

BLURT



10/20/2011

Jason Boland & the Stragglers



Rancho Alto

(Thirty Tigers)

Yeehaw, y'all. No two words better sum up the spirit of Jason Boland & the Stragglers, a no-nonsense, blue collar combo heavily invested in heartland sensibilities. With ample doses of both hard luck and honkytonk – not to mention the guiding hand of producer/multi-instrumentalist Lloyd Maines – the band revives rather than reinvents in their bow to authenticity.

Boland's rough hewn vocals have a gruff, everyman appeal, suggesting the sound of a true survivor flush with hard bitten tales and a dust bowl sensibility. Boland wraps himself in the guise of an everyday working man afflicted with the feeling of being shunted outside the mainstream. He sums up that stance in songs like the miner's lament "Down Here in the Hole;" an ode to America's essential populist poet, "Woody's Road;" and "Farmer's Luck," a heartfelt narrative that recalls his grandparents' struggle to prevent the government from confiscating their farmland.

Framed by fiddles and steel guitar, this is the real deal, from its deadpan ballads to the down home serenades, the sort of thing that would make Waylon, Willie, Hank and Johnny nod in mutual agreement. Their eighth and best effort to date, *Rancho Alto* offers Boland and band a rarified place to roost.

DOWNLOAD: "Farmer's Luck," "Down Here in the Hole," "Woody's Road" LEE ZIMMERMAN