

[ REVIEWS ]



## ALBUMS

### DIERKS BENTLEY

*Riser*

CAPITOL RECORDS NASHVILLE

**GRADE: A**

The great challenge that faces any successful artist is growth: Do too much of it too quickly and you'll alienate your fans; do too little and you'll get left in the dust. Dierks Bentley has done it incrementally, in a way that feels effortless and natural. But viewed in the aggregate, Dierks' artistry leading to his seventh full-length, *Riser*, is leaps and bounds from "What Was I Thinkin'." Growth is a major theme of the album, which began in grief following the death of Dierks' father and finished as he was celebrating the

arrival of his son. The title track, which features some of Dierks' finest vocal work ever, captures it perfectly: he's reassuring someone that he's going to overcome whatever life throws at him, because that's just what he does. "Here on Earth" hints at spiritual growth by posing an existential quandary about the pain of living, finally accepting that there's no way to understand it all. "Say You Do" and "Hurt Somebody" are both doomed songs of people longing for an intense connection but wise enough to know it isn't going to work. Musically, *Riser* has shades of Beck's seminal 2002 album, *Sea Change*, seamlessly blending traditional instrumentation with spacey studio effects and rock guitars for something that sounds great on the car stereo or piped into headphones. It's not all

heavy material either, but even the fun songs, such as "Pretty Girls," have a touch of mature sadness. On "Drunk on a Plane," he breaks bad in Mexico after his bride-to-be dumps him and sticks him with non-refundable plane tickets. It's riotously funny, yet there's a corrosive bitterness lurking at the edges. The collection really soars when it blends the personal and the spiritual, as on the single "I'll Hold On" and its simple mantra to hold on to the things that matter, even as we all have to grow and change. With *Riser*, Dierks has done just that.

— JON FREEMAN

**AT A GLANCE:** A confident and forward-thinking batch of songs, *Riser* is an exciting next step in Dierks Bentley's artistic evolution.