

SEPTEMBER 2018

Lucero

Among the Ghosts

LIBERTY & LAMENT/THIRTY TIGERS



After nine albums and 20 years in the game, the core members of Memphis rock outfit **Lucero** still deserve a lot more recognition than they get. It starts with frontman and firebrand **Ben Nichols**, whose throaty rasp and folksy demeanor belie a Southern gothic worldview that's richly steeped in the rebel loner's elixir of whiskey, women and the open road. Marriage and fatherhood have mellowed Nichols some, at times giving *Among the Ghosts* the contemplative air of a personal statement along the lines of *The Last Pale Light in the West*, the 2009 solo outing he crafted around Cormac McCarthy's bleak, unforgiving novel *Blood Meridian*. On "Everything Has Changed," he taps into a dark country vein, chased by drink and the devil, but the inspirational "To My Dearest Wife" stands out, told in the voice of a Civil War soldier, with the band surging behind him like comrades-in-arms on a battlefield. Throughout the album, Lucero comes across as tight-knit and tasteful; lead guitarist **Brian Venables**'s solo on "Cover Me" immediately heightens the song's trance-rock energy, while **Rick Steff**'s buttery organ riffs on "Long Way Back Home" accentuate a deep and unshakable sense of longing. Nichols has often cited his love of Tom Petty and Lucero continues to live up to that lofty standard, with Nichols leading the charge. *Bill Murphy*