from the traps of your life, and from defining your own narrative. And other things I've done include playing Friar Tuck in Robin Hood and doing Judas in Jesus Christ Superstar. My comedy songs are a tiny percentage of what I do. And if you're a reviewer and you come to my show and say, why is this guy doing something other than comedy, I don't care if you don't know anything about my career, but don't write about it as if you get to define the terms of what I do. Even if the only thing I'd ever done successfully was comedy, the ticket buyers will tell me whether they want to see my art or not.

MUSIC BREAK - Congratulations

Amanda 38:24

When you were in your 20s, and you were clearly ambitious, wanted to do things, make things, be known, be seen, and especially we were talking earlier about that need to be applauded, and seen by the audience, and congratulated, and all of that, can you look at yourself now and see how your own relationship with the definition of success. and how it's evolved? I spend a lot of time thinking about this, especially because I'm crowdfunded, and especially because I have a very weird relationship with the music business, with the art world. There are parts of my career that don't make any sense to anybody, but I've lived my life on this tightrope between really wanting to be patted on the head by certain entities, and even groups of people, or magazines, or whatever, and also, with one hand really wanting to get patted on the head, and on the other hand, being like, actually, fuck you guys.

Tim 39:21

Why do you get to define success, you arseholes?

Amanda 39:22

How do you get to say that? And there are all these people who love my work, appreciate my voice, love what I have to say, and so if all these people love my voice and appreciate what I have to say, now will you pat my head? And running back and forth between those two worlds, but also gaining more and more perspective from above as I get older and older, watching myself running over there, no, running over here. And I wonder, there aren't that many artists, who I get to talk to, who have had careers as weird as you, and haven't just basically stayed in one lane, and maybe diverged into one other lane, but have run all over the place, and are able to articulate, well, that's what I felt when I was 25, but then...

And I really am genuinely curious, even now, because not every project is a success, and not everything works, and not everybody loves you, and people fucking yell at you on Twitter. Especially because I imagine a 25 year old artist listening to this, dealing with their own head demons, and all of the ego, and being able to take something away where they can aim. Where they can have a larger understanding of how you get to fucking define success.

Tim 40:38

Yeah. I can be a wise old Zen Buddhist about this, or I can unpack all the dirty shitty, still broken bits.

Amanda 40:48

Yeah, do that. Do that.

Tim 40:50

And the trouble is, they're both. I have a lot of peace and happiness in my life, and I try to be very grateful for that, because I don't struggle with my mental health. I do struggle, but I don't. I do struggle to be happy and at peace, but I don't feel like it's a neurological disorder of a struggle, it's just the human condition sort of struggle. And I'm so, so, so lucky.

I find it hard to get perspective on my luck, because I believe you're wired by the time you're 20, and it's very, very hard to change your wiring. And so an interesting thing about me, if there's anything interesting about me, is I didn't at 15 go, one day, I'm gonna have my name in lights! I just wasn't brought up like that. I was brought up to think that you are only as special as how hard you're working, and how kind you are. Not that anyone said that to me, but that was the sense I got. I didn't think I was special, I had never been told I was special. If anything, I'd been told the opposite, that you're not special, which I think's a very... I love the way I was brought up, I'm one of four kids, and we're all very, very close, and I love my parents, I think one of the things that gave me was, I don't actually think I'm as entitled as one might be. I thought maybe one day someone will pay me to play piano in the corner of a bar. I thought, wow, imagine that!

And then when I had that gig, I thought, this is a bit boring, maybe I should write some originals, and get a record deal, I mean, I don't suppose I can, but I could try. And so on and so forth until at about 30, suddenly, a lot of people were watching what I was doing, and the incredible

gratifying thing about that was the thing that they finally watched me do, after a decade of trying to get acting gigs, but not looking quite right, and not being good enough, and trying to get record deals, but not really being categorizable, it was when I just did exactly what I wanted on stage that people started watching, and that hasn't stopped. So fuck the Guardian reviewer, that's my job, is to do what I feel on stage. It's what you do. It's why you're so rare, you do exactly what you fucking feel on stage. And that is success.

And with that came money, and respect, and some awards, and then Matilda came along, and with that came money and respect and awards, and there is no fucking end to my need for more respect. There's an end to my need for money, I've never been particularly driven by that. I wasn't worried about it when I was poor, and I'm not too worried about it. I try and give a good amount away, that's my main concern. And then deal with the guilt of having a nice house.

Nothing makes me want to sit back. There is nothing that will make me go, oh, I've done well. I am just as desperate to make my next thing good, and better, to improve my work, and make something better, than I was when I was 25. And that is a good thing, and it's why I've got to work in theater, and musical theater, film, TV, and comedy. But it is deeply tiring, and something I have to work on, because I am running the risk of my life going by without enjoying it enough.

Amanda 44:18

I am watching this happen to Neil, and to a certain extent, me. And I don't think I would be noticing if I didn't have a kid. I didn't have a kid until I was 39. It really magnified the fact that I spent pretty much every waking moment of my life working.

Tim 44:41

Working towards a receding goal.

Amanda 44:43

Just working. Working, and then very occasionally not working very intensely, and getting drunk very intensely, and partying very intensely, but for a couple hours, because I could not fucking wait to get back to work. And again, none of it was really driven by money, but it was definitely driven by some weird or larger fire.

Tim 45:05

And I think Neil's very like that, and I think we are just broken we just broken teenagers.

Amanda 45:09

You are!

Tim 45:11

We're just broken teenagers in 40 something bodies, or in Neil's case 70-odd, I hear.

Amanda 45:14

He's in his late hundreds actually.

Tim 45:17

In his late hundreds. I hate this word celebrity, but some people might think of me as a celebrity, and a celebrity talking about how they struggle to find peace is the most boring thing in the world. But where I've gone right, is that I have been accidentally brave, and I think I've been brave as in I haven't ever gone, okay, I've found something that makes me money, and has me an audience, I'll stick with it. I've always gone, okay, fuck it, I've done that, what else can I do? And I think that's because I tried to be conventional and failed, and therefore I've learned, the more I push outwards, the better it goes for me. So I'm very lucky in that regard.

Amanda 46:00

But do you really think you're lucky? Or do you think that that is actually the most basic, fundamental ingredient of an artist jumping out from a pack of conventional bullshit and doing well?

Tim 46:11

I think so. But Chris Hemsworth's an artist...

Amanda 46:13

Because also look at me, look at Neil, this is the one thing we all have in common. Neil never even really tried to be conventional. He did a little bit actually, he was a journalist, and he actually would have made good money as a journalist, but I think he was just like, ah, I am this weirdo, and I have this weird thing that I can do, and maybe people will pay me money for doing the weird-ass thing that I do, and eventually they did.

Tim 46:32

And some wonderful people I know who are artists have found great success and happiness, finding a thing they can do, and sticking with it. Like Max Martin, who's written [most of the top five hits of the last 20 years](#). He's just really, really good at writing pop songs, and he's one of the wealthiest people in the world, and he's just happy doing that, I think. And someone like Chris Hemsworth is incredibly beautiful, he knows that if he keeps his body, and works hard on his craft, and says yes to acting roles... We're a little bit different, because we've had to find our own way, because we we didn't fit in any of those more conventional boxes, and back in my 20s, when my friends went to [NIDA](#), and then went on and got on Home and Away...

Amanda 47:23

What's NIDA?

Tim 47:24

Oh, our drama school, like our [LAMDA](#), our [RADA](#). And went on and got jobs in Home and Away, and in Australian film, and whatever, I was so jealous of them. And when someone I

know got in a band, and they got on Triple J, and they sold a bunch of records, and got invited to a festival, I was so jealous.

And here I am in my 40s, having not got any of that in my 20s, because I didn't write like that, and I didn't look like that, and I didn't have the confidence. I now have literally the best career I could possibly dream of. I just don't even think there's anyone in the world whose career I would rather.

And so in that way, it's luck, right? It was my unconventionality that made me have to find some other way of communicating, and that has given me this extraordinary privilege. And not just privilege of an audience, and the opportunity to do all the things I've ever wanted to do, but the privilege of being a genuinely, with many, many exceptions of people who hate me, and think I'm a bigot and stuff, I have a voice, that I manage very, very carefully to make sure that it is valued, that I actually have people... I am in a position, in Australia particularly, where what I think about things in certain circles is valued, and that is unbelievable to me.

Amanda 49:00

You have power.

MUSIC BREAK - Feeding The Dark

Tim 49:07

I'm also very conservative, right? So, where I am unconventional is in my conservatism, in that I have never taken any drugs, I have always done exercise, I married my first girlfriend, I had kids at 30, I stay in very close contact with my family, I am an uncle, and a father, and a brother, and I am boring. I have not shed my middle class, do the right thing.

I think other people think I'm wacky, but I see myself as deeply conventional in the way I think, and the way I go about my life. And I feel very lucky in that regard too, and so if there's someone listening, who is young, and thinks about success and ambition, I feel like in my moments of peace, I feel like success is that I've been authentic, that I've made a living, and that I have not hurt people around me.

I care very, very much that I don't think what's important is my experience of the world. I think that what's important is... my wife would laugh at me, because there's no doubt our lives revolve around what I'm doing, but I do try, despite the fact shit gets pretty weird in my life sometimes when I'm touring or whatever, I do try to make sure that the musicians around me, and the staff at the venues, my family, my friends, my going through the world, and the people who work for me's journey through the world, leaves behind a trail of people going, oh, that was a nice experience, working with that guy. That is absolutely my priority.

Amanda 50:51

You follow our golden rule of Team Amanda Palmer. Don't be a dick.

Tim 50:53

Yeah, don't be a dick.

Amanda 50:56

There's a song you played at the show at the Palladium, and I actually never knew what the title was, but I'm assuming it's called [I'll Take Lonely](#). It's a beautiful song. And it's about the conflict of being in a monogamous relationship, and feeling incredibly tempted to sleep with someone that you've met, and I'm assuming this is taking place on the road or something. And like a lot of your stuff, it comes out as an incredibly sincere but sort of bittersweet love song. And I'm in an open relationship, and have been tempted to write songs about... I mean, there's just no way away from the complexity, even if you're in an open relationship, there are boundaries, and rules, and jealousy.

Tim 51:38

No one is on another plane.

Amanda 51:40

Right. And yet, I found myself wondering what it would feel like to be your wife, sitting and listening to that song. It's sort of like, well, it's a lovely thing to say, but if what you're really saying is, I'm fucking random, because we are both from Perth, and so you married me, and you wound up with me, how much of a love song is it really? And I felt the same way listening to that one, it's like she's got to live with the amazing complexity of a songwriter working out some of the most awkward and painful human emotions possible...

Tim 52:13

In front of 3,000 people, including her.

Amanda 52:17

In front of 3,000 people. You made a quip at the show that didn't really, to me, come off as a quip, where you said something like, she hates sitting at my shows, and she hates hearing me talk about this shit. And you said it, and it got a huge laugh, but I was like, oh, but I know that's probably true. Because who would want to be confronted with that over and over and over again? But does she also just have a blanket acceptance that that's what you are, how it works, and every once in a while you're going to come out with these songs that are like, part love song, and part dagger into the heart?

Tim 52:47

Yeah, it's a perfect description, and I do believe they're love songs, because I think love is only profound to the extent that it is a choice that you keep making, and that it is something, whether or not you're in a sexually open relationship, your relationship with Neil survives only to the extent that you place each other consciously on some kind of pedestal, that you turn a blind eye to the shitty fact of life, and sort of elevate each other consciously.

The energy of love that comes in the first year or two, that fuel is not a perpetual energy machine, you have to keep creating fuel. And I do believe in that, and I am someone who's, I think I'm gonna go all the way with this girl, so I believe in it, and my actions prove my belief in it.

I think Sarah, I don't know how much she loves my stuff, I think that she and I have been together for so long, she's been listening to my songs since she was 17. I think it's just, we're so close to each other, she doesn't really have objectivity. I think she's proud of me, I think she's very nervous when I play. I think she's proud that other people look at her and go, wow, that must be hard. And I think a bit of her is like, yeah, but I can cope with it, so fuck you.

But also she's married to me, not just the songwriter but the person, and that's how I see the world. I am not a fantasist, I think I'm a materialist, I believe we are cells and atoms in a meaningless universe, and that our job as artists is to try and tell stories that bring meaning to the meaninglessness. That's literally what my job is, to put good ideas into the world, in a world that without art, and stories, and narratives, and rhetoric, would be anarchy, and meaningless, because there is no god, no fate, no anything, no spirituality.

Amanda 54:42

Well, and in a certain sense...

Tim 54:44

And she lives with me, so she knows that's how I unpack the world.

Amanda 54:47

If your relationship is stable enough, and lasts, and continues to last, because you continue to choose, I often feel this way about Neil, there's just a tighter safety net to say things that are actually quite dangerous. Because the love song that people expect is a bad love song.

Tim 55:08

Well, it's a lie. So we talk about radical empathy, I'm kind of into radical honesty, although that's not quite true, because I think people like 'I just say it how it is', I'm like, well just don't, you dick. Say it how it will be well received, and we'll do a kindness to other people, don't say it how it is. I don't think relationships are served by smearing icing sugar over the top of the poorest cake of your relationship. I think, if you can say we are a good couple, despite being human, and because we're human, that I think most people believe in that.

I've written a new song that's gonna come out on my record, that is about what I said earlier, I think I'm going to go all the way with this girl, and about reality, it's another love song, but the chorus simply goes, I think this could last forever, girl let's fall apart together. I'm going to call it The Wedding Dance, because it's like a $\frac{3}{4}$ waltz, that's about entropy, about the fact that when you marry someone, you're committing to decay together, to being with each other as you decay towards death.

Amanda 56:26

Tim, that's so romantic.

Tim 56:27

It is, right?

Amanda 56:28

It actually is.

Tim 56:29

I do, it makes me cry to think.

Amanda 56:32

Tim Minchin fans all over the world are going to get married to this song, you know.

Tim 56:35

It's gonna be called the Nerds' Wedding Dance. But it's called Fall Apart Together, and I don't know if Sarah is quite with me, I think she would rather a bit more icing sugar sometimes. I also don't buy jewellery, I don't believe in displaying your love with ostentatious displays of wealth around the neck of the woman you own. I'm a bit annoying, I'm not very romantic, but I believe the way I do it is romantic.

There's all sorts of other stuff, I mean, I'm always telling a story. The version of myself in my life I present to you, and on podcasts, is a branding exercise.

Amanda 57:11

Of course!

Tim 57:12

I mean, I try to be really, really honest, but...

Amanda 57:15

Here's the thing, Sarah's not on this podcast, she's not touring the world getting to tell the story of your fucking relationship. You are. And I would assume that that is one of the more frustrating things, it's like you get to control the narrative.

Tim 57:27

I get to define it. Even worse, there's a documentary about when Violet was born, there's a two hour feature length documentary that was made about my first year in Edinburgh, when my life changed. It was a feature film. And that has become her history, and we can't even remember the many ways it's not quite true, because it's a documentary, it's an edited together narrative.

Our life is being defined by its documentation, in film, and in articles, and reviews, and in feature articles about me, because I've talked too honestly, in podcasts, and in my art.

I am defining our lives. I think if Sarah was here now, I probably don't ask her enough about that feeling. I think she's less inclined to ramble on, but I think she would agree that that's tough.

Amanda 58:17

So since Neil and I are both in your position...

Tim 58:21

Yeah, it's really interesting.

Amanda 58:23

It's really different. It doesn't mean that the fact that the other one gets to go out and tell the narrative doesn't drive the other one crazy.

Tim 58:31

Of course.

Amanda 58:32

And especially because us, and when I say people like us, I don't mean progressive, I mean, like the seven of us who have these bizarre...

Tim 58:40

Storytelling careers.

Amanda 58:41

Breakout, weird storytellers in many genres, careers that don't fit in any particular box. I think the thing that we cling to, is we get to control the narrative the way we want, we get to tell the story as sincerely, or as filled with potty humor, as we want, because that's what we want to fucking do, and we will not let someone wrest away control of that narrative. And when someone does it, it really, really makes us angry.

And I watch this with me and Neil, if we have one big monster in our relationship, it's that. We call it struggling for control of the narrative. And if the other one gets the wheel, and is like, no!

Tim 59:27

Well, and you're particularly...

Amanda 59:28

This is how it happened, this is the story, this is the story we get to tell about it. That's the kryptonite of our relationship, because there's two of us, so it's actually harder.

Tim 59:36

Yeah, and part of the broken teenager, and the broken teenager that drives both of you, probably, is that it doesn't matter how gritty, and self-effacing, and humble, and granular your self-narrativising gets, you're still self-aggrandizing. You're still trying trying to make yourself special.

Amanda 59:57

Well, you're still talking about you.

Tim 59:59

Yeah, you are still making yourself the hero or the victim of your story. And when you've got a massive audience, it's supercharged, it's narcissism. There's a necessary narcissism to what you and Neil and I do. It's really interesting, and something, and I don't know if I'm right about this, it might just be the feeds I'm reading or whatever, but my sense is, since you had a kid, or just since the first couple of years you and Neil together, this Palmer-Gaiman couple was like its own super brand. And you guys, it seemed to me, embraced the idea of that narrative, of the coming together of these two minds. And recent years, I feel like you've held more back from the public, and maybe since the kid, I feel like you're less demonstrative, and less... Have you guys kind of gone, hold on, we don't need to put it all out there so much?

Amanda 60:55

Well, I think it's gone through phases, and also our marriage got really rocky. It would be a really interesting study, talk about fucking narcissism, someone should run the numbers, I bet if you looked at our tweets through time...

Tim 61:11

They would reflect your marriage journey.

Amanda 61:11

From 2007, they would totally reflect the ups and the downs of the graph of our marriage. And yet, sometimes we'll use social media as a way to patch up the boat being a little bit leaky, because we're far apart.

Tim 61:29

Public display of affection, it's a declaration.

Amanda 61:30

Yeah, it is. It's an intimate public display of affection. And Neil calls it like the proprietary pat on the bottom, it's like, it's still real. Twitter is still real. Those emotions getting broadcast throughout time and space are still real.

And also, Ash coming into the world four years ago represented a third narrative. And I think Neil and I, especially having been raised the way we were, and needing such desperate control of our own narratives as kids, are hyper-aware that we could crush and steal his...

Tim 62:03

Not to grab Ash's.

Amanda 62:05

Yeah, we don't wanna take his.

Tim 62:06

So are you keeping him... I haven't read a huge amount of you and Neil talking about Ash, and I haven't seen pictures, I saw early pictures.

Amanda 62:16

We posted a lot of baby pictures to Twitter and Instagram, and I have friends, I have quite a few friends, who have regular working class jobs, all the way up to mega celebrities who don't even say their kids' names on the internet.

Tim 62:29

My kids aren't on the internet. There's one photo of Violet.

Amanda 62:33

And I actually feel like that would feel too weird to me.

Tim 62:38

Right. Because it's not how you live.

Amanda 62:40

Because of how I live, and also, I feel like the internet, at least certain parts of it, are my community. And I mean, this is actually something that I'm interested in writing more about, because I sort of feel, the same way that I wish I had not withheld information about being pregnant, and I think that this 'hold off on telling people for three months' thing is kind of a myth, because when you miscarry...

Tim 63:04

I agree. You still need people.

Amanda 63:05

You want the support of the people around you.

Tim 63:07

I agree, it's a weird thing.

Amanda 63:08

And then all of a sudden, you're dumping all the information on them at one time. And I'm like, I want these people to see my child, care about him, know his name, see his face, feel protective towards him. And this is sort of...

Tim 63:20

Except that is making a choice for him.

Amanda 63:23

Right, but it's also the strong vulnerability, weird naivete tightrope dance that I've done all my career, which is like, I dare you to tell me not to trust these people. I dare you to tell me that this isn't a safe space for my child. Because actually, these people who create my concentric circles of community on the internet, on Twitter, on Patreon now, they fucking have my back. They watch out for me, and my kid, and my husband. Don't tell me that that's a predatory, unsafe space to put my kid.

Tim 63:55

I don't think it's unsafe. I would, and only for the sake of having a conversation that has some debate in it, not just patting each other on the back, I think it's much more related to control of the narrative thing that you and Neil have. You and Neil are adults who have chosen to live your lives reasonably publicly, to share a lot, both of you independently, and then when you got together as a couple. And you can dial that up, and dial it down, depending on how you feel.

I don't think I have a strong opinion on this, but my daughter is now 13, and she is humiliated by her existence, because she's 13. I won't share with you the things she's going through, because it's her life, but she's 13, she's not...

Amanda 64:44

It's awkward.

Tim 64:45

It's awkward. She's stressed, and finds life hard, just because she's 13, and I just am glad, at this stage, where she's starting to engage with social media, and all that stuff, that I've made the choice, that if someone writes Tim Minchin's daughter, they can't see what she looks like, or where she's gone. It's her blank slate from which to build her own identity in online, if she wants, with me leaning over her saying, I'd prefer you never post a photo of yourself being sexually demonstrative if you're not yet aware of what your sexuality is, or any declarations, public declarations of who you are, in a way that you might regret in a few years. I'm pretty strong in guiding her, because I've had the best and worst of it.

Amanda 65:33

I think as Ash gets older...

Tim 65:36

You can fade him out.

Amanda 65:37

I will probably fade him out

Tim 65:39

I think it only matters from sort of 8 on. Before 8, they don't see themselves as a human anyway.

Amanda 65:47

And baby pictures kind of all look the same.

Tim 65:49

Exactly, they're just monkeys.

Amanda 65:50

But I also really didn't want to be an annoying parent on the internet, because I...

Tim 65:55

Yeah, look at my miracle!

Amanda 65:57

Yeah, look at my amazing child! And yet, it pains me that I can slave for six weeks on a song and a video project, put it out on Instagram, and watch it get a tenth of the engagement that a cute photo of my child with ice cream on his face, will get. And yet, I still try to step back and go, well what is that teaching me about humanity?

Tim 66:17

Well don't post your kids for hits, that's crazy, right? I post my dog for hits.

Amanda 66:22

Yeah, well, this gets into a whole conversation about species that we should have.

MUSIC BREAK - You Keep Starving Your Heart

Amanda 66:31

There is an incredible relationship that has actually always existed for me in songwriting, between speed and...

Tim 66:42

Good outcomes.

Amanda 66:42

Result, that I actually just didn't really understand was a thing until recently, when I really decided to get very scientific about it. And I looked back at the long trail of songs that I had written, hundreds of them, and went, okay, what were the good ones? What were the conditions? What were the bad ones? Or not the bad ones, but...

Tim 67:03

Yeah, a meta-analysis of your process, and you found that the quicker you wrote them, the better they were.

Amanda 67:07

I did. So there's a couple of conditions, not just speed, but some combo of speed and stakes. And then, where is the song going to head when? To whose ears? And when I started my Patreon, which is now almost five years ago, I assumed that I might be able to use it to help unlock this puzzle. Because again, the Patreon is great because it's supportive, but it isn't really so much about the money as it is having this giant mass of people that I can make a contract with, that all of a sudden, like these stakes appear.

Tim 67:45

Yeah, it's like opening a restaurant. There's a bunch of people come to your place, and you say, I'm gonna deliver some stuff for you.

Amanda 67:50

You have to do it.

Tim 67:51

They're sitting there waiting for their meal.

Amanda 67:54

So, you have done so many different kinds of projects, and then some, like this album, the stakes are yours, the budgets yours, you could fucking pull an Axl Rose and spend 10 years on this record, or you could just be like, fuck, I'm going to put it out, and I'm going to book the tour, I'm going to put it out in the fall, whatever. What have you learned, if anything, especially having worked on musicals with deadlines, what have you learned about you, and speed and process, having done all of these projects?

Tim 68:24

I think work is more likely to be popular if you write it quickly, because you don't second think your craft, which means it tends to be simpler, and simpler stuff is generally more popular. So if I write a song quickly, it's more likely to just use the toolkit I've got, the palette that is mine, and is harmonically, sonically, easy to listen to, because I go, we'll just use the E minor to C to G, whatever. So popularity could come from speed.

Amanda 68:57

Can you play an E minor to C to G, cos we just happen to have a piano here?

Tim 69:00

The four chords, whatever. So, I think there's a few things to talk about. One is, if you write something quickly, it's probably more likely to be popular, because it's more likely to be simple. Which isn't the only thing of value. I like Groundhog Day the musical better than Matilda the musical, it's a much more complex piece of work, and you could watch it six times, and still be noticing layers and stuff, and I think it's a piece of work I'm more proud of, but it's not as popular.

Amanda 69:27

Complex doesn't get asses in seats.

Tim 69:29

No, but it can have more longevity. But Matilda, I wrote most of in six weeks, which brings me to another thing about speed, which is it can help you with cohesiveness, or coherence of ideas, both musical and conceptual. So, if you write 12 songs in a four week space, they will, whether you like it or not, cohere, because you are in that space, especially if it's the same room and you're writing on the same instrument, you can write as radically differently, or this one's going to be swing, and about boxes of cheese, and this one's going to be, you know, a straight rock song, and about pencils.

Amanda 70:10

Were you alone writing most of those songs? Or were you in a room with other people?

Tim 70:14

No, always. I've never, ever written a song with anyone else in the room. I accidentally sent someone some lyrics the other day, with all the spare lyrics.

Amanda 70:23

So you were really embarrassed?

Tim 70:23

Oh my god, cos I just write whatever, and they're full of cliches and stuff, and I'm just writing lyrics, writing lyrics, and too many rhymes, and all that. And often, by the time I have my finished lyrics on one page, I'll have four or five pages of other shit.

Amanda 70:35

I do the same thing!

Tim 70:38

And I accidentally sent them all of them, like don't read the other pages!

Amanda 70:40

Did you have a point in your career where you... because I used to write longhand, did you have a point where you stopped writing longhand and you switched to a computer?

Tim 70:48

Yeah, it was pretty early. I don't think I've written anything after 22 or something, without just typing on a computer.

Amanda 70:55

So the Matilda process, did you have set writing hours where you're like, I'm gonna go in, I'm going to be there, I'm gonna get a bunch of...

Tim 71:01

Yeah, I was in London, and I'd catch the bus into a little studio space that I'd hired, it's actually a really cool high ceilinged empty space with a little shitty upright in the middle of all this space. It was really weird, with a little desk next to it, it was a really weird vibe. And I just went in every morning, because Sarah was pregnant with Casper, and he was due in six weeks, I'd just come off tour, I'm like, my first draft of this musical needs to be done by the time this baby comes.

Amanda 71:27

That's stakes.

Tim 71:28

That's great, and I was writing Matilda, and Violet was 2 and a half, it was a great headspace. Stakes, continuity of environment, and emotional state.

Amanda 71:37

And then you went home every night to a 2 and a half year old.

Tim 71:39

Yeah, that's right.

Amanda 71:41

When you look back, do you notice anything about the conditions of that writing space, even sleeping, eating, exercising, doing things to take care of yourself, getting too caught up into family drama, did you notice anything that served or didn't serv, when you would just be able to sit down and flow and get stuff down?

Tim 72:04

I don't think so, I'm still on a journey with this stuff. I'm considering trying to build a studio. I live on a house that has a hill in front of it, and I'm considering, I have to fix the garage, which is sort

of dug into the hill, and I'm considering digging a bunch more hill out, and making a sort of bunker with skylights.

This is what I don't believe, I don't believe, or at least this has been my personal experiment. I have discarded all superstition, or accoutrement, from both my performing and songwriting. So a few years ago, I went, I'm all anxious about my voice, and I have to suck on these things, and do this warm up, and I wasn't doing it much, but I was doing it a bit, and I noticed all my actor friends having all these processes, and I'm like, I don't think that's doing anything. I think that is you trying to control a meaningless universe, I think you're trying to control. And it's the same, I have to have my special hat, the Roald Dahl syndrome, this is my thing, and it works for some people.

I wrote most of Groundhog Day in a dressing room, in a place that I'd rented for a few weeks. I actually have a room at the moment that's the spare room of my house, a little room, smaller than this, with a window, from which I can see the ocean, and I have the blinds down the whole time, because I don't think an ocean view helps your songwriting.

Amanda 73:26

This is what Stephen King says, he's got a house in Florida, and he's got an office with a desk that faces the ocean, and a desk that faces the wall. And he uses the desk that faces the wall.

Tim 73:35

And he uses the ones that faces the wall. I've written my song about the ocean view, done. Shut the curtain, it's done.

Amanda 73:40

I have a thing about needing to be in a space where I know I am not going to be interrupted mid-thought. No one's listening to me fuck around. And I was the same way when I was a teenager, and I was writing my first songs. I lived in this rickety old Victorian house, and if anyone was home, even if they gave no shits that I was sitting there at the piano in the living room, I could not write a song.

Tim 74:04

I recently parked my upright at Giant Dwarf, this gorgeous little venue in Sydney, and went, if you have my piano, and it's yours, you can use it for every gig you ever have, but when the venue's empty during the day, can I come and write? And they were like yeah, sure, and they gave me a key. And I went in like, three times, and every time...

Amanda 74:19

Someone would come through.

Tim 74:20

There'd just be like, someone needing to pick something up, it's alright, ignore me! And I'm just like, this is not, I can't...

Amanda 74:24

I'm exactly the same way, and I have tried to explain this to Neil, and Neil is actually very, compared to me, very interruptible. I think it might just come from a groove he got into, because he had kids at 22, and I think he just got used to being able to compartmentalise so hard, that he can sit practically at a party, and write a short story.

Tim 64:50

But also, his process is between him and his mind and his fingers. Whereas I'm like... (*plays piano and hums*) I'm improvising my way into...

Amanda 75:04

So you've literally never sat down with another human being, and fuffed, and done a...

Tim 75:12

Maybe back when I was doing bands, and I was jamming. Nowadays, I write a song, and take it to my band, and we have a fiddle, and I'm like, hey, could you try, and we're fiddling. There's definitely stuff on the record that is Jack's lines and stuff, but I'm not going, what if we, you know...

Amanda 75:28

I have some thoughts about this, which is it requires a level of trust and intimacy, and really the only person I've ever been able to co-write with is [Jason Webley](#). Because he's kind of the only person I feel that safe with, that I can be that...

Tim 75:44

How young were you when you guys started working together?

Amanda 75:47

We met 20 years ago. But we also, like us, we just knew that we were cut from the same cloth. It's just a completely non judgmental space, and we can sort of create dumb, cliché, stupid rubbish lyrics in front of each other, and know that everything can just go right in the trash.

Tim 76:03

I think I would like that relationship. My brother and I, when we were teenagers, wrote songs together.

Amanda 76:08

Do you ever get an idea and rush off to the piano anymore? Cos I don't.

Tim 76:12

No. I haven't, not for years and years.

Amanda 76:14

Can we weep in each other's arms when this podcast is over, for the loss of our spontaneous...

Tim 76:17

Sometimes I'll write down a lyric, it's mostly I'll write down a lyric.

Amanda 76:21

I actually do leave myself voice memos, I'll sing songs into my phone, thinking, someday! And then...

Tim 76:28

And then you think, you never do, and then one day you do. I mean, most of the songs on my new record are voice memos and notes I've left, and not looked at for years, and gone back.

I had this lyric written down, women in four wheel drive porsches always look miserable. I just went, that's hilarious. And it sat there for years, and I couldn't figure out, and every time I went to it, I heard it as a Latin thing. And I just went, I don't wanna write a fricking Latin thing, and now it's part of a pop song, and I really, really like it, and it took years.

Amanda 76:58

You lived in London for a while. You lived in LA for a while. You're back in Australia. And these are the three places that I've also lived, by the way. Do you see anything about America that you think Americans aren't quite seeing, that you can offer up?

Tim 77:16

The thing that they all have in common, that the world has in common, is that we don't revere our leaders anymore, we spend our whole time flippantly calling them evil on Twitter, and so who the hell would want to be a leader, given one of the things was that you got respected, and everyone says politicians get paid too much, I don't think they get paid anywhere near enough, and I think we attract the wrong type of people. It's no longer, and especially women, at a time in history where women are on the move, in corporations, and in the arts, and where at an incredible pace, we are moving towards equity, women are still not going into politics, because it's hateful. Because we hate them, and tell them we hate them, and tell them we hope they die. So there's this terrible dearth of talent in leadership. But that's a whole other conversation.

The thing I think about America, which I know will sound condescending, and is simplistic, and of course, whenever you try and draw a rule to apply to 380 million people, you're gonna fail. But if there's anything that Americans have in common, apart from the ones who have emigrated, it's that deep down, despite everything, they do believe America is the greatest country in the world. They do believe it's special. And there's no doubt it is special, and it has been special, but it's actually probably more the latter, it probably has been special, because of

various conditions, because Europe destroyed itself in the middle of the 20th century, because of all the immigration of all the different minds from all over the world, because, yes, of the American dream and the free market, great ideas, great things happen there, and there's no doubt they have military might.

But I think until, as a culture, Americans realize that they are no longer the greatest country in the world, by any meaningful measure, that they are genuinely an empire on the brink of collapsing into despotism, until they say, oh, no, we're not the greatest country in the world, because we fail our poor on health and education, among other things, and because we revere greed, we revere individualism over collective enterprise, even my most liberal American friends, deep down, you go, well, America is not the greatest country in the world, they go, yeah, I mean, well, it is, but I mean, you can see them do this, yeah, but we said it every morning at school, we had it indoctrinated into us. America, I refer to it in my Fuck This song as having a Teflon self-esteem. We, as Western nations, but especially America, needs to look at itself and go, oh, we need fixing.

Stop thinking if we double down on American values, it will get better. If you double down on the American dream, it'll keep going. Rampant growth capitalism and individualism.

Amanda 80:25

But with all that, what do you see in Australia right now?

Tim 80:29

I don't think it's as bad, because we don't have that arrogance. But the problem we just have, that we are a little brother country, and we have a little brother version of the same problem. We're trying to double down on our national identity at a time when only global missions matter now.

Amanda 80:47

Do you remember the last time you cried? That something made you cry?

Tim 80:51

I had to really work on not crying this morning about 45 minutes before I saw you.

Amanda 80:56

Because of your daughter?

Tim 80:57

Yeah. I didn't do anything wrong, I've just been without Sarah for a few weeks, and this morning felt... Just for some reason I'm a bit tired, and felt very emotional about her, and not being able to get that right. But I cry reasonably easily. It's not usual for me to get sad at breakfast.

I find things... I cry very easily at movies and stuff, but mostly I work pretty hard on being well. It's funny, that desire as an artist to make people cry. [Upright](#) will make you cry. I think Upright's a psychopathy test, if you don't cry at Upright there is something wrong with you.

Amanda 71:42

Good measure of success. That gets back to our measure of success.

Tim 81:44

Yeah, exactly.

Amanda 81:45

Tim Minchin, I love you very much, and I think you're very handsome.

Tim 81:47

Thank you so much for having me.

Amanda 81:58

This has been The Art of Asking Everything podcast. Thank you so much to my guest, Tim Minchin. You can go to his site timminchin.com for music, videos, blogs, many more interviews, and the whole shebang.

Our interview was recorded by Sean Carey at Church Street Studios in SYdney, Australia.

The theme song that you're listening to right now is called [Bottomfeeder](#), it's from my 2012 crowdfunded album, [Theatre Is Evil](#).

I would like to give a shout-out to Jherek Bischoff, who arranged the beautiful in-betweeny orchestral music that you heard in this podcast, that's mostly snippets from my latest album, [There Will Be No Intermission](#), which you should listen to, if you like very, very sad songs about death, abortion, and other stuff. And you can go [support Jherek on his Patreon](#), he's really prolific, and his music is incredible.

For all the music you heard in this episode, you can go to the new and improved amandapalmer.net/podcast

The whole podcast was produced by FannieCo, and I always need to thank everyone at Team AFP, Michael, Hayley, Jordan, Alex, you guys are golden.

And this whole thing would not be possible without my patrons, all 15,000 of you. Patronage means that I can release this podcast with no ads, no sponsorship, no branding, and especially no censorship. We are actually the media. This podcast is just made by me and my team. Special thanks to my higher tier patrons, Simon Oliver, Saint Alexander, Birdie Black, Ruth Ann Harnisch, and Leela Cosgrove.

If you enjoyed this episode, I beg you to [go to my Patreon](#) and become a member, and you'll have access to a full pile of stuff, pictures, the podcast's book club forum, and so much more. And you will keep the lights on, for me and my team.

Signing off, I am AFP. Keep on asking everything.