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Dierks Bentley: Just a normal guy who happens to collect country music hits, honors and fans



It's stunning not only that Dierks Bentley packs arenas and has a string of No. 1 hits, albums and other coveted honors, but the platinum-selling country star isn't ever in the tabloids, doesn't get drunk and send nasty tweets and, by all accounts, leads a normal life.

The lesson here: Great country music, without craziness, still can win fans.

"I know it sounds kind of weird, but a great show for us is just having a good time," Mr. Bentley told me a few years ago. "We just want to consciously always put on a good show for people."

Yes, his latest album, "Riser," had the No. 1 hit "Drunk on a Plane," but that song isn't indicative of Mr. Bentley's lifestyle or even the whole album. Some might be surprised to learn that "Riser" was written, in part, with Mr. Bentley's father in mind. Leon Bentley, who died in 2012, was a major country music fan whose influence guided his son in many ways, including toward all things country.

One can't help but think that Dierks Bentley, now the father of three with his wife, Cassidy, takes a page from his own hands-on, traditional upbringing.

Mr. Bentley sounded a bit sheepish when he told a Taste of Country writer that he has a heck of a time shielding his three children from the meaning of "Drunk on a Plane."

There's something about knowing that Mr. Bentley doesn't flaunt excesses privately or publicly — he drives to the grocery store in an old pickup truck when he is not entertaining thousands — that makes me believe country music really does still have a heart.

Of course, Mr. Bentley is not alone. "American Idol" season 10 winner Scotty McCreery tours and records only when he is not hunkered down with his studies at North Carolina State University. Mr. Bentley's tourmates, Kip Moore and Maddie and Tae, also are down-home.

What I've found especially intriguing about Mr. Bentley, aside from his serious music chops, is that he almost left the business before his career even started. He attended Vanderbilt University in Nashville when his parents insisted on an education before he tried to break into music.

After years of disappointment, he was on the verge of leaving Music City when — as legend and Mr. Bentley tell it — he stopped into the famed Station Inn, where bluegrass god and fellow "regular guy" Del McCoury was playing. Hearing Mr. McCoury's music persuaded him to give it another shot. The two have since recorded together, notably on Mr. Bentley's 2010 album, "Up on the Ridge," and stay in touch.

If you're going to see a country music show this year, check out Mr. Bentley's Sounds of Summer 2015 tour and prove that nice guys can finish first.

IF YOU GO:

WHAT: Dierks Bentley, Kip Moore, Maddie and Tae, and Canaan Smith in concert

WHERE: Jiffy Lube Live, 7800 Cellar Door Drive, Bristow, Virginia, 20136

WHEN: Friday, 7 p.m.