

HIT THE LIGHTS

★★★½

Skip School, Start Fights

New singer, more experience, better songs.



After the departure of singer Colin Ross last year, it was unclear what direction the Lima, Ohio, group Hit The Lights would veer toward. Would they elect to reprise the nasal pop-punk on their 2006 debut *This Is A Stick Up... Don't Make It A Murder* or jerk the wheel down another road? Well, HTL haven't exactly made an abrupt turn on their sophomore effort, but *Skip School, Start Fights* certainly reflects a more thoughtful, experienced band, graduating guitarist Nick Thompson to lead vocals, a position he excels in. "Drop The Girl" and "Breathe In" showcase the group's penchant for pop-rock hooks and catchy melodies that immediately recall predecessors New Found Glory, while closer "On And On" reveals HTL's softer side as Thompson croons over calm guitars. It's not necessarily innovative, but it's accessible and memorable—two adjectives that can't be attached to many of Hit The Lights' peers' albums. (TRIPLE CROWN; triplecrownrecords.com) Emily Zemler