(Breathes in, breathes out)

So I didn't always make my living from music. For about the five years after graduating from an upstanding liberal arts university, this was my day job. I was a self-employed living statue called the 8-Foot Bride, and I love telling people l did this for a job, because everybody always wants to know, who are these freaks in real life? Hello. I painted myself white one day, stood on a box, put a hat or a can at my feet, and when someone came by and dropped in money, I handed them a flower and some intense eye contact. And if they didn't take the flower, I threw in a gesture of sadness and longing as they walked away.

(Laughter)

So I had the most profound encounters with people, especially lonely people who looked like they hadn't talked to anyone in weeks, and we would get this beautiful moment of prolonged eye contact being allowed in a city street, and we would sort of fall in love a little bit. And my eyes would say, "Thank you. I see you." And their eyes would say, "Nobody ever sees me. Thank you."

And I would get harassed sometimes. People would yell at me from their passing cars. "Get a job!" And I'd be, like, "This is my job." But it hurt, because it made me fear that I was somehow doing something un-joblike and unfair, shameful. I had no idea how perfect a real education I was getting for the music business on this box. And for the economists out there, you may be interested to know I actually made a pretty predictable income, which was shocking to me given I had no regular customers, but pretty much 60 bucks on a Tuesday, 90 bucks on a Friday. It was consistent.

And meanwhile, I was touring locally and playing in nightclubs with my band, the Dresden Dolls. This was me on piano, a genius drummer. I wrote the songs, and eventually we started making enough money that I could quit being a statue, and as we started touring, I really didn't want to lose this sense of direct connection with people, because I loved it. So after all of our shows, we would sign autographs and hug fans and hang out and talk to people, and we made an art out of asking people to help us and join us, and I would track down local musicians and artists and they would set up outside of our shows, and they would pass the hat, and then they would come in and join us onstage, so we had this rotating smorgasbord of weird, random circus guests.

And then Twitter came along, and made things even more magic, because I could ask instantly for anything anywhere. So I would need a piano to practice on, and an hour later I would be at a fan's house. This is in London. People would bring home-cooked food to us all over the world backstage and feed us and eat with us. This is in Seattle. Fans who worked in museums and stores and any kind of public space would wave their hands if I would decide to do a last-minute, spontaneous, free gig. This is a library in Auckland. On Saturday I tweeted for this crate and hat, because I did not want to schlep them from the East Coast, and they showed up care of this dude, Chris from Newport Beach, who says hello. I once tweeted, where in Melbourne can I buy a neti pot? And a nurse from a hospital drove one right at that moment to the cafe I was in, and I bought her a smoothie and we sat there talking about nursing and death.

And I love this kind of random closeness, which is lucky, because I do a lot of couchsurfing. In mansions where everyone in my crew gets their own room but there's no wireless, and in punk squats, everyone on the floor in one room with no toilets but with wireless, clearly making it the better option.

(Laughter)

My crew once pulled our van up to a really poor Miami neighborhood and we found out that our couchsurfing host for the night was an 18-year-old girl, still living at home, and her family were all undocumented immigrants from Honduras. And that night, her whole family took the couches and she slept together with her mom so that we could take their beds. And I lay there thinking, these people have so little. Is this fair? And in the morning, her mom taught us how to try to make tortillas and wanted to give me a Bible, and she took me aside and she said to me in her broken English, "Your music has helped my daughter so much. Thank you for staying here. We're all so grateful." And I thought, this is fair. This is this.

A couple months later, I was in Manhattan, and I tweeted for a crash pad, and at midnight, I'm ringing a doorbell on the Lower East Side, and it occurs to me I've never actually done this alone. I've always been with my band or my crew. Is this what stupid people do? (Laughter) Is this how stupid people die? And before I can change my mind, the door busts open. She's an artist. He's a financial blogger for Reuters, and they're pouring me a glass of red wine and offering me a bath, and I have had thousands of nights like that and like that.

So I couchsurf a lot. I also crowdsurf a lot. I maintain couchsurfing and crowdsurfing are basically the same thing. You're falling into the audience and you're trusting each other. I once asked an opening band of mine if they wanted to go out into the crowd and pass the hat to get themselves some extra money, something that I did a lot. And as usual, the band was psyched, but there was this one guy in the band who told me he just couldn't bring himself to go out there. It felt too much like begging to stand there with the hat. And I recognized his fear of "Is this fair?" and "Get a job."

And meanwhile, my band is becoming bigger and bigger. We signed with a major label. And our music is a cross between punk and cabaret. It's not for everybody. Well, maybe it's for you. We sign, and there's all this hype leading up to our next record. And it comes out and it sells about 25,000 copies in the first few weeks, and the label considers this a failure.

And I was like, "25,000, isn't that a lot?"

They were like, "No, the sales are going down. It's a failure." And they walk off.

Right at this same time, I'm signing and hugging after a gig, and a guy comes up to me and hands me a $10 bill, and he says, "I'm sorry, I burned your CD from a friend." (Laughter) "But I read your blog, I know you hate your label. I just want you to have this money."

And this starts happening all the time. I become the hat after my own gigs, but I have to physically stand there and take the help from people, and unlike the guy in the opening band, I've actually had a lot of practice standing there. Thank you.

And this is the moment I decide I'm just going to give away my music for free online whenever possible, so it's like Metallica over here, Napster, bad; Amanda Palmer over here, and I'm going to encourage torrenting, downloading, sharing, but I'm going to ask for help, because I saw it work on the street. So I fought my way off my label and for my next project with my new band, the Grand Theft Orchestra, I turned to crowdfunding, and I fell into those thousands of connections that I'd made, and I asked my crowd to catch me. And the goal was 100,000 dollars. My fans backed me at nearly 1.2 million, which was the biggest music crowdfunding project to date.

(Applause)

And you can see how many people it is. It's about 25,000 people.

And the media asked, "Amanda, the music business is tanking and you encourage piracy. How did you make all these people pay for music?" And the real answer is, I didn't make them. I asked them. And through the very act of asking people, I'd connected with them, and when you connect with them, people want to help you. It's kind of counterintuitive for a lot of artists. They don't want to ask for things. But it's not easy. It's not easy to ask. And a lot of artists have a problem with this. Asking makes you vulnerable.

And I got a lot of criticism online after my Kickstarter went big for continuing my crazy crowdsourcing practices, specifically for asking musicians who are fans if they wanted to join us on stage for a few songs in exchange for love and tickets and beer, and this was a doctored image that went up of me on a website. And this hurt in a really familiar way. And people saying, "You're not allowed anymore to ask for that kind of help," really reminded me of the people in their cars yelling, "Get a job." Because they weren't with us on the sidewalk, and they couldn't see the exchange that was happening between me and my crowd, an exchange that was very fair to us but alien to them.

So this is slightly not safe for work. This is my Kickstarter backer party in Berlin. At the end of the night, I stripped and let everyone draw on me. Now let me tell you, if you want to experience the visceral feeling of trusting strangers, I recommend this, especially if those strangers are drunk German people. This was a ninja master-level fan connection, because what I was really saying here was, I trust you this much. Should I? Show me.

For most of human history, musicians, artists, they've been part of the community, connectors and openers, not untouchable stars. Celebrity is about a lot of people loving you from a distance, but the Internet and the content that we're freely able to share on it are taking us back. It's about a few people loving you up close and about those people being enough. So a lot of people are confused by the idea of no hard sticker price. They see it as an unpredictable risk, but the things I've done, the Kickstarter, the street, the doorbell, I don't see these things as risk. I see them as trust. Now, the online tools to make the exchange as easy and as instinctive as the street, they're getting there. But the perfect tools aren't going to help us if we can't face each other and give and receive fearlessly, but, more important, to ask without shame.

My music career has been spent trying to encounter people on the Internet the way I could on the box, so blogging and tweeting not just about my tour dates and my new video but about our work and our art and our fears and our hangovers, our mistakes, and we see each other. And I think when we really see each other, we want to help each other.

I think people have been obsessed with the wrong question, which is, "How do we make people pay for music?" What if we started asking, "How do we let people pay for music?"

Thank you.

(Applause)