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Music

PLAYLIST

Genre or Post-Genre, It's a Singer's World



Dustin Downing

Jason Boland & the Stragglers

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Jason Boland & the Stragglers

Characters abound on “Rancho Alto” (Proud Souls/Apex/Thirty Tigers), the new album by Jason Boland & the Stragglers, the raw [Oklahoma country outfit](#) that, on several previous albums, had mostly avoided them. But there’s an evident shift in the tenor of Mr. Boland’s voice and his songwriting here, turning a band that’s been appealing but not consequential into a newly invigorated and steadily striking force. Mr. Boland isn’t the most evocative singer, nor does he have much range, but there’s a sternness to his tone that hasn’t been there before, and he’s using it in service of stories about injustice and reproach. There’s a doleful criminal on “Down Here in the Hole,” a man wracked with guilt and privilege on “False Accuser’s Lament” and the ghosts of a traveling rodeo on “Fences.” But the best character here turns out to be Mr. Boland, who’s learned to massage a feeling and get the full effect from it, making his love songs like “Every Moment I’m Gone” and “Obsessed” feel like more than easy trifles.