



Aversion
rock - punk - indie

Yes Virginia ...
The Dresden Dolls
Roadrunner Records

★ ★ ★ ★ (out of 5)

If there's one thing that the budding legions of cabaret-rock acts have taught us, it's that it takes more than the flashy, over-the-top vaudeville trappings to make a successful band. As with any other genre, you can fake style. You can't fake substance.

The Dresden Dolls need to fake neither on *Yes Virginia ...*, the duo's sophomore album. There's never been doubts that the cabaret-Goth act's short on style – the Dolls almost single-handedly brought cabaret stylings out of the historical wastebasket and back into style. It's not just the command of Weimar-era cabaret styles that made the Dolls one of the underground's most buzzed acts. Underneath all the exaggerated dynamics and faux-historical trappings, the Dolls deliver where it counts – in the songwriting. While the duo's best known for its cabaret dressings, it's really keyboardist/singer Amanda Palmer's songwriting that allows *Yes Virginia ...* to transcend the cabaret concept.

Underneath the cabaret and Goth overtones, *Yes Virginia ...* is a deceptively smart album. Although many of the Dolls' contemporaries use their cabaret underpinnings as a crutch, the Boston duo delivers sharp songwriting that transcends the gimmicks inherent in cabaret revivalism. Despite all the eyeliner, costumes and jazz-era overtones, Palmer's sordid songs hinge on startlingly honest observations. "First Orgasm" might be a be a dose of naughty sexuality if it weren't for Palmer's confessions of loneliness and isolation. "My Alcoholic Friends" is a convoluted tale of debauchery and alcoholic escapism, while "Me and the Minibar" plumbs the depths of solitude and misery.

Palmer doesn't let her biting tales of sex, drugs and the seamy side of life stand in the way of making exciting music. Joined by drummer/guitarist Brian Viglione, Palmer rockets through songs that position her as an uncomfortable middle ground between Marlene Dietrich and Sarah MacLachlan. With blustery piano arrangements that mix up everything from speakeasy jazz to the hyperbole of modern Goth, *Yes Virginia* is a theatric, sexually charged number that proves everything old – such as cabaret – can be new, and exciting, again.