

La Muñeca Y LOS MUERTOS



Album Title: Estrella
Reviewed By: Kendra Atleework
Review Title: Better Bilingual
Star Rating: 4 Stars out of 5

Review Summary:

La Muñeca y Los Muertos challenge the expectations of a diverse fan base with their debut release *Estrella*, which successfully carries us to unexpected heights. A multicultural band in a multicultural state, they combine the best of pop, ska, and Latin rock.

Review:

Everything's better bilingual. True to their California roots, San Francisco quintet La Muñeca y Los Muertos incorporate not only lyrics in English and Spanish but a diverse aesthetic and musical style. The resulting album serves as an intricate collage of two of the major cultures that make up our state and country. And at the same time, La Muñeca y Los Muertos are simply good to listen to.

Their 2010 debut release invokes ska-pop favorites like No Doubt or Reel Big Fish, as well as Latin rock and pop artists such as Julieta Venegas. Top it off with a sprinkle of rockabilly and a grinning calavera and you have *Estrella*, or "Star" in English, a combination of cultures and musical genres that is both original and well balanced.

This debut was not hastily released. *Estrella* is the product of a band who has been playing together since 2004, and the album has been carefully thought out, rehearsed, and pieced together, characterized by skillful musicianship and tight, professional arrangements. Melodies are aggressive and memorable while remaining catchy and skankable, as ska should be. Such genre-melding is perhaps the most interesting thing about this album. It is the factor that sets La Muñeca y Los Muertos significantly beyond similar contemporary acts. For example, La Muñeca y Los Muertos may vaguely resemble *Girl in a Coma*, a group focusing on a Latina aesthetic and rockabilly sound, and it is easy to draw countless comparisons with ska and Mexican rock bands alike, from the *Specials* to *Mana*. However, in combining genres and cultures smoothly in one album, La Muñeca y Los Muertos do what their peers fail to. In a way, La Muñeca y Los Muertos act not only as artistic but social heralds. They add something new and interesting to contemporary pop rock, and in doing so they paint a complex picture of a contemporary, multicultural California.

Most tracks are enthusiastic and upbeat, harnessing just enough aggression to avoid falling short at cheesy. Many are characterized by creative start/stop rhythmic patterns. Some of the most memorable include track two, "Star:" a great ska-rock song, catchy and fondly memorable while remaining technically formidable and musically tight. The third track, "World," is marked by an intriguing conclusion reminiscent of *Tiger Army*. The fifth track, "El Salvador," is perhaps the strongest offering on *Estrella*. It incorporates a Latin flavor with a dose of ska and Spanish lyrics. The track is cute, catchy, smart, and overall memorable. The seventh track, "Los Muertos," is also interesting in its heavy incorporation of ska and bi-lingual lyrics, while the following track "Electric Car" veers more towards rockabilly.

The band's image and personality is reminiscent of the Mexican bingo game *Loteria* that serves as a motif throughout their aesthetic. Familiar to some from childhood and to others from high school Spanish class, *Loteria* incorporates brightly colored cards decorated with caricatures: *El Borracho*, *El Valiente*, *La Araña*. Each is rendered in pen and ink, intricate, colorful, distinct. Among the squares on the bingo cards are *La Muñeca* and *La Muerte*: the doll, and the dead. Forceful front woman *Muñeca Osorio* takes on the *loteria* token of *la muñeca*. *Osorio's* voice and guitar are striking, her lyrics clever and smart, and her personality as a performer riveting. Simultaneously the imagery and cultural references that she so skillfully incorporates into *Estrella* give the music powerful cohesion and added artistic appeal.

Estrella the album is danceable and appealing, yet La Muñeca y Los Muertos challenge expectations of a diverse fanbase, successfully carrying us to unexpected heights. A multicultural band in a multicultural state, they're combining the best of many genres, and many worlds.

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