

Veruca Salt Won't Stand Still

Written by Jeff Ignatius

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Say this for Veruca Salt: Static it ain't. The Chicago-based band, which makes good on a canceled show at RIBCO this Thursday at 10 p.m. with Ophur, is hardly the same outfit that made a minor splash in 1994 with American Thighs and the single "Seether." Only Louise Post remains from that lineup, with chief collaborator Nina Gordon treading solo waters.

Veruca Salt's new disc, *Resolver*, is similarly itchy, never comfortable in one place for very long. A sense of desperation permeates the album, as if Post has something to prove.

She thinks she does, of course. She needs to show the world that Veruca Salt without Gordon is still Veruca Salt, that the band isn't a one-and-done wonder, and that alternative rock can still rock.

That's a pretty ambitious agenda, and *Resolver* can't succeed on those terms. Better bands than this – Smashing Pumpkins and Hole, to name a few – have struggled to remain relevant in the world of Britney Spears and Eminem.

You can't fault Post for trying, though, and the effort is admirable both for itself and for the result. Song by song, *Resolver* is strong. It's only as a whole that it falls apart. You could charitably call it "stylistically diverse," but a more honest assessment is that it's all over the place, a jarring sampler for the ADD age. Post and company seem willing to try anything, hoping for a hit to guide future endeavors. You like that? We'll fill the next record with it. Veruca Salt is a collection of talented musicians in search of a sound. No surprise, there. If you're scratching your head trying to remember why "Veruca Salt" sounds familiar, it's because the band was thrown to the masses six years ago by a major label in an effort to cash in on the Next Big Sound, the post-*Nevermind* loud, hooky, girl-band vibe encapsulated in The Breeders' "Cannonball." When that craze expired after its 15-minute life cycle, where could Veruca Salt go? *Resolver* certainly doesn't try to repeat the success of "Seether," but it has a hard time deciding what it wants to be. You've got your profane punk ("Born Entertainer"), your sad lament ("Imperfectly"), your buzzy-fuzzy anthem ("Only You Know"), your Tori Amos ("Disconnected"), your riff-and-chorus rocker ("Officially Dead"), and just about anything else you could want this side of bubblegum pop and rap. Post's harsh screams invoke L7 and Courtney Love, while her breathy sing-song sounds like a muted Amos. The guitars come straight from the Billy Corgan sound factory. As mimicry, it's pretty accomplished. That sounds meaner than intended. In our age of copycat bands – and who hasn't confused Creed for Pearl Jam? – Veruca Salt refreshingly tries a lot of different things. Better still, most of them work very well. Aside from its faux-edgy lyrics and easy target ("She's all crazy and shit / She shows us her tits / She's just a corn-fed, white-bread chick"), "Best You Can Get" is a catchy nugget of electronica-tinged rock with a sing-along chorus. It's a hairpin turn from the straight-ahead screaming venom of "Born Entertainer." And "Yeah Man" showcases all the band's strengths in a single track, careening among a multitude of sounds in a three-and-a-half-minute pop song. There's even more promise; *Resolver* almost manages to hit a groove toward the end. Post spat her bile early and often, and it seemed to exhaust her. The last half of the record is calmer and more assured, focused, and comfortable. *Resolver* ends up a frustrating artifact, a snapshot of a good band in flux. It's impossible, of course, to know in what direction Veruca Salt and Post will go next, but while they're in the Quad Cities, it should be fun to see where they are now.