

# Driftwood

COUNTRY, JASON BOLAND, OKLAHOMA, RED DIRT, TEXAS

## Review: Jason Boland & the Stragglers, *Rancho Alto*

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### Jason Boland & the Stragglers

*Rancho Alto*

[Apex (2011)]

If you haven't checked in with **Jason Boland and the Stragglers** lately, you may be surprised. The cranked-up, party throw down ambience of earlier albums has virtually vanished, giving the indication that Boland is now gunning for the neon lights of Nashville with his stone country edge. But nothing could be further from the truth. Boland's brand of country music doesn't align with today's country pop pabulum, nor is it inane outlaw country. It's best thought of as an extension of the Oklahoma Red Dirt scene transplanted in neighboring Texas, where this native Oklahoman now resides. Quality songwriting prevails on eight originals; reverent interpretation are evident on three others, two of which hail from esteemed Red Dirt singer-songwriters Greg Jacobs ("Farmer's Luck") and Bob Childers ("Woody's Road"), the undisputed Red Dirt godfather.

Boland's songs often center around protagonists battling life's struggles—a trapped miner, a guy defending his property and the eternally, grieving soul. At times, Boland's imagery is bone chilling, as it is on "False Accuser's Lament":

That banker took my home,  
now I'm in these hills alone  
Oh, from time to time I see his wife in a long black veil.

Heady themes indeed, but they're far from maudlin. Sometimes there are happier topics, like the warm memories of "Mary Ellen's Greenhouse" and the gushing amorous confession of "Obsessed." The melodies and arrangements are subtly moving and in one form or another, every tune, whether it's mid-tempo, brisk or a dangerously, fall-in-love belly rubber, is a dance floor invitation. Modern, uncompromising honky tonk at its best.

—Dan Willging (Denver, CO)

