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For Immediate Release

Paul Thorn and Blind Boys of Alabama to Headline 2018 Levitt National Tour

*Southern raconteur and GRAMMY legends to stop
at seven Levitt locations this summer*



We're thrilled to announce that Southern raconteur **Paul Thorn** and his six-piece band will team up with five-time GRAMMY-winning Gospel legend, **Blind Boys of Alabama**, for a **one-of-a-kind musical collaboration** as headliners of the 2018 Levitt National Tour. Now in its fourth year and created to celebrate the collective impact of the Levitt network of music venues in communities across the country,

the **2018 Levitt National Tour will stop in seven Levitt cities this June and July**—Los Angeles; Memphis; Arlington, Texas; Denver; and Bethlehem, Pa.; as well as Dayton, Ohio; and Sioux Falls, S.D. (both home to future permanent Levitt venues). Levitt audiences across the country will experience these exhilarating, soulful shows blending old-school gospel with rock, blues and country.

No stranger to Levitt, Thorn has performed at the permanent Levitt venues in Memphis and Arlington, and looks forward to returning to Levitt stages as part of the Tour. "I am so honored to be the 2018 Levitt National Tour artist along with Blind Boys of Alabama," says Thorn. "It means a lot to me that Levitt provides places where everyone can come and enjoy the music, where nobody is excluded. People deserve an opportunity to go out and be entertained."

Blind Boys of Alabama vocalist, music arranger and drummer Ricky McKinnie, who has been with the group for 30 years, concurs. “Anytime people can come out and there isn’t a price tag on a show of this magnitude, it’s just a great thing to do. It makes us feel good to know people of all ages and backgrounds will experience these free Levitt concerts.”

“We’re thrilled to present this incredible artist collaboration, crossing multiple musical boundaries and illustrating the power of music to bring us together,” says Sharon Yazoswki, executive director of the Mortimer & Mimi Levitt Foundation. “The Levitt network was unanimous in their artist selection for the 2018 Tour—the acclaimed singer-songwriter Paul Thorn alongside celebrated music royalty, Blind Boys of Alabama. It’s going to be an unforgettable experience for all!”

For the 2018 Levitt National Tour, audiences across the country will be treated to an energizing and heartfelt evening of song, inspiration and personal connection featuring songs off of Thorn’s much-anticipated album, “Don’t Let The Devil Ride,” an old-school gospel album set to be released in early 2018 that features collaborations with Blind Boys of Alabama, as well as other artists like Bonnie Bishop, The McCrary Sisters, and Preservation Hall Jazz Band. “We’re gonna light up the sky!” says McKinnie. “We sing from the soul, we dance, we go out into the audience and shake hands with people.” He adds that Thorn’s driving spirit will “reach out and touch you.”

Levitt audiences will also be inspired by the shows’ messages of hope and resilience in overcoming adversity—whether that centers around physical challenges such as blindness or growing up on the margins of society. McKinnie, who lost his eyesight at age 23 following glaucoma, says, “Once people get to see Blind Boys perform, they will realize we don’t have a disability—we have a limitation. And a limitation doesn’t have to be a handicap. Music brought me closer to who I am and kept me in tune to what I could do.” He hopes their story will encourage people to follow their hearts. “We are all dreamers. If you can dream the dream and keep the faith, you can make it happen.”

Stay tuned for upcoming concert dates for the 2018 Levitt National Tour!

About Paul Thorn

Paul Thorn has created an innovative and impressive career, pleasing crowds with his muscular brand of roots music – bluesy, rocking and thoroughly Southern American, yet also speaking universal truths. Raised in Tupelo, Miss., among the same spirits (and some of the actual people) who nurtured the young Elvis generations before, Thorn has rambled down back roads and jumped out of airplanes, worked for years in a furniture factory, battled four-time world champion boxer Roberto Duran on national television, signed with and been dropped by a major label, performed on stages with Bonnie Raitt, Mark Knopfler, Sting, and John Prine among many others, and made some of the most emotionally restless yet fully accessible music of our time. He’s also appeared on major television shows such as *Late Night with Conan O’Brien* and *Jimmy Kimmel Live!*, been the subject of numerous National Public Radio (NPR) features and charted multiple times on the *Billboard* Top 100 and Americana Radio Charts.

About Blind Boys of Alabama

Blind Boys of Alabama are recognized worldwide as living legends of gospel music. Celebrated by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences (NARAS) with Lifetime Achievement Awards, inducted into the Gospel Music Hall of Fame, and winners of five GRAMMY Awards, they have attained the highest levels of achievement in a career that spans almost 80 years. Blind Boys are known for crossing multiple musical boundaries with their remarkable interpretations of everything from traditional gospel favorites to contemporary spiritual material by songwriters such as Eric Clapton, Prince and Tom Waits. They have appeared on recordings with many artists, including Lou Reed, Peter Gabriel, Bonnie Raitt, Willie Nelson, Aaron Neville, Susan Tedeschi, Ben Harper, Patty Griffin and Taj Mahal. Blind Boys of Alabama have appeared on *The Tonight Show With Jay Leno*, *Late Night with David Letterman*, *The Grammy Awards*, *60 Minutes*, *The Colbert Report* and many other television shows.

About the Mortimer & Mimi Levitt Foundation

The Mortimer & Mimi Levitt Foundation is a private foundation that exists to strengthen the social fabric of America. Through its support of creative placemaking, the Levitt Foundation empowers communities to transform neglected public spaces into welcoming destinations where the power of free, live music brings people together and invigorates community life.

The Foundation's primary funding areas include **permanent Levitt venues** and the **Levitt AMP [Your City] Grant Awards**, an annual grants competition. During the past decade, the Foundation has awarded more than \$20 million in grants to support access to free, high caliber live music experiences while bringing new life to underused public spaces.

The Levitt network of permanent outdoor music venues and AMP concert sites collectively serves more than half a million people annually through **450+ free, family-friendly concerts in 22 towns and cities**. As an example of the high caliber talent presented across the Levitt network, the 2017 GRAMMY nominees included 25 artists who have performed on Levitt stages in recent years.

Permanent Levitt venues are located in cities as diverse as **Los Angeles** and **Pasadena**, Calif.; **Westport**, Conn.; **Bethlehem**, Pa.; **Memphis**, Tenn.; **Arlington**, Texas; and the recently opened **Denver**. Each permanent Levitt venue is programmed, managed and supported by its own 501(c)(3) Friends of Levitt nonprofit organization, with Levitt Los Angeles run by the Foundation. Each presents 50+ free concerts every year featuring acclaimed, emerging talent to seasoned, award-winning performers in all music genres. Due to accelerating interest from cities and engaged citizens, the permanent Levitt venue program is growing. Developing Levitt locations across the country include **Dayton** (opening 2018), **Sioux Falls** (opening 2019) and **Houston** (opening 2020), amongst other cities. Learn more: <http://www.levitt.org>.