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Hangmen



East of Western

(Acetate)

www.acetate.com

When the Hangmen first hit the Los Angeles music scene in the late '80s, the long-haired quartet was mistaken for a hair metal act and unfortunately marketed as such by Capitol Records. When the rootsy grit-rockers on the band's self-titled LP didn't give mousse-abused Sunset Strip rats any thrills, the Hangmen were dropped, signed by Geffen, and dropped again without releasing record 2. That's usually the end of the story, but leader Bryan Small refused to surrender, getting past his drug addiction and keeping the band going as an indie label entity with a series of strong records in the last decade.

The sixth Hangmen album, *East of Western* continues the upward arc of 2007's Mike Ness-produced *In the City* with a consistently fine set of steely street rockers and unsentimental ballads. The criminals and blue-collar workers that populate snarling stompers like "Railroad Man," "Graverobbers" and "Homesick Blues" exude defiance as much as desperation, keeping spit and

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spirit alive no matter how close to the hips the alligators get. Romance drinks a bitter brew as well in the C&W-inflected "Betrayed," the crawling "Haunted" and the Stonesified "Had a Girl," and a blazing cover of the Modern Lovers' "She Cracked" betrays roots in more than Jagger, Richards and Thunders.

The quartet's teeth-gritting delivery suits its subject matter, giving the proceedings a sense of danger most rock & roll lacks. "I'm Your Man" may give love the thumbs-up, but in the Hangmen's hands it sounds like a threat. New axeman Ron Heathman (ex-Supersuckers) proves to be the right partner to augment Small's bitter sneer, and the unfussy production captures the band in all its glory. *East of Western* may be the Hangmen's truest shot of the mean streets yet.

DOWNLOAD: "Homesick Blues," "Had a Girl," "I'm Your Man" MICHAEL TOLAND



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