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Dierks Bentley brought a giant plane on stage to sing 'Drunk on a Plane'

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More than two decades after moving to Nashville, an ever-so-grateful Dierks Bentley got his first chance to headline Bridgestone Arena.

After the show, Bentley confided that he'd wrestled vocal problems all day. The singer, rolling his red plaid sleeve up to show the needle mark, said he had gotten an IV around noon and two shots at 6 p.m. in an attempt to get his voice stabilized. Between the medical treatment, and talks with Jesus, his voice came back, Bentley said.

Couldn't score a ticket to Bentley's "What the Hell World Tour" featuring Jon Pardi and Cole Swindell? Here are five things you missed:

1. The music: then and now.

Dierks Bentley had opened shows at Bridgestone Arena for artists ranging from George Strait to Luke Bryan, but had never headlined Nashville's largest indoor concert space until Saturday. Paying homage to Strait and his early days playing cover songs on lower Broadway, Bentley brought out Pardi to duet on a cover of Strait's hit "Carrying Your Love With Me." Bentley's show opened with a minute-long fiddle and banjo jam into Bentley's bluegrass hit "Up On the Ridge." He followed immediately with sing-along favorites "Free and Easy," "Tip it On Back" and "Am I the Only One," during which he stopped at the end of the first verse and let fans sing the chorus.

Other crowd favorites included new hit "Black" and "Say You Do," which moved the audience to light up the arena with their cellphone screens.

2. Dierks Bentley doesn't stand still – physically or emotionally.

Bentley opened with bluegrass, then took fans on a musical coaster ride with amped up highs including "5-1-5-0," "Sideways" and "Somewhere on Beach" that included a bit of crowd surfing. During "Feel That Fire," he ran down the steps leading from the drum riser to the stage and slid across the catwalk. But Bentley wasn't afraid to get serious, either. He talked of his love for his dad in "I Hold On" and "Every Mile a Memory" came with a video montage of career highlights and family memories. The singer gave "Riser" an acoustic arrangement on a satellite stage. With nothing to hide his voice but his guitar and his fans singing along, Bentley's voice rang strong with the grit and passion on which he's built his career.

3. Dierks Bentley's thankful heart

Three songs into his set, Bentley, an avid hockey fan, referred to Saturday night's headlining show as his "Stanley Cup Game 7." Later he recalled a time when arenas had to be curtained off because he couldn't sell enough tickets to fill them and called the turnout "unbelievable." During his breakthrough hit "What Was I Thinking," Bentley said, "I was thinking we played Bridgestone Arena in Nashville on a Saturday night ... and it's the best night of my life."

4. Opening acts, special guests and friends

With six consecutive No. 1 singles, a radiating charisma and the comfortable confidence of a much more experienced artist, Swindell is destined for top billing in an arena tour. He's also headed to country radio with a Dierks Bentley duet. The men's new single "Flatliner" from Swindell's "You Should Be Here" album will be on country radio Monday and they sang it Saturday night.

Bentley brought duet partner Elle King on stage for a special version of their Grammy-nominated "Different for Girls." He welcomed his bus driver, Ken Lyons, on stage for a long round of applause and ended the show with fellow artists and friends Swindell, Pardi, Cassadee Pope, Kelsea Ballerini, Chase Rice and King on stage for "Drunk on a Plane."

5. The "Magic Mike" encore

Bentley, after nursing his voice and some alcohol all night, closed the show with "Drunk on a Plane," or as he sang, "I'm getting drunk on a stage." Dressed as a pilot, Bentley rolled out in a prop plane, climbed out and zipped his pants as he launched into the rowdy rebound anthem. Swindell and Pardi reemerged and Pardi ripped his shirt open exposing his chest and bellowed "Magic Mike." Bentley took off his pilot jacket, threw it to the back of the stage and untucked his shirt as Swindell quipped, "I'm getting out of here."

After the house lights came on, Bentley spent several minutes greeting fans from the stage, soaking in night's last moments.