

CONNECTICUT POST



Dierks Bentley headlines a venue where he once was a fan

6/11/16

Link: <http://www.ctpost.com/news/article/Dierks-Bentley-headlines-a-venue-where-he-once-8041531.php>

HARTFORD — Dierks Bentley seemed sincere when he talked about how the Xfinity Theater held a special place in his heart.

When he was touring the northeast, playing every small bar he could book, he saw Bon Jovi and Skid Row play at the amphitheater-style venue, sitting on the lawn in the back and enjoying one of his first concerts.

On Friday night, Bentley was back inside the venue, only this time one of the hottest country music stars in the country was down front, on the stage as the headlining act for his 2016 “Summer on a Beach” Tour.

And just like he wasn’t disappointed in the show so many years ago, Bentley made sure his fans left happy and satisfied, following a full evening of country music — that included three other acts — and didn’t end until the final note was played around the midnight hour.

The Arizona-born Bentley — who attended a high school in New Jersey and later the University of Vermont for a year — hit the stage after opening acts Tucker Beathard, Cam and Randy Houser set the tone for the evening.

He opened with “Up On The Ridge” and despite a perhaps unintended faux pas in the lighting, which made all of the band members look like pumpkins, the fans were more than ready for the music and immediately up on their feet. By the time he had the 10,000-plus in attendance singing along to “5-1-5-0” and “I Hold On” he knew the night was his to own.

One of the highlights — at least for the fans in the cheap seats — was when Bentley and his backing band (well, except for the drummer, who was left managing the beat from 15 feet above the main stage) took the show to the middle of the venue, cramming themselves on a small B-stage set up closer to the lawn.

“Riser” — which he dedicated to a fan down front, who was celebrating her 50th Bentley show — was followed by a rollicking Eagles cover of “Take it Easy” with Cam and Houser helping out. He wrapped up his mid-stage effort with “Freedom.”

After that, it was back to the main stage for a finishing kick of songs that included “Somewhere on a Beach”, “What was I Thinking?” and “Sideways.”

He sent the crowd home with an encore of the much anticipated “Drunk on a Plane” in which Houser and Cam once again joined him on stage to wrap up the long night.

The sun was still up when Beathard hit the stage to those who arrived early. Beathard, a former baseball player at Middle Tennessee State University, provided a glimpse of what could be future stardom with a solid set of songs that rocked the country set and undoubtedly gave him a few new fans.

Soon after Cam — the longtime former songwriter for Miley Cyrus who is coming into her own as an on-stage performer — took over for her usual fun-loving set of songs.

Then, the Mississippi-born Houser took the night to the next level with his deep voice and powerful, straight-ahead rocking style of country music that energized the evening even more.

By the time Bentley hit the stage, the crowd was ready for a show to remember.