

Rolling Stone

Album Reviews



David Byrne

Uh-Oh

RS: 4 of 5 Stars Average User Rating: 4 of 5 Stars

2004

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On his second official solo album, David Byrne continues to come to grips with the paradoxes that have turned him into one of the quirkiest of pop icons. Jampacked with catchy ditties as coy as the album's title and bristling with North America-meets-South America stylistic hybrids, *Uh-Oh* is a pop tart as only Byrne can concoct – light and sweet on top, sticky and ironic in the middle. Tastes good, and for the most part, it's good for you.

Musically, Byrne deliberately mixes it up (with the help of such abettors as Angel Fernandez, who co-wrote salsafied sections for a few tunes). The opening track, "Now I'm Your Mom" (a snappy number about transsexualism), sets the stage for what's to come, shifting from a mechanistic synth bed, passing through a droll clarinet solo and coming out the other side in mambo mode.

Uh-Oh sums up Byrne's career, carrying over the Latin-Caribbean hot sauce from his previous solo experiment *Rei Momo* (1989) and trafficking in a more familiar Talking Heads-style blend of funk, C&W and pure goof-ball pop. Byrne manages to introduce fresh ingredients to make New Wave sound new again; call it neo-New Wave.

And yet, as summery fun and juicy as *Uh-Oh* is, what's missing is the undertow of tension that we haven't heard much from Byrne since the Heads' masterworks *Fear of Music* (1979) and *Remain in Light* (1980). He seems to have gone giddy on us, moved over to the sunny side of the street. Still, there are always dark shadows to contend with in his work. "Twistin' in the Wind" is a chipper diatribe about dirty dealings in Washington, D.C., and Everytown, U.S.A. In the otherwise party-ready tune "Tiny Town," Byrne sings, "The whole world is a

tiny town, full of tiny ideas." He holds up a self-deprecating mirror in the frivolous "Girls on My Mind": "I'm the star of my own movie/Honey, I'm the leading man/You might ask yourself – who is that guy?/ With the girls upon his mind?"

Byrne hasn't forgotten everything he learned in art school, but he's basically a craftsman in the grand pop tradition, making big noise with a few chords, plenty of attitude and an ear for hooks. He's just not one to wear his heart on his sleeve: The girls stay safely on his mind, beautiful abstractions held up for objective observation. It's hard to complain, though. There's still a party bubbling in David Byrne's mind. It hasn't stopped yet. (RS 626)

JOSEF WOODARD

(Posted: Mar 19, 1992)