

FROM ITS STORYTELLING TRADITION IN THE 1920S RURAL SOUTH TO TODAY'S UNLIKELY CROSS-SECTION OF POP, AMERICANA, ROCK, FOLK, AND EVEN RAP, COUNTRY MUSIC DEFIES DEFINITION. AND NOW, LIKE NEVER BEFORE, THE GENRE'S BEEN UNBOXED. EVERYONE FROM HONKY-TONKING TROUBADOURS TO SONGWRITING SIRENS ARE CHALLENGING WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A COUNTRY ARTIST THESE DAYS. ON THE FOLLOWING PAGES, MEET

THE NEXT GENERATION OF

COUNTRY

MUSIC

BY

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THE HONKY-TONKERS

JASON BOLAND & THE STRAGGLERS

HOME BASE: AUSTIN, TEXAS

Jason Boland & The Stragglers consider themselves a straight-shooting, five-piece honky-tonk band—one carrying on the long tradition of Oklahoma red-dirt music, a bluesier, more rock-oriented strand of country that originated

in Jason's hometown of Stillwater, Oklahoma. "Growing up where I did, country is just what you've heard from birth," says Jason. "But I grew up listening to AC/DC too—that's just the way it happened."

But much like Bob Childers, Waylon Jennings, and other red-dirt forebears, they're more interested in forging connections with live audiences than precisely defining their sound. For these dusty-booted troubadours, that means touring, and lots of it—anywhere from 180 to 220 days out of every 365. "Not that it's not fun sometimes to walk out to a big mass of writhing humanity at some giant festival," Jason notes, but these guys are men of the people, most at home among neon signs, crowds in cowboy boots, and cold, cheap beer. They'll even happily gather around a

campfire, as they did last fall at their inaugural Medicine Stone Festival at the Diamondhead Resort in Tahlequah, Oklahoma. "It's just three nights of lots of music and campin' and the beautiful Illinois River," Jason says. "A lot of friends and a lot of tunes." Every so often he and The Stragglers will slip into the studio, as they did for 2013's *Dark & Dirty Mile*. But soon enough they're itching to get out on the road again. "We're the type that home is where you hang your hat," Jason says. "And there's always another town down the road and another dance hall to play."

MUSICAL HERO: The Red Dirt Rangers. "I always admired the way they played, whether there were 2 people or 2,000."

THEIR NEW FAVE: The Turnpike Troubadours. "I hesitate to call them up-and-coming anymore—those guys are on fire, and rightfully so."

JASON'S BISCUITS & JAM TRACK: "Lucky I Guess"

PHOTOGRAPHED AT The Camel, Richmond, Virginia