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## **VISITING ACT | Adios, Cowpunk** **Lucero bring the Boss to the country**

BY SHAWNTÉ SALABERT



*The Tennessee kids: Rock band Lucero*

**Lucero** w/ Rocky Votolato, Drag the River

Fri. Nov. 17 9 p.m. \$12 (\$10 adv.)

Cumberland's 301 King St. 577-9469

[www.cumberlands.net](http://www.cumberlands.net) [www.luceromusic.com](http://www.luceromusic.com)

Seriously, people. We're arriving at critical mass with the overgenreification of music and it has to stop somewhere. Case in point: "country punk." What is that? Cowboys with mohawks singing about how they wish the ranch was a bit more anarchist? Naw, nope. Pull out the manila folder in your cramped mental file cabinet and toss it in the trash. Real country is punk, outlaw, renegade, and it doesn't need a qualifier — has everybody forgotten this?

The point here is that Lucero have been called a lot of things over the past

few years, from record to record, writer to writer, but the simple truth is that these Memphis boys make old-school country music with swagger and soul. They borrow the stereotypes of lusty Southern men with a thirst for women and beer and turn them into something a bit more sweet and thoughtful.

The band's newest record, *Rebels, Rogues, & Sworn Brothers* (Liberty & Lament), is mature, but without abandoning their disposition for slight reinvention — this round, keyboards have been added courtesy of Rick Steff and there's no mistaking the loud knock of rock in most tracks. Fresh from somewhere Midwestern, vocalist and guitarist Ben Nichols shares his thoughts on geography, politics, and bringing the Boss into Lucero.

**CITY PAPER:** I notice that somehow Bruce Springsteen creeps up a lot in your promo materials. What's up with your Boss fixation?

**Ben Nichols:** He's just really good [laughs]. When the band started, around 1998, I just kind of started rediscovering all this stuff that I hadn't listened to for 10 years. Bruce Springsteen ... I started just looking at him from kind of a different perspective and just really respected his songwriting. His attitude towards rock is just extremely inspiring.

**CITY PAPER:** When I think of Springsteen, I think of Americana and the Midwest and guys with Ford pickups proud to be an American. Lucero definitely has that Americana vibe.

**BN:** Yeah, but there's also a lot of disappointment and longing and there's that kind of feeling that the city's dying around you and America is dying around you and you've got to get out and find something to make your own way. There's a whole lot of no jobs to be found, crumbling buildings, and trying to escape that — there's a lot of that in there, too. I think that's what makes [Springsteen] good; he's got a fairly broad view of America. I mean, "Born to Run," they wanted to use that as the New Jersey state song and they discovered once they just fucking listened to it that it's about wanting to get the hell out of New Jersey. It's a two-sided coin.

**CITY PAPER:** Being from Memphis, and from the Midwest, seems to be a foundation for a lot of your music.

**BN:** Somebody else called Tennessee "Midwest," but I think Tennessee is pretty much Southern.

**CITY PAPER:** True. Either way, you can sense that Memphis vibe in your music.

**BN:** The history in Memphis is definitely inspiring. I mean, hell, it's where rock 'n' roll came from. It's a little daunting, I guess, but I don't know — I think it's more inspiring.

**CITY PAPER:** Where did the new album title come from? It's kinda gritty. I like it.

**BN:** We stumbled across it in a book and it seemed to kind of sum up that "us against the world" attitude. We'd all been stuck in a van together for about five years of solid touring. With the type of rock songs that we were writing, and because recording the record was a really cool experience, things were just at a point where we felt kind of like a team again.