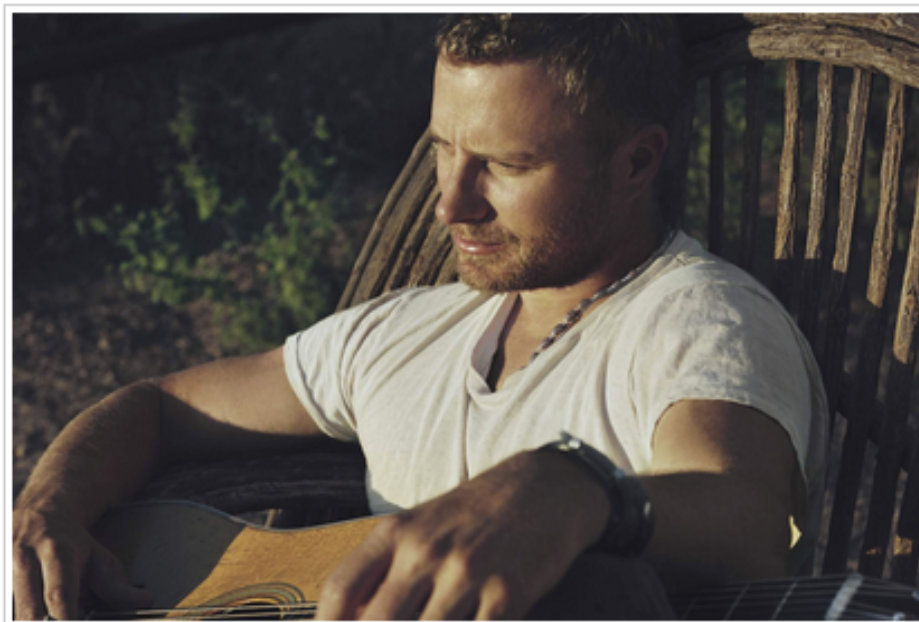


Dierks Bentley: Having songs people want to hear is a good problem to have



Dierks Bentley has hit the charts with such songs as "Every Mile a Memory," "Feel That Fire" and "Am I the Only One?" NINO MUNOZ

BY ED CONDRAN
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The only thing that's surprising about the song "Riser" is how long it took Dierks Bentley to release it as a featured cut to radio. The title track of Bentley's latest album, which dropped in February of 2014, is the fifth single to hit country radio.

"It was an issue of timing," Bentley said during a phone call from his Nashville home. "Bourbon in Kentucky" was the first single from the album, and that was just too heavy. 'Riser' is kind of heavy and we waited."

Bentley, 39, believes that the catchy and powerful cut written by ace tunesmiths Travis Meadows and Steve Moakler is a special song.

"There's no doubt about that," Bentley said. "It's one of those songs you find once in your career. It's the cornerstone of this record. It's one of the most moving songs you're going to hear. The response has been huge."

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DIERKS BENTLEY With Kip Moore, Maddie and Tae and Canaan Smith
When: 7 p.m. Thursday Where: MidFlorida Amphitheatre, 4802 U.S. 301, Tampa Tickets: \$31.25 and \$56; www.livenation.com

"Fans have let me know how much it means to them. It's about dealing with adversity and being resilient."

It's yet another big hit for Bentley, who has recorded 18 singles that have hit the country singles charts. Thirteen of those songs have peaked at number one. It's not easy for Bentley to assemble a setlist. How can he not play such smashes as "Every Mile a Memory," "Feel That Fire" and "Am I the Only One?"

"Having songs people want to hear is a good problem to have," Bentley said. "Those songs help me connect with the fans live."

Bentley, who will perform Thursday at the MidFlorida Credit Union Amphitheatre, has always been one of country's most engaging performers.

"That's what it's about," Bentley said. "It's about taking the audience on a ride. It's not just about playing the familiar. I try to provide an experience for them. I learned that early on."

Kenny Chesney provided some lessons to Bentley, who opened for the country superstar in 2006. "I learned a lot from Kenny," Bentley said. "I remember how I went about things, and I was young and I didn't always make the best decisions. I remember playing (Raymond James) the stadium in Tampa a decade ago and the whole band went out there in black during a blistering afternoon. That wasn't a good idea. Kenny never would have done that. But with him, you watched how he connected with his audience, and it's easy to see how he has such a collection of die-hard fans. The guy does things the right way, and I'm trying to do the same thing. I'm thrilled I can do this for a living. I love music, and I grew up loving music."

While coming of age in Phoenix, Bentley was all over the map in terms of music. "My first show was Skid Row opening for Bon Jovi," Bentley said. "I just fell in love with concerts at that point. And it just got better when I saw Dwight Yoakam, U2 and Garth Brooks. And then I caught Bruce Springsteen. What all of those recording artists have is the ability to turn it up during live performance. They are all great live entertainers. Springsteen is off the charts. He can play three hours and not even scrape the surface, but then there's us mere mortals. If I can do 90 minutes and hit them hard, I did good."

Bentley, who plays men's league hockey and is a big Nashville Predators fan, watched the entire Stanley Cup Final. "I'm sorry about what happened to the Lightning," Bentley said. "It was a heck of a series, but I'm sure the fans in Tampa are hurting. Part of my job is to lift their spirits. I'm going to go all out with my band to help take the fans there to another place. That's what a touring recording artist should be able to do. You need to provide a form of escape. I know Bon Jovi, Garth and U2 did that for me when I was a kid. Now that's what I'm about doing."