



INTERVIEWS \

Q&A: Into the 'Black' With Dierks Bentley

The country star talks about some of the darker themes behind his grown-up new album

Link: <http://www.spin.com/2016/06/dierks-bentley-interview-black-new-album/>

Dierks Bentley has gone dark. On his just-released album, *Black*, the award-winning, chart-topping country artist hits on some heavy-duty life topics, moving well beyond aircraft intoxication to explore infidelity, nasty breakups, and the kind of drinking nobody wants to raise their glass to.

Before hitting the road to support the new LP, Bentley rang up SPIN from a Nashville studio to chat about how the record came together and just how much truth is behind these songs.

Black isn't exactly sunshine the whole way through. I think the first three songs are a pretty good tone-setter. I try to make my box as big as it can be because I never want to do the same thing twice.

When did these songs coalesce into the record's theme of rough and failed relationships?

I always envision the two sides of a vinyl record in my head when I'm putting it together. Coming off of "Riser," I literally had nothing musically. I had outlined chapters of a novel and ran it by my producer and manager. My producer liked it and my manager used the word "contrived." Then I wrote the song "Black" and it felt mysterious and in line with the book I had been working on. Some of those chapters turned into songs on the album. "Black" is also my wife's maiden name. So, this record has some layers.

So did your relationship with your wife inspire all these songs about hook-ups and bad hangovers?

Well, we just celebrated our ten-year anniversary and it got me thinking about our relationship and how crazy love is. I think this record is more geared toward younger hookups and breakups and love. It was more asking the question, "What is love?" I wanted to dive into the corners and shadows, and not the happily-ever-after stuff.

It's not a purely autobiographical record then?

No, no, no. Sometimes I have to tell [my wife] I'm just writing that! There's serious stuff in here. I make records that can get heavy. There's stuff not about us in there, like the infidelity. She was more looking for the real-deal love song on the record but one didn't come to me when the album took the shape [like] it did. It took me two minutes to sequence. It's a story of a journey through love and relationships and how this guy, whoever he is on the album, grows throughout the course of it.

It might not be an autobiographical record, but do you look at yourself as that guy? As mature or grown in your relationship with your wife?

Oh yeah, man. I'm on stage 13. I'm at that can't-be-replaced stage. The transformation I've been through personally with my wife is amazing, but having two girls and a boy, man, that's the painful stuff.

Do you have any wild breakup stories from your single days?

Love always had my number. I could never patch a breakup together with whiskey and a one-night stand. I took them real hard. I had my hair fall out in the shower from stress and one time I got a hernia from working out so hard, trying to get through the pain. I don't think about that stuff anymore. It pains me more to see my kids grow up. That's the most painful thing, worse than any breakup.

What exactly do you mean by "painful?" Like, "I wish my daughter was still five?" It's the pain of loving [them]. The little things they say that make them sound 17 years old when they're six. It hurts me. I love them to death, and I want them to grow up and be strong, but at the same time it just hurts like hell to watch them get older.

Did you have doubts about releasing this record at all? Or worries that the subject matter would be too much for some of your fans?

I play for amphitheaters and thousands of people. I got a great thing going. I try to change up my records and shows because I want my fans to be surprised. There's a lot riding on it. I have to make records that are me, though. I couldn't go out there every night if I wasn't doing that.

I don't tour to make money, I do it because I love it. When I'm putting a tour together I'm not sitting with number-crunchers, having them tell me I can't do this or that. If I wanna put an airplane on stage for "Drunk on a Plane," I'm going to dream as big as I can and let the rest figure itself out.

What's on tap for this tour?

I put this bus out in the tailgate section. At a country music show the tailgate section is crazy. Those people don't mess around. So, to give back a little bit,

we've been bringing this sweet tour bus out there with about 20 iPads, where people have been able to preview and talk to us about the new album.

Those tailgate parties can definitely get intense. It's like the parking lot of a Big Ten football game.

It's a little more dangerous. You don't f**k with these folks. They'll beat your ass up.

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