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JASON BOLAND

The lead Straggler talks *Rancho Alto*, the state of the nation, and walking the line between inspiration and innovation while living life in the sober lane.

By Chris Mosser

Jason Boland is a survivor. The onetime "Bourbon Legend" is now six-years sober, and in recent years has also persevered through a near career-ending vocal cord ailment and experienced a modern-day rite of passage via a tour bus drug bust on a lonely Texas highway. Through it all, the seasoned Oklahoma-bred honky-tonker (now living in Ausitn) and his crack band, the Stragglers, have released some of the sturdiest records to come out of the Red Dirt/Texas music scene in the last decade, including 1999's *Pearl Snaps*, 2001's *Truck Stop Diaries*, 2004's *Somewhere in the Middle*, 2006's *The Bourbon Legend*, and 2008's breakthrough *Comal County Blue*. The just-released *Rancho Alto* is a poignant, time-honored true country album that comes in the midst of a trend of genre experimentation amongst Boland's peers that might appear to be a faltering of faith in what country music is, or should be. Boland and the Stragglers have never been on firmer footing, though, and the new album finds Boland in top form and loaded for bear.

We met up in South Austin, and I managed to pry Boland away from his beautiful significant other long enough to sit a spell and catch up at Opal Divine's in Penn Field. I suddenly felt self-conscious walking through Opal's door with him — I had invited a recovering alcoholic to meet with me in a bar. But then I realized that this is a guy who plies his trade in bars every night. Boland's demons are never too far away.

Photo Courtesy of Jason Boland