

Album delivers a solid punch

■ Songwriter **Paul Thorn** shares some of life's hard lessons

By **ANDREW DANSBY**

ENTERTAINMENT WRITER

Paul Thorn is a keen observer of conflict and character, both of which are in great supply on his new album *Pimps & Preachers*, its title a reference to his uncle and his father, who chose very different lines of work. The veteran singer-songwriter tells compact stories with his songs — some glum, others hopeful, all delivered in a soulful gritty voice that reflects his Mississippi upbringing. He talked to us about his new album and his old job, which entailed getting punched in the face by former boxing champ Roberto Duran.

Q: Did you run *Tequila Is Good For The Heart* by a health care professional?

A: Well, no. It's really only a temporary sedative to numb the pain. The next morning you feel the effects of too many tequilas. But for a short period of time, it works.

Q: There's a great duality to the album,

from the title on down. Lots of conflicting

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STORY-TELLER:

Paul Thorn writes songs that are both gloomy and hopeful.

forces that twist together in the world.

A: Well the title comes from — some people think it's some sort of catch phrase, but in reality it has some real meaning to me. My father was a Pentecostal preacher. And my uncle in his youth was a pimp. As a child these guys were huge mentors in my world. My philosophy in life was molded by these two men.

Q: Did they get along? It seems they wouldn't have much to talk about vocationally.

A: You know how it is with family. You butt heads every once in a while. But at the end of the day they got older and got closer. They had a lot in common back then too. Both had the same wardrobe. Both promised heaven while they dangled you over hell.

Q: I thought *Better Days* was a really important song on there because it was hopeful. Do you feel the need to temper the darker stuff with some hope?

A: Yeah, everything I write, even if there's sadness in there, I try to put something in about hope, some way out of it. If you just sing about sad stuff with no redemption, you're just perpetuating misery. ... We're living in a word today where everything is so cruel and heartless. You turn on the

TV and the hook of these reality shows is exploiting people's misery. Like American Idol when they laugh at people who really want to be singers. Instead of pulling them to the side in private and going, "Hey, I know you want to sing, but you just don't have it." Instead it's vogue to humiliate them on national TV. I don't want to be a part of that.

Q: Was there a story behind writing *Love Scar*?

A: I was having a conversation with a girl in a bar one night. She had a tattoo of a blue eye with a tear coming out, and I asked what it meant. She told me she was drinking in this bar and a good looking guy walked up and used the line, "If I could be a tear rolling down your cheek and die on your lips, my life would be complete." She was so charmed that she started drinking with him and got turned on by his silver-tongued words. They wound up in a motel, which hardly ever leads to a lasting relationship. ... So she went to a tattoo parlor and got that opening line on her, the blue eye with the tear. She now has this scar, some people think it's a beautiful tattoo, for her it's a reminder of a bad memory.

Q: Speaking of which, I imagine boxing can leave you with lots of reminders that you were a boxer.

A: Oh yeah, in my career I got over 60 stitches in my face. But you know, I wear those with pride. Everybody's got scars.



Q: Did Roberto Duran leave you with one?

A: Oh yeah, but he was a hero. It was a surreal experience fighting him. He was a hero of mine when I was growing up. Literally, I had a poster of him on my bedroom wall when I was in my teens.

Think of how surreal it is to go from that to standing in the ring looking across at him. The reality of it is he was arguably one of the top 10 fist-fighters who ever lived. What a great honor to wear a scar given to you by somebody like him. The good thing about it that I keep in mind, yes I got my (butt) whooped but it took a real (tough guy) to do it. Drunks or guys you meet on the street, I think I could probably handle myself with them. They ain't Duran. I've never seen you, but y'know maybe I could whoop you. But then maybe you're tougher than I think.

Q: I assure you, I'm not tougher than you

think.

A: Maybe not, but when you've fought you find yourself constantly sizing people up that way.

Q: So is it possible to convey to a non-boxer what it's like to get punched in the nose really hard?

A: Uh, yeah I suppose it is. But the thing about boxing, before the fight you feel this basic fear. You know it's coming.

Like, let's say you're writing a story at your desk and somebody just hits you in the face. You have no time to get scared, you just react and try to fight back. But if the same person says, "Hey, when you get off work I'm gonna be standing by your car and I'm gonna whoop your (butt)." That's different, it allows time for anxiety to set in. You're thinking about it all day.

That's how it is with boxing. It's a lot of fear and waiting. Once the punches start flying, you get over the nerves and

just try to survive. It's not that you don't feel it. But the worst part of boxing isn't getting hit, it's living with the fear.

I ain't never met a boxer who wouldn't tell you the same thing.

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PAUL THORN

■ **When:** 6 tonight

■ **Where:** Cactus Music, 2110 Portsmouth

■ **Free:** More information: www.cactusmusichtx.com

■ **When:** 8 p.m. Thursday

■ **Where:** Heritage Place Amphitheater, 1203 Callahan, Conroe

■ **Free:** More information, 936-494-3820

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PHOTOGRAPHY