

## DRESDEN DOLLS

*Wilkommen, bienvenue, welcome to **Yes Virginia's** manic-depressive cabaret*

By Dorian Lynskey

In 1897, the New York Sun received a letter from Virginia O'Hanlon, a distraught eight-year-old seeking expert advice on her father's claim that Santa Claus didn't exist. The editor's response, an impassioned paean to belief and romance in the face of drab certainty, became the most reprinted newspaper editorial in US history and, 109 years later, has inspired the second album from Boston duo the Dresden Dolls. Singer and

pianist Amanda Palmer has a gift for naming. The city famed for fine china on one hand and the attentions of Bomber Harris on the other is an apt reference for a band arty enough to compose a musical based on Gunter Grass's *The Tin Drum* yet sufficiently powerful to support Nine Inch Nails unscathed.

Like a more evenly matched White Stripes, the Dresden Dolls construct imposing edifices from limited materials, drummer Brian Viglione lending brawn to what former performance artist Palmer dubs her "Brechtian punk cabaret". She's a whipsmart drama queen with humour as bitter and black as too-strong coffee and, one assumes, doctorate-level familiarity with the work of Sylvia Plath ("The first orgasm of the morning is cold and hard as hell") and Dorothy Parker ("I'm trying hard not to be ashamed not to know the name of who is waking up beside me/ Or the date, the season or the city"). Featuring cameo appearances by Hitler, Aristophanes and Sudan's Janjaweed militia, these hyperarticulate show tunes constitute some of the brightest, boldest songwriting you'll hear all year. Good work, Virginia.

*Yes Virginia is on Roadrunner*



Dresden Dolls: some of the boldest songwriting you'll hear this year.

# 05/06

## The WORD