

SPOTLIGHT



# JOSH TURNER

## A traditionalist works to bring the ballad back to country radio

"THE OTHER NIGHT I WAS HAVING dreams about the number of pre-orders we were getting," says Josh Turner, referring to advance purchases of his fifth studio album, *Punching Bag*. "That shows how important this is to me." Nearly 10 years after debuting with the modern country gospel standard "Long Black Train," Turner is focused on maintaining a confident attitude to achieve long-held ambitions. "I try to look at things in a positive light, to learn to let go of the negative things," he says.

True to that perspective, *Punching Bag* features breezy romantic fare that recalls past No. 1 hits such as "Your Man" and "Why Don't We Just Dance." He balances those with more serious material such as "Pallbearer," inspired by the death of a family member, and "For the Love of God," influenced by his Christian faith. As Turner shifts between moods and tempos, his motivations are simple. "I look for songs that have a message I want to convey," Turner says.

For Turner, who wrote or co-wrote nearly all the album's songs, *Punching Bag* is a culmination of a busy two-year period in his personal life. He celebrated the birth of his third child and completed renovation of a log cabin on his property—a rural refuge where he hoped to create songs that

connect with his fans. "I just want my music to strike a chord," he says. "I want people to listen to the songs and think about what they mean in their own lives."

Musically, Turner turned to a trusted authority, producer Frank Rogers, to frame his rumbling baritone and coax his best performances. "He really understands my voice and how to make it sound its best," Turner says. "He's so skilled as a producer. Sometimes he'll go in and add an overdub or percussion without telling me, and when I hear it, it just sounds right."

Turner, 34, remains a champion of traditional country, despite Nashville's increasing reliance on slick production values. He's resolute in including down-home acoustic instruments on his albums, a nod to musical heroes such as Randy Travis and John Anderson. Turner's goal is to satisfy his creative impulses while striving for commercial success. "For some reason they frown upon country ballads now," he says. "It's all about in-your-face songs. It's funny how hard you have to work a ballad to be played on country radio. But I'm willing to adjust—I made a conscious effort to have more uptempo songs. That doesn't keep me from putting some ballads on my albums."

—Blake Boldt

