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Dierks Bentley Captures Concert Vibe in New DVD

Live & Loud at the Fillmore

By: Craig Shelburne

To say that Dierks Bentley is proud of his new concert DVD, *Live & Loud at the Fillmore*, would be an understatement.

"I'm not trying to sell DVDs," he insists. "I'm not trying to make money off DVDs. I'd give one to everyone if I could. I just want people to see it. We're proud of our live show. At this point, it's like a life's work so far for me and for all the guys in the band and all the fans who have been promoting us from day one."

During a recent interview at CMT's office, the award-winning singer talked about what he's learned from Kenny Chesney, how he keeps his band happy and fighting his way to the top as a concert headliner.

CMT: Some people have stage presence and some people don't. How does a fledgling entertainer build a strong stage presence?

Bentley: There's no shortcut to playing a big show. My whole thing started off from a very grassroots feeling. You start off by playing a small stage where you can't really move at all. If you move too far left or right, you'll knock the banjo out of tune or get a fiddle bow stuck in your eyeball, so you kind of stay stationary. There's no way to get used to playing the bigger rooms until you go out there and do it night after night.

We shot the DVD at the Fillmore [in Denver], which is a very big bar. It holds about 5,000 people. Even though I'm running all over the stage, reaching out and grabbing people and jumping off stage and all the crazy stuff that happens in a live show now, I still go back to that feeling of playing downtown on Lower Broadway [in downtown Nashville]. When you're trying to work a tip jar, there's a drunk guy right in front of you, yelling that if you don't play some song, he's going to come up there and kick your butt. If you can play for that crowd, you can go play anywhere.

There's also the opposite situation, where the crowd isn't into it at all. How do you try to bring them into the show?

I played some shows with Kenny Chesney and George Strait where sometimes the lighting is not right, where it's hard to see out into the crowd. You just gotta find a way, sometimes internally, to find a good time without depending on the crowd. You hear about people who talk about how they're so dependent on the crowd for that energy, and I'm the same way. The crowd is like the sixth member of the band. But on nights when it's not like that for some reason, you've got to have fun as a group.

I think this DVD shows what me and the guys are all about. We do a lot of things together during the day, so when we're on stage, it's a real camaraderie. These are some of my best friends. We always tell ourselves it's our one life to live, too. We spend all day out here on the road waiting to play a show. We think our lives are valuable, so we go up there to entertain ourselves, first and foremost, and have a good time for us. We want to have a good show, so that when we walk away that night, we don't feel like the day was wasted. We want to walk off the stage and think, "Man, we really made this day worthwhile."

Do you still have that sense of anticipation when you get on the tour bus?

Oh, yeah. For us now, what keeps it fun is always starting over again. Going out there, you start playing the little bars in Nashville, then you get a record deal. Now you're going out there, hitting the road, playing bigger bars. Then you're an opening act for Kenny Chesney or George Strait, and it's your first time playing in an arena. Now we're in this whole new category of being a headliner. We're like the freshmen, the underclassmen, of a category of people that includes Kenny, Rascal Flatts, Keith Urban, Brad Paisley and all these guys. It's like a chance to start over again, and that really does reinvigorate you. Not that we needed it, but it definitely makes you put the boxing gloves back on, strap 'em on a little bit tighter and go out there and fight your way back up to the top. We're working hard to get back up there. We like being No. 1, but we've got a long way to go.

How do you keep the guys happy on the road?

The guys in my band stay happy when they can play music. When you're doing some of the opening slots, only playing for 20 to 25 minutes, that's when there's unrest in my group of guys. They get frustrated being out there and not playing, so back when we were doing those tours, opening up for other people, we would play a lot of music after the show. We'd go out there and do our 20-25 minutes and then just sit around the rest of the night and play bluegrass and country songs on down the highway.

I've learned different things from people -- and certainly from Kenny -- about having a great vibe out there on the road. Everyone's an equal on the road, as far as our tour's concerned -- the band, the crew, everyone. We just try to have fun out there for ourselves. It's easy to lose sight of not having fun. I think some people treat going out there like a job, but let's be honest: It's definitely not a job to play music for a living. We remind ourselves to have a good time out there, and we manage to do that pretty well.