

(4.29.17) <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/music/la-et-ms-stagecoach-dierks-bentley-backstage-20170429-story.html>

Stagecoach 2017: Dierks Bentley recalls when 'Taylor Swift opened for me'



Sitting in his trailer backstage at Stagecoach on Friday a few hours before stepping onto the Mane Stage as the first of the festival's three weekend headliners, Dierks Bentley recalled his initial appearance at what is now the world's biggest country music festival.

What immediately sprang to mind wasn't his own performance, but that of the fledgling star who preceded him in the blistering early-afternoon opening act.

"Taylor Swift opened for me," he said with a tone of amazement. "That's how long ago that was. It was her first time on the road, but she was just so poised and put on a really great show. I knew she was going on to great things."

Nine years later, the Arizona-bred singer and songwriter has steadily worked his way up the Stagecoach lineup, like others before him such as Miranda Lambert, Jason Aldean, Blake Shelton and Eric Church, all of whom had to look hard to find their own names in tiny type on the posters for their first Stagecoach appearances.

"Stagecoach is a good barometer for measuring my career," Bentley said. "It's a chance to check back in on where we've been, what we've accomplished, what we're looking forward to since the last time we were here."

A few hours later, he opened his set with the title track from his 2010 album "Up On the Ridge," a rootsy affair that helped push Bentley's career to a new level and demonstrated that "the country fans are really loyal, and they showed they were willing to go with me" on a creative tangent that sidestepped the usual driving country-rock hits he'd had for a foray into acoustic bluegrass-rooted songs.

His Stagecoach performance, which included duets with Elle King and Jon Pardi, was the start of a round of summer concerts for Bentley, including several other festivals. But even with the proliferation of mega-shows across the country, Bentley said Stagecoach remains special.

“I have a picture somebody gave me from that first show, of me dancing with some girl on stage,” he said. “The sun was still pretty high in the sky, and you see the trees and the mountains in the background. We’ve been doing this for a long time, but there still nothing like Stagecoach.”

