

People

Dierks Bentley Surprises Fans at His Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum Exhibit



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Link: <http://www.people.com/article/dierks-bentley-surprises-fans-at-exhibit>
Really, when you think about it, the only thing missing in the Dierks Bentley exhibit at the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum is, well, Dierks Bentley.

But on Thursday, the singer fixed that omission when he made a surprise appearance inside his display before several dozen museum visitors who'd been tipped off that some sort of surprise was coming.

For a few brief moments, Bentley, 40, poked his head out over one of the mannequins dressed in his clothes, delivered a kiss to his hand on his well-worn guitar, and saluted his pilot's uniform from the "Drunk on a Plane" video – and

then he left his stunned audience to head off to an autograph session in the museum lobby for 100 fans lucky enough to snag a free ticket.

The session was just one of dozens occurring this week for the 85,000 country fans who have gathered in Nashville for the annual CMA Festival.

Bentley is known for engaging with fans, and he kept his reputation intact by bestowing those gathered with hugs, autographs, pictures, animated chats and lots of joking and teasing.

Jenna Hoffman and three of her friends evoked hearty laughter from Bentley after they told him they were on the front row of a Hershey, Penn., concert in 2014 when Bentley invited a young woman to help him sing "Drunk on a Plane" – and she ended up vomiting on stage and then bolting. (Yes, of course, the entire unfortunate episode turned into a minor YouTube sensation.)

"He told us he tried calling her three times and left her three voicemails, but she never called back," said Hoffman, who lives in Carlisle, Penn. "I think she was just super-embarrassed."

Melissa Burkett of Rock Spring, Georgia, got a bit of ribbing from Bentley when she pointed out her disinterested husband, who was standing nearby waiting impatiently for his wife. "Yeah, he looks like he'd rather be seeing a baseball game," the star joked.

Fans were asked to give Bentley a written name so he could personalize his autographs, and Valerie Day-Hawkins thought that meant having to pick just one of her two daughters. When she told Bentley of her dilemma, he instantly solved it by signing the front and the back of her CD – one side for each daughter. "I have two daughters," he told the fan from Newfoundland, Canada. "I know what it's like when you pick one over the other."

Josh Gass decided to offer Bentley a glowing review of his new album, *Black*, and Gass was delighted that the singer actually asked "my recommendation on what the next single should be." What Gass – a longtime Bentley fan – didn't tell the star is that he selects music for a country radio station in Carterville, Ill. Gass's choice? "What the Hell Did I Say," which he described as a "typical guy song."

Among those who snagged a session ticket was Tamra Davis, who first met Bentley 15 years ago at Nashville's Fan Fest (now the CMA Festival). Then a virtual unknown, Bentley "was all alone at his little table, so I had a half-hour conversation with him," said Davis of Irvine, Calif.

Bentley invited her to attend an upcoming show near her home – only to discover that Davis already had Kenny Chesney tickets that night.

"I said, 'I tell you what, I'm coming to your show,'" Davis recalled. "So I showed up at his show and I had him sign the Chesney ticket. From that day forward, he's known my name and I've been a diehard fan."

Bentley performed before a sold-out crowd at Nissan Stadium Thursday night as part of an all-star lineup. His exhibit at the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, "Dierks Bentley: Every Mile a Memory," runs through Sept. 6.