

Dierks Bentley returns 'Home' to mainstream sound

By **MICHAEL MCCALL** | For The Associated Press
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Dierks Bentley
"Home" (Capitol Nashville)

A banjo kicks off Dierks Bentley's new album "Home," recalling a backwoods sound prevalent on his previous, bluegrass-inspired album "Up on the Ridge."

The similarities stop there. The bluegrass album generated rave reviews and but no radio hits. With "Home," Bentley returns to contemporary country music and the top of the charts — in the distinctive fashion that has established him among country music's most interesting hit-makers.

Bentley always utilizes banjo, fiddle, mandolin and especially dobro in his music, but with a modern beat and energy that, along with his distinctive voice, gives him a compelling sound of his own.

Like his peers, he regularly offers songs about celebrating with friends. "Am I The Only One," already a No. 1 hit, as well as "Tip It On Back" and "5-1-5-0" are as entertaining as any partying songs coming from Jason Aldean and Eric Church.

But the Arizona native separates himself from his peers with love songs, which feature a sensual quality rare in modern country music. The steamy "Breathe You In" and the tortured "In My Head" are outstanding relationship songs, while "Home," a valentine to America, is a patriotic ode that doesn't stoop to jingoism.

"Home" indeed finds Bentley back where he belongs: On the top of the country music charts.

Check out this track: The soulfully swaying "When You Gonna Come Around," a sexy duet with Karen Fairchild of Little Big Town, makes flirting sound as if it's going to lead to an inevitably positive conclusion.

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Dierks Bentley, 'Home'

By Sarah Rodman

Curly-topped country singer Dierks Bentley took the rural route on his last release, the superb country-bluegrass blend "Up on the Ridge." With the help of some of the best pickers available, and friends like Jamey Johnson and Miranda Lambert, he

followed his roots wanderlust to great effect. For the follow-up, he heads back on the main highway to Nashville. The result is a solid collection of good time country rockers ("Am I the Only One," "5-1-5-0"), poignant ballads (the heartwarmingly patriotic-yet-personal title track), and contemporary radio bait (the midtempo ripper "Tip It on Back" and the jaunty "Heart of a Lonely Girl"). But Bentley was clearly moved by the sound of "Ridge," as its textures unobtrusively infiltrate "Home" — including dusty fiddles, ringing banjos, and wisps of pedal steel. There are several standouts here: A sultry duet with Karen Fairchild of Little Big Town on "When You Gonna Come Around" has a sensual charm, and album closer "Thinking of You" is a gentle lullaby of affirmation to his family that features a snippet of his young daughter singing the refrain — which could've been cloying, but ends up simply sweet.

