

TexasMonthly

MUSIC REVIEW

Rancho Alto

RANCHO ALTO BY JASON BOLAND AND THE STRAGGLERS,
PUBLISHED BY THIRTY TIGERS

by Jeff McCord

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While slick pop continues to dominate the contemporary country scene, traditionalists like **Jason Boland & the Stragglers** find themselves limited to regional success. Though their last album hit number thirty on the *Billboard* country chart and constant touring has made them a fixture on the Texas–Red Dirt circuit (Boland lives in Austin, the rest of the band is split between Fort Worth and Oklahoma), they're still far from a household name. Over the past decade Boland has gone through a divorce, grappled with alcoholism, endured a career-threatening polyp on his vocal chords, and experienced a car accident that nearly took his life—enough for half a dozen country weepers. Yet he has emerged from all this sounding energized rather than embittered. **Rancho Alto**

(Thirty Tigers) features simple but evocative storytelling and an elevated sense of songcraft. A slow waltz with a memorable chorus, "Every Moment I'm Gone" is one of those just-this-side-of-hackneyed lyrics Nashville once would have swooned over, beautifully rendered by Boland's honeyed baritone. "False Accuser's Lament" takes the famous ballad "Long Black Veil" and turns it on its end, focusing on the accuser instead of the wrongly accused. No song this dark should ever be this catchy, but damned if it's not a two-step classic. Nothing else on *Rancho Alto* quite measures up to this one-two punch, but it's a remarkably enjoyable work. If Boland could find a place on the radio, there might be hope for country music yet. 🍷



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