



East of Western

The Hangmen {recordings_bands_mg} [East of Western](#) {/recordings_bands_mg}

Acetate,

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Time can be tough on bands. There are those that were never built to last and bust up in a burst of flames (or sometimes just a fizzling puff of smoke), and there are those that trudge towards the end of the line playing the same songs night after night, soundtracking memories but devoid of creative spirit. But then there are those bands that refuse to die, sometimes even finding a spark later on in the game. That's the case with the Hangmen, who hit the LA scene in the late '80s only to be worked over by an industry that wanted nothing other than to cast the band in the million-selling mould of Guns N' Roses. The pressure cracked the band and the group disappeared for a time, only to return a decade later led by singer/guitarist Bryan Small and strumming out some mean punk and country-tinged tunes that were both gritty and damaged at their best.

And in 2012 Small is still mining the same frayed territory for his songs, letting his heart hang on every ringing, distorted guitar chord, joined here by ex-Supersucker guitarist Ron Heathman, whose tastefully ragged playing sits well within Small's songs of trouble.

This band was always less GNR—or at least less Slash than Izzy Stradlin—and more Social Distortion—which makes it unsurprising that Social D's Mike Ness produced the Hangmen's 2007 effort—and *East of Western* doesn't break that mould. Nothing wrong with that, though, especially for a band that sounds as though it could only exist in the

shadows of last call at some roadhouse on the edge of LA (again, rather than on the Sunset Strip like the industry wanted during the group's early years).

East of Western stomps along steadily, a short and tight record that still manages to wander some varied territory in the country-punk swagger of "Drink Smoke," the rolling heartbreak of "Had a Girl," where Small cries "When I met you / That's when luck ran out on me," and the hypnotic pull of "Haunted."

Time hasn't broken Small, and, in fact, has given him the opportunity to focus and develop his lyrical tales of the beaten down. At times he doesn't sound like a man who will make it much farther, but he's done just that for this many years and it's that struggle for survival that he captures in his words. Musically, the band is as tight as ever—keeping in mind that the songs are still loose and rambling—with longtime bassist Angelique Congleton holding the bottom together with style while Small's guitar locks into the steady pounding of Dino Guerrero's drums, leaving plenty of room for Heathman to colour the songs with his countrified punk licks. Save for Congleton, the only consistent voice in the Hangmen for the past couple decades has been Small, but as long as those two are there, and as long as Small keeps scratching out songs like these, time is on the Hangmen's side.

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