

Winehouse, Doherty must stop idiotic race to the bottom

by *George_Varga*

If pain, emotional upheaval and an apparently insatiable appetite for self-administered destruction are among the keys to artistic creativity, Amy Winehouse and Pete Doherty must rank among the most creative young tortured artists on the planet.

A RACE TO THE BOTTOM - The eating disorders that gifted English singer Amy Winehouse has battled pale in comparison to her current drug and alcohol abuse. CNS Photo courtesy of Republic. Or, more likely, these two English musicians-turned-human-train-wrecks are simply the latest to discover that the downward spiral of drugs, alcohol and rock 'n' roll is exactly that.

Unfortunately, there's a profound difference between discovering hard truths firsthand versus actually acknowledging and learning from them. And it's difficult to determine if the London-based Winehouse and Doherty truly realize how serious their predicaments are.

What does seem certain, sadly, is that both appear to buy into the myth that young rock stars and wannabe stars are indestructible, despite so much deadly evidence to the contrary (from Jimi Hendrix and Sid Vicious to Kurt Cobain and Hole bassist Kristen Pfaff.)

Sadly, Winehouse, 24, and Doherty, 28, seem determined to squander their musical gifts, if not actually destroy themselves.

Living on the edge for public consumption, even in the name of your art, is a gamble very rarely worth taking. Pulling back is all the harder in an age when the media and the public thrive on young stars who act very badly. And when those actions overwhelm your music and your life, survival becomes even more of a challenge. This holds especially true for troubled young performers who are thrust prematurely into the public spotlight.

Doherty, the nominal leader of the English band Babyshambles and the ex-boyfriend of Kate Moss, has been arrested on so many drug charges, you almost need a calculator to tally the total. His band's new album, "Shotter's Nation," reaffirms that he could be a talent to contend with if he somehow can clean up his act.

Recently, the post-rehab Doherty publicly apologized for resuming his heroin use. But even his worst overdoses have not yet deterred him, and his apology seemed more directed at the judge who could send him to prison than to his family, friends or fans.

Winehouse, meanwhile, is responsible for one of 2007's best songs, the vintage soul-celebrating "Rehab." Its defiant refrain - "They tried to make me go to rehab / But I said: 'No, no, no'" - was autobiographical, since her manager did try to get her into rehab to kick her penchant for booze and pot.

Make that her former manager, since she fired him for daring to even suggest her life might be more valuable than the stardom fueling her debilitating quest to maintain a constant buzz. In August, she canceled some of her tour dates, reportedly in order to be treated with her husband, Blake Felder-Civil, at the Priory. That's the same high-priced London rehab clinic where Doherty has stayed.

The couple's brief Priory stay was prompted by a reported overdose of heroin, cocaine, ecstasy, ketamine and alcohol.

While Winehouse's record company said she was hospitalized because of "severe exhaustion," her father-in-law, Giles Civil, was more candid. "She's got to get a grip before it's too late," he said, before suggesting her record label "suspend" her contract until she and her husband either recovered or were forced to enter a rehab clinic "where they can't leave until they sort themselves out."

Winehouse's father doesn't think that will happen. "There's only one way out of this," he told a BBC radio interviewer. "At some point, they are going to reach rock bottom, and at that point they will say, 'I don't want to do that anymore.'"

But will they?

From jazz legends Billie Holiday and Charlie Parker to such rockers as John Bonham and Jerry Garcia, the list of gifted musicians who lost it all to drugs and alcohol grows longer every year.

Is rock music alone to blame, when drug abuse is rampant in nearly every segment of society, here and in many other countries? Of course not.

But watching Winehouse and Doherty stumble in and out of rehab with their lives on the line - careers seem insignificant in cases like these - one can only sadly wonder if they, or we, have learned anything at all.

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