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DIERKS BENTLEY

Long Trip Alone

Producer: Brett

Beavers

Capitol

Release Date: Oct. 17

On his third release, Bentley makes the

transition from raw, unbridled talent to seasoned professional, abetted by relentless touring and the natural maturation process. Bentley's wilder impulses, thankfully, are still evident, as on the Waylon-esque "That Don't Make It Easy

Loving Me," the observant "Band of Brothers" and a breezy "Free and Easy Down the Road I Go." Aided by expert musicianship and spot-on production, Bentley translates his on-stage charisma to the studio better than ever before. But he really shines on the ballads, like the powerful, expressive "Every Mile a Memory," the syncopated "Hope for Me Yet" and a softly percolating "The Heaven I'm Headed To." These more mature themes showcase a confident songwriter (all 11 cuts were co-written with producer Brett Beavers) and performer that is becoming a major star.—RW