

SHOWCASE

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Freddy Fender keeps up attitude through tragedy

By KARLA TIPTON
Assistant Showcase Editor

Despite all the ups and downs in his life, country western performer Freddy Fender tries to maintain a positive outlook.

AV Fair: today

"Whatever happens, just keep going and try to keep a loving attitude toward people, because

we're all in the same boat," said Fender in a phone interview from his home in Branson, Mo. He will be performing twice nightly today through Sunday on the East Lawn Stage at the Antelope Valley Fair.

During his more than 30-year career, Fender has had his share of troubles. He served time in prison, became addicted to alcohol and drugs and struggled with a failing career. He kicked the addictions four years ago, and now owns, operates and performs at Freddy Fender's Theatre and Mexican Restaurant in Branson and is about to release *Spanish Harlem*, his first album in eight years.

Yet Fender and his family suffered even more tragedy this month. Within a few days of each other, his mother died of a heart attack and his adopted son was killed in an automobile accident.

"The last two weeks have been the greatest challenge of my sanity," he said of his loss. "Each time I had to bury my mother and my son, I had to get back on stage and put a smile on. It's been real hard, but I haven't had to have a drink or drugs. They wanted to give me sleeping pills because I had a hard time sleeping just thinking about

what happened and I said, 'No.' And it keeps getting easier."

Of his family, Fender said they are more supportive than ever. "It has brought us closer together and now we're sort of keeping an eye on each other, trying to stay alive and still go on with the business of living, which is what it's all about.

"All families get hit and it was our turn, I guess," he said. "We're all doing very well in accepting it and trying to live with it, one day at a time.

"You'd be surprised how much strength you really have."

Fender remains optimistic about his new acting career — which includes last year's part in Robert Redford's "Milagro Beanfield War," as well as the possibility of a role in an NBC-TV movie, "Desperados," tentatively scheduled to air in September.

He is also pleased with *Spanish Harlem*, which will be out on Critique Records sometime around Labor Day.

"It definitely has a pop direction and definitely a country western direction," he said. "Let's say that I'm continuing in what I've been doing for a long time, which is mixing it up, sort of bilingual. My specialty is the slow ballads, the simple ballads.

What they call a Tex-Mex type of rhythm and blues."

Since many music fans remember his past hits "Wasted Days and Wasted Nights" and "Before The Next Teardrop Falls" — both of which placed high on the country and pop charts — Fender has high hopes for his new album.

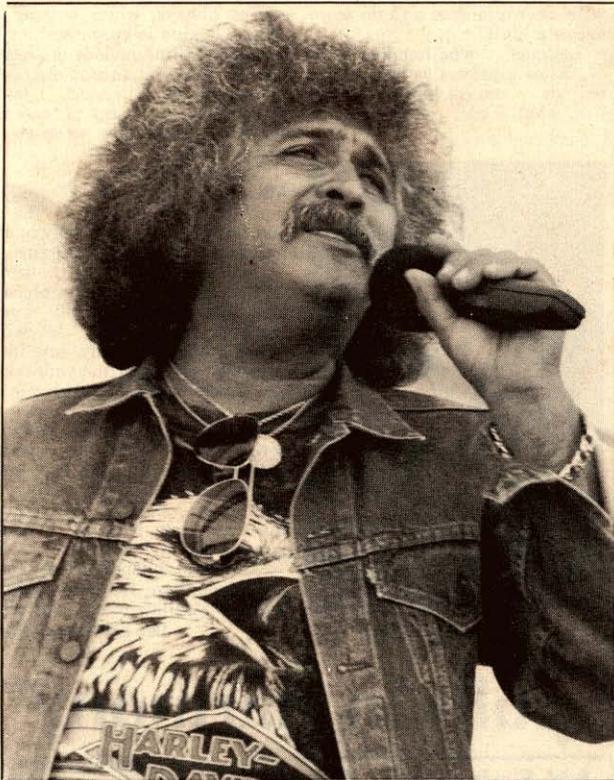
"I've always been very fortunate in being able to cross over," he said. "My records were exposed all over the world. I'm one of the fortunate ones — an international artist."

Apart from playing six months a year at his theater-restaurant, Fender still tours worldwide. In November, he goes to Holland.

Yet despite his many occupations, Fender feels more comfortable when he's busy.

"I think that juggling (occupations) is what makes me tick," he said. "I have never even dwelled on the idea of being an 8-to-5 man with a pipe in my mouth, somebody giving me my slippers, sitting in front of a fireplace with my newspaper.

"I'd die of boredom," he said. "I have to be doing something. And the more challenging, the better."



rick perrine

FREDDY FENDER'S country western performance will be open to fairgoers with admission. He plays the East Lawn Stage at 7 and 10 p.m. today and Saturday, and at 8:30 and 10:15 p.m. Sunday.