

Tampa Bay Times

Review: Dierks Bentley pours drinks, starts parties at Tampa's MidFlorida Credit Union Amphitheatre

(7/17): <http://www.tampabay.com/blogs/soundcheck/review-dierks-bentley-pours-drinks-starts-parties-at-tampas-midflorida/2285703>



A mere three songs into his concert Saturday in Tampa, the unthinkable happened: Dierks Bentley spilled his drink.

“Well, that sucks,” he said.

So what did he do? He stole someone else’s.

“If you’re gonna get Drunk On a Plane, you gotta have a drink, right?” he told the crowd of 17,000 at the MidFlorida Credit Union Amphitheatre. “If you’re gonna go Somewhere On a Beach, you gotta have a drink, right? I’m taking you guys on a plane ride tonight. I’m taking you guys down to the beach tonight.”

You'd think Bentley might be itching to settle down just a bit, having turned 40 last fall, and having just released *Black*, his most personal and serious album to date. When he entered the stage to the intense bluegrass hootenanny *Up On the Ridge*, it seemed this might be a night when we finally see the Arizona native start to grow up up.

Except: Yeah, no, not exactly. Where's the fun in growing up? Those 17,000 fans hooted and hollered like they were as loose and lubricated as Bentley himself. They needed a ringleader. And if there's one thing Bentley can do, it's lead a ring.

Oh, the memories he gave those on the front few rows in Tampa. The fan who got to wail a line from *Say You Do*. The fan who got to strum his guitar on *I Hold On*; the lady whose cell phone he grabbed to film a video mini-monologue. The fans who caught and held him aloft when he dove off the stage during the slow-rolling *Somewhere On a Beach*, prompting two stagehands to sprint out and hoist him back up. The guy he brought up during *Am I the Only One* for a race shotgunning beers.

"The title belt remains in place!" yelled the victorious Bentley. "The alcohol abuse remains in place!"

There's certainly a calculated clown prince element to Bentley's schtick. For example: *Feel That Fire*, during which he hopped off the stage and marched through the crowd to a B stage, where he and his band were joined by openers Randy Houser and Cam for an endearingly sloppy spin on the Eagles' *Take It Easy*.

But even if he's got the whole night planned out to the minute, dang if Bentley doesn't still make it feel like anything can happen.

To that end, the night's biggest surprise might've been hearing Dierks get a little serious, as on the title track to *Black*, with its Edge-like delayed guitars pinging through the speakers. He also acknowledged all the "crazy stuff going on in the world," as well as more personal heartbreak, like the recent death of his family dog Jake, who got a photo tribute during *Every Mile a Memory*.

"Everybody here's going through something right now," he said. "Everybody's got something they're dealing with. Half the reason you came here is to forget about it, and that's our job, is just to have a good time and party."

Bentley wasn't the only one looking to start a few parties on Saturday. Featured act Houser proved he's one of country's great unsung belters, roaring and whipping a sweat-soaked towel through full-throated singles like *Fired Up*, *Boots On* and *How Country Feels*. It was a set of pure brimstone, particularly when he

brought the house to a screaming ovation on the solo, acoustic but oh-so-mighty Like a Cowboy, one of the great live country songs you'll ever hear.

Cam, too, proved a gem in her own 25-minute set. Like Bentley, she came out to her own bit of rollicking, unhinged mountain music, the title track to last year's excellent untamed, and mixed things up from there: Understated midtempo track Half Broke Heart, the peppy Want It All, the laugh-out-loud city-slicker put-down Country Ain't Never Been Pretty.

Cam also got the best surprise accompaniment of the night. When she paused near the end of dramatic ballad Burning House to ask everyone to hug during the final chorus, an blast of thunder from what a very close lightning exploded through the Amp, prompting the crowd to jump and gasp.

"Hold each other extra tight," she said.

The rain quickly stopped, but the fun never did. Bentley kept dropping party songs -- Tip It On Back, Am I the Only One, What the Hell Did I Say, What Was I Thinkin', Sideways -- right up through his big finish. For the encore, he "drove" a jet onto the stage to sing the unapologetic Drunk On a Plane in full captain's regalia, joined by Houser, Cam, fellow opener Tucker Beathard and a celebratory squad of fans, friends and family.

See what happens when you pour Dierks Bentley another drink? His party plane might touch down in your city, and stay there until your night is made.