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MUSIC NEWS & REVIEWS

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## Dierks Bentley is on a roll into Raleigh



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When interviewing an A-list musician, you can't take for granted that everything will go well. Their shows might be selling out across the country, but you may also be talking to them the day after a divorce is finalized, so they won't be up for many personal questions. Or they may have a hit single on the radio, but albums aren't selling, so they may not want to talk about the number of downloads on Spotify.

With Dierks Bentley, performing Friday at Coastal Credit Union Music Park at Walnut Creek in Raleigh, it's clear upon hearing his voice that nothing could be better for the entertainer at the moment.

At the time of our phone call his new album, “Black,” had just debuted at No. 1 on the Billboard Country Album chart; No. 2 on the overall Billboard Album chart; and its first single, “Somewhere on a Beach,” had hit No. 1 on the Country Singles chart.

In an era in which country music seems to embrace only the newest and youngest stars, Bentley is enjoying his greatest popularity – 15 years after recording his first album.

“Man, it is unbelievable,” Bentley says, on break during his Somewhere on a Beach tour. “To be honest, this is the first time we’ve ran a really successful album launch, or at least this is the most people to be there to pick it up the week a new one came out. It’s doing pretty good, and we’re all pretty happy with the numbers. This is the first time that everything has just came together at one time for me, where we knocked it out of the park right from the first single.

“We had a lot of fun producing stuff to build up to the album’s street date, dropping songs and a fun little video series online, and just getting our fans involved with the release. It’s really the first time in my career where everything just clicked like that. I still don’t know how it happened,” he says with a laugh.

Reaching the top is what every performer dreams of, but the reality of stardom has become a burden for many. The pressures can lead headliners to rely on familiar set lists and scripted “spontaneous” dialogue to make it through performances.

But Bentley has been preparing for this moment since he first hit the road. He realized early on that his creativity went beyond the songs and onto the stage itself.

“When I was younger, I would sit on the back of the bus and design stage layouts on the back of cocktail napkins – I loved designing sets for when I became a star – and with the launch of the new album and new tour, we’ve really poured a lot of money into everything,” he says. “This is totally different from last year. It’s really been a yearlong process, from talking about breaking down some of the older songs and performing them in newer ways, to getting together with all of the crews to design a whole new stage setup.

“When you get to this level, you really get a chance to make things different. When you are opening up for someone else, you really don’t have many choices in the matter; you can’t control the lighting, the set, the sound, even the music people hear as they are walking into the amphitheater. At this level, you can control every aspect of it. The competitive part of me wants to make it hard for any other performers to top our show for the rest of the summer.”

So far Bentley has avoided the disappointment that sometimes comes when landing a dream job. He seems to realize that there have been too many tough decisions made for him to relax and just phone in a stretch of shows; to think that mediocre is good enough for some of the tour's smaller markets.

"For me there is just too much at stake to go out and have a bad night," he says emphatically. "I don't mean financially or careerwise, I mean personally. Being away from my family, and all of the sacrifices that they have made in order for me to try to make music, I can't afford to go out there and have a bad night because that makes everything worthless. Right before I walk onstage I tell my band, 'We are here in order to make this day have meaning.' Sitting in an amphitheater parking lot for 20 hours before a show has no meaning, so we've already lost most of the day before we ever step off the bus. We go out night after night to put on a kick-ass show just to make all of this have some meaning."

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