



The Dresden Dolls: *Yes, Virginia*
(Roadrunner)

The Dresden Dolls' 2004 self-titled full-length debut was one of the most exciting recent discoveries in music. The Boston-based piano and drums duo burst onto the scene with their innovative cabaret

punk tunes, a perfectly calculated aesthetic, and a truckload of poise and attitude to spare. The cockiness of both their musical and visual approach, combined with the talents and skills to back it up, made The Dresden Dolls and their debut nothing short of a revelation. Which is why *Yes, Virginia* feels like a disappointment.

At first, the follow-up to the widely acclaimed debut falls firmly into the sophomore slump category. *Virginia* is very similar to *The Dresden Dolls*. The melodies, the energy, the rhythms, the lyrics are all completely interchangeable with the first record. The new album doesn't broadside the unsuspecting listener with its equal parts Kurt Weill, Rodgers and Hammerstein, and Lora Logic. In other words, *Virginia* is not a revelation. And so what?

Virginia is not a refreshing smack in the face because we have a frame of reference for this brilliant and effective hybrid of pop (in the broadest sense of the term) music—the band's first album. So, yes, the sophomore album is the traditional sophomore slump album—not as luminous as the first, and retreads much of the same ground. But don't lose perspective here: the band's first album created an entire new genre of music. So for the dress-up Dolls to repeat themselves is still to contribute something new to music. Such is the price of creating and further defining a wholly original sound.

The album kicks off with its strongest track, "Sex Changes," with perfect tunesmith signature changes, the great wordplay of the title, and brilliant intensity. And although lyrically this outing is weaker than the debut, *Virginia* is packed with the great bouncy melodies ("My Alcoholic Friends," "Mandy Goes to Med School"), subversive and angry themes ("Dirty Business," "Necessary Evil") and Brian Viglione's drumming is always creative and song-serving. But of course, the star is the personality of Amanda Palmer's larger-than-life voice.

Make no mistake that Palmer is a theatrical show-woman. Call the songs melodramatic, call her histrionic, but one can never accuse Palmer of not selling a song heart and soul. When she misses, she's comes off as precious. When she hits, she's as moving as anything in music today. Either way, it's a riveting show. (www.dresdendolls.com)