

## 20 best Dierks Bentley singles ever (so far)



Local country-boy-made-good Dierks Bentley, who launched his career after moving to Nashville in the '90s, is back in the Valley on Saturday, Aug. 15, for a headlining concert at Ak-Chin Pavilion in support of "Riser," the singer's fourth release to top Billboard's country-album charts.

Here's a look at his 20 best singles (as scientifically chosen by using the Science of What I Like), topped by "What Was I Thinkin'," the song that sent him on his way 12 years ago.

### 1. "What Was I Thinkin'" (2003)

A rollicking country-blues track fueled by swampy slide-guitar licks played on what sounds like a Dobro, "What Was I Thinkin'" was Bentley's first single. And it took him straight to No. 1 on Billboard's country charts — in part, because it's infectious and, in part, because he really sells it, shrugging his way through the chorus hook with an audible grin and throwing in some playful spoken-word asides. He tosses in a well-played Bo Duke reference, and that first verse is the stuff of classic country story-songs: "Becky was a beauty from south Alabama/ Her daddy had a heart like a 9-pound hammer/ Think he even did a little time in the slammer/ What was I thinkin'."

## 2. "Am I the Only One" (2011)

Another smile-inducing country No. 1, this lighthearted honky-tonk throwback sounds like something Jerry Reed or Waylon Jennings might have topped the charts with when a shout-out to "The Dukes of Hazzard" would have been a whole lot less nostalgic. It's another of those story-songs Bentley does so well. In this one, he can't find anyone to go drinking with on a Friday night and wonders whether he's the only one who wants to have fun tonight. It should be noted, though, that Wildman Willie would not blow him off on Friday "in the p.m." because "Idol" was on TV. "American Idol" has never been a Friday show (unlike, of course, "The Dukes of Hazzard").

## 3. "Home" (2011)

Bentley's serious side had never sounded more inspired than it does on this anthemic song about America, on which he sidesteps the chest-beating patriot act you tend to get from country stars in moments as heartfelt as "Scars, yeah she's got her scars/ Sometimes it starts to worry me/ 'Cause lose, I don't wanna lose/ Sight of who we are." No wonder Bono liked it. That's right. U2's front man liked it, going on record at the Academy of Country Music Awards this year with, "Dierks Bentley's music reaches all the way from Nashville to my kitchen in Dublin. When he sings 'Home,' I feel patriotic about America. And I'm not even American. I think anyone who hears it understands that America is not just a geography. It's not just a country. It's an idea. I think country fans get that deeper than most." That could be why "Home" topped the country charts.

## 4. "How Am I Doin'" (2004)

Another early track that makes the most of Bentley's playful side, this upbeat country-rocker eases in as an acoustic country ballad, setting the tone with "It's strange to hear your voice/ I did not expect for you to call/ You wonder how I'm doin', how I'm holdin' up since you did me wrong." And that's when the twangy electric guitars come crashing in and Bentley's tone turns from wounded to sarcastically explaining just how over her he is. The best part is the bridge, where Bentley sings, "Well I don't know what you were thinkin'/ Runnin' 'round on me/ Now you say you're sorry/ Well honey, I agree." And that last line is spoken to heighten the comic effect. This one hit No. 4 on Billboard's country chart.

## 5. "Settle for a Slowdown" (2006)

This country chart-topper takes a more serious look at a breakup than "How Am I Doin'," setting the tone with moody surf guitar as Peter Buck might play it and Bentley in his lower register standing in the middle of the road, where he figures he looks like a fool, getting soaked to the bone, as she drives off. He really hits his stride here on the chorus, a sing-along hook that ends with "I keep a-lookin'

for the slightest sign/ That you might miss what you left behind/ I know there's nothing stopping you now/ But I'd settle for a slowdown."

#### 6. "Bourbon in Kentucky" (2013)

This melancholy breakup song was the first single out of the box from "Riser" and it somehow stalled at No. 40 despite Bentley's heartfelt delivery and a memorable chorus that practically dares you not to sing along, with Kacey Musgraves chiming in on backing vocals. And the lyrics are heartbreaking, a drinking song for those occasions when the bottle lets you down -- or as this single phrases the familiar country theme, "There ain't enough bourbon in Kentucky for me to forget you."

#### 7. "I Hold On" (2013)

The country singer gives his inner U2 fan the wheel on this anthemic country ballad from "Riser," written while trying to process his feelings of loss after losing his father. "After my dad passed away," he told me, "I was sitting in Arizona, just looking at the sunset and I was thinking about the road trip he and I made together from Phoenix to Nashville when I was 19 in a 1994 Chevy truck. And I was thinking, 'Why do I hold on to that same truck?' It's because my dad did several of those road trips with me sitting shotgun and 'I Hold On' is one of the first songs I wrote after he passed away, asking why do I hold on to these old things, like guitars and boots that require duct tape every night? You start asking questions about yourself when you're the only person standing at the helm of the ship anymore. You don't have a captain helping you out."

#### 8. "Drunk On A Plane" (2014)

Bentley's first platinum single is a drinking song that puts a playful spin on pathos. It starts with the narrator boarding a plane because, as he explains, "I took two weeks vacation for the honeymoon / A couple tickets all inclusive down in Cancun / I couldn't get my money back so I'm in seat 7A / I'm getting drunk on a plane." It isn't long before he's buying drinks for everyone except the pilot and receiving mile-high flight attention from the stewardess. Silly? Sure. But there's a reason this one took him back to No. 1 on Billboard's country airplay charts.

#### 9. "Feel That Fire" (2008)

This chart-topper comes with an anthemic chorus that feels like it's taking him closer to mainstream rock despite the pedal steel and banjo working to keep it country. Meanwhile, Bentley sings about a girl who needs to feel that fire, "the one that lets her know for sure/ She's everything I want and more." But rather than give you a narrative on the verses, explaining why she has her doubts, he uses the verse to give you a character sketch by telling you the other things she

wants: "She wants her nails painted black/ She wants the toy in the Cracker Jack/ She wants to ride the bull at the rodeo."

10. "Every Mile a Memory" (2006)

Another country No. 1, this wistful ballad employs the same sort of small-town nostalgia that Jason Aldean has taken to the bank so many times the past few years. But this song uses that nostalgia to wallow in the memory of the one who got away with "every mile a memory/ Every song another scene/ From some old movie going back in time to you and me." It all comes to a head on the bridge, where Bentley sings, "Funny how no matter where I run/ 'Round every bend/ I only see just how far I haven't come."

11. "Lot of Leavin' Left to Do" (2005)

Bentley has a tendency to play the rambling man. And this song is one of his better odes to one-night stands and next-day getaways, recalling Waylon Jennings on the banjo-driven verses. The words are pretty cold, but Bentley wears them well, especially when issuing a warning as explicit as "Before you go and turn me on/ Be sure that you can turn me loose/ 'Cause I still got a lot of leavin' left to do." This one peaked at No. 3.

12. "Tip It On Back" (2012)

On "Bourbon in Kentucky," Bentley tries in vain to drown his heartache in a bottle. On "Tip It On Back," the single that preceded "Bourbon," he's trying to drink away the even harder-hitting heartache of shattered American dreams. "I see Main Street closing," he sings. "Miles of 'For Sale' signs / And them fields ain't growing fast enough to get us by / I feel the sweet release of a Friday night / For a couple of hours we can run this town 'til it runs dry." It would not be a stretch to view this one as somewhat Springsteen-esque.

13. "Trying to Stop Your Leaving" (2008)

So how does Bentley feel when she's the one who's got a lot of leavin' left to do? A little put out, it would seem, on this Springsteen-esque country-rock ballad with chugging guitar and a raspy delivery to underscore the heartache in the lyrics. "Train's a comin'," Bentley sighs. "It'll be here 'fore too long/ But I don't think I can stop it with a song." If he could, though, this would be the song that got it done. It peaked at No. 5.

14. "Say You Do" (2014)

The third in a string of consecutive singles from the singer's latest album, "Riser," to rise to No. 1 on Billboard's country airplay charts is a bittersweet ballad whose chorus finds him pleading with his ex to at the least pretend she's still in love with

him. It's a richly detailed story song that sets the scene with a primarily acoustic verse that finds him telling her, "Don't worry about the damage done / Just let those words roll off your tongue / Even if you're lyin' / If you really don't mean it, I don't care / If you need a little buzz to get you there / Then baby I'm buyin'."

#### 15. "Riser" (2015)

Bentley had to talk his label into releasing this dramatic, U2-flavored title track as the album's fifth single, which he did, as he told me, because he believes it's "a powerful song that could make a difference in people's lives." And it's easy to hear what gave him that idea. The song is an uplifting ode to the resilience of the human spirit in the face of adversity and an anthem for those who get up off the ground and come back swinging when life has brought them to their knees. To date, the song has peaked at No. 39 on Billboard's country airplay chart, but they just made a video, and Bentley says it has a sweet spot in the set on this year's tour.

#### 16. "Free and Easy (Down the Road I Go)" (2007)

Another banjo-driven salute to the life of a rambling man, this single topped the country chart while echoing Glen Campbell at his twangiest and giving a shout-out to bluegrass stars Cross Canadian Ragweed rockin' on the radio. There's no love interest in this one, so it's not as cold as "Lot of Leavin' Left to Do." And he actually offers an explanation for his rambling this time: If you only get to go around one time, he says, "I'm gonna sit back and try to enjoy the ride."

#### 17. "Come a Little Closer" (2005)

His second country No. 1 is sultry little ballad that doesn't leave a whole lot to the listener's imagination on the lyric front. In the opening verse, he sings: "Come a little closer, baby / I feel like layin' you down on a bed sweet surrender / Where we can work it all out / There ain't nothin' that love can't fix / Girl, it's right here at our fingertips."

#### 18. "5-1-5-0" (2012)

Bentley's always done his best to offer fans a balance of serious-minded anthems and upbeat party songs. This is not from the serious-minded side of that equation, as the title it shares with a Van Halen album would suggest. As Bentley more than likely learned from that Van Halen album, 5-1-5-0 is a California law-enforcement term for an involuntary psychiatric hold, which in this instance only means your love has got him "just this side of loco." It topped the Billboard country chart, the third straight single to do so from "Home."

#### 19. "Sideways" (2009)

Another upbeat party song that got him to the top of Billboard's country chart, this banjo-driven "Feel That Fire" highlight is a celebration of the art of celebration. As Bentley proclaims on the chorus: "Been here since the sun went down / Be here when it comes back around / Worked all week it's time to play / Gonna get a little bit sideways." There's a reason it's become a staple of the live show. According to setlist.fm, the only songs he's played more times in concert are "What Was I Thinkin'" and "Free and Easy (Down the Road I Go)." And those songs have both been around longer.

#### 20. "Up on the Ridge" (2010)

This was the title track to Bentley's foray into straight-up bluegrass, and although it didn't chart well, having peaked at No. 21 on Billboard's country chart, it has gone on to be a staple of the live show. It's on the brooding side with a subtle echo of Led Zeppelin's take on bluegrass in the acoustic-guitar part (it's in there; trust me). Lyrically, it finds the singer encouraging his "honey child" to "blow out these city lights" and escape for a night up on the ridge, where they'd be running free and wild.