

Americanafest artist Paul Thorn talks influences, collaboration, and new album

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- BY: CHRIS GRIFFY



Americana artist Paul Thorn discusses his new album and his upcoming Americana Showcase.

Credits:

Chris Griffy

[Americana Music Festival](#) Showcase artist [Paul Thorn](#) has been one of the true "road warrior" success stories of the genre. Rising from almost complete obscurity in the mid-'90s to Americana superstar with almost no radio support, Thorn has built a grassroots base of dedicated fans through relentless touring and some of the best lyrics in the business.

So it came as a surprise to many that Thorn, who writes all of his own material as well as penning hits for the likes of Toby Keith and Sawyer Brown, decided to make his 10th album an entire album of covers. Eschewing legends like The Rolling Stones for more obscure but talented songwriters like Elvin Bishop and Ray Wylie Hubbard, "[What the Hell is Goin' On?](#)" is a fresh take for Thorn.

We sat down for a wide ranging interview with [Paul Thorn](#) during the Americana Music Conference, which you can find excerpted here. If you'd like to read the full interview, check back into the Nashville Festivals Examiner tomorrow for a complete transcript.

On why a songwriting legend decided to record an entire album of covers:

"Well, it was my tenth album and I wanted to take break from myself and have some fun. So I picked out some songs from songwriters I really like and, I'm really fortunate to have such a great band and put my own spin on these songs."

On his choice to cover more obscure songwriters on his album:

I had a big old stack of songs and I tried to record them but some didn't work out, so I stuck with the songs that were in my wheelhouse and that's how it came to pass.

On his personal connection to Wild Bill Emerson

Wild Bill is an old school Country songwriter. He wrote songs for George Jones and Tammy Wynette. He's the guy who taught the guy to write who taught me to write, Billy Maddox. Wild Bill passed his knowledge on to Billy and Billy passed it on to me. So recording one of his songs was a way to acknowledge that everything I do came through Wild Bill... It's probably the most popular song on the album in as far as songs people [want me to sing live](#).

On the misconception that Elvin Bishop did all of the guitar work on Paul's version of "What the Hell is Goin' On?"

It's come across that Elvin did most of the work on that song, but my guitar player did most of the work. People think that big muscular guitar must be Elvin but he only did a solo. Most of the muscle on that track is my guitar player Bill Hinds. He's a guitar god but nobody knows it yet. Every chance I get to promote him, I'm going to.

On the enduring popularity of "Mission Temple Fireworks Stand."

People really responded to it. I didn't know when I wrote it. It's kind of like when Percy Sledge plays a show he has to do "When a Man Loves a Woman." When Paul Thorn plays a show, he has to do "Mission Temple Fireworks Stand!"

How he balances his setlist to both hardcore and casual fans:

"I try to give everyone a little bit of what they want but nobody everything they want. If they get everything they want, people become spoiled and they get hard to live with! *laugh* Hunger is the sweetest sauce!

On playing an Americana Showcase tonight between Sara Watkins and Chris Thile:

I'm on third. People always want to play last but next to the last is the best position in truth. Everybody's getting in their spot and they're not going to leave. When you're the last act, about 3/4 through the show, some people leave. Tonight I've got a captive audience that I'm going to go out there and make have a good time!

On participating in a panel at the Americana Conference:

It's kind of like being God without the super powers! I don't even know what I'm supposed to talk about. I'm just going to sit there and if I know the answer I'll answer the questions and if I don't, I'm going to pass it on!

That's just a small sampling of the full 25 minute interview with Paul Thorn. Check back for a full transcript to get Paul's opinions on artists who are under appreciated and how shows like American Idol have killed the craft of building a live act. You can also read our [full interview with Paul from Americanafest 2010 here](#).

If you'd like to check out Paul Thorn live, head over to the Cannery Ballroom tonight where Thorn will be joined on a bill by Punch Brothers, Sara Watkins, and Blue Highway.

We'll be providing coverage of the [Americana Music Festival](#) 2012 all week including artist interviews, show recaps, and the latest news and pictures. Click Subscribe at the top of the page to have the latest delivered to your inbox.