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Music Pick

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Mad Juana at the Viper Room

"You take the world for granted as you float up on your cake," Karmen Guy purrs with a deceptive sugariness on Mad Juana's new album, *Bruja on the Corner* (Acetate Records), before digging in the knife. "You think you're some kind of a dignitary, but you're nothing more than a fake," she declares while accordionist Marni Rice, saxist Danny Ray and trumpeter Nico Camargo serenade her with merrily bittersweet, soused and swanky rejoinders straight out of old-time New Orleans. So many musicians invoke witchcraft and voodoo without ever sounding magical, but the New York group are indeed bewitching, with a timelessly exotic blur of Gypsy-punk influences akin to Manu Chao and Gogol Bordello that's taken to another level of enchantment altogether by Guy's sultry chanteuse persona. Her songwriting partner in crime, guitarist-bassist Sami Yaffa, lays down some considerable groovy grooves that go far beyond his previous contributions to Hanoi Rocks and the reconstituted New York Dolls, such as the dreamy dub interlude in the otherwise madcap "Strangers in Paradise" and the stormy acoustic guitars and haunting melodica-flecked sadness of "Circus Downtown." It all culminates most impressively in the sinuously mesmerizing "Revolution Avenue," whose dueling horns, loping dub bass, psychedelic sound effects and Guy's border-dissolving imagery echo the febrile moods of Tijuana No's classic album *Contra-Revolucion Avenue*. (Falling James)