

'Black' review: Dierks Bentley tackles solid relationship storytelling

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REVIEW

THE GRADE B+

BOTTOM LINE: Giving the country mainstream some well-crafted edge.

Dierks Bentley is on a roll.

Though he's been racking up country hits for years, Bentley's last album, "Riser," especially his hit "Drunk on a Plane," introduced him to a wider country and pop audience. And he picks up where he left off with his new album "Black" (Capitol Records Nashville) and the smash single "Somewhere on a Beach," which combines catchy lyrics with a laid-back delivery and a dramatic groove.

It's a trick Bentley manages again and again on "Black," expertly weaving styles and storytelling tricks to build memorable tales to sing along with. "I dialed seven digits five times today, just to hear you say you love or hate me," he sings to open "Pick Up," probably the best-written country song this year. "I'll take anything. I just want to hear your voice." His duet with Elle King, "Different for Girls," smartly laments how the sexes deal with a breakup, while "Mardi Gras," featuring Trombone Shorty, shows how easily Bentley can move from one genre to the next without losing his country viewpoint.