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## Dierks Bentley on his new album, writing in Telluride, and working with Brandi Carlile



For his ninth studio album, *The Mountain*, Dierks Bentley looked West, channeling the jagged peaks of his youth in Arizona. “I had this idea for awhile to do a record that ties back into where I’m from,” he tells EW, “but I didn’t really know how you do that. Is it a lyrical thing or a sonic thing?”

After a summer set at Telluride Bluegrass Festival last year, he found the answer: return to the same place to write and record. “There’s an intangible magic to that location,” he says. It shows. *The Mountain* marks one of the most joyful, brazen, and cohesive collections of his career.

Below, EW chats with Bentley about the new project, what keeps him motivated, and the joy of collaborating with Brandi Carlile.

### **ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY: Where did the idea for an album about the West come from?**

**BENTLEY:** Every album, I don’t know what the hell I’m going to write about. I never want to go backwards—the good ol’ days are good because they’re gone, for me. [Laughs] So they all require a leap of faith, that’s where the magic resides. [Last summer] I was in Wyoming with my producer Ross [Copperman] and we were sitting below the Teton Mountains and just went, “Wow, *The Mountain*, that would be a great title.” That was all we had.

**You wrote the record in Telluride, Colorado after playing last summer's Bluegrass Festival.**

There's just this intangible magic to that location. I thought, man, I wish I could capture this feeling and bring it back to Nashville. When I was telling my wife that, she was like, "Just bring people out there." There were seven of us—I call everyone the Tellu-Writers—living together, getting our Colorado ski town-slash-college-house-party-vibe on for five days.

**It sounds like this was a really unique experience.**

It was the first time that I got really pulled along by an album. After [the writing sessions], everyone was like, "How do we get back out here?" I said we should record the album out here, and we all laughed about it. Well, three months later, I was recording out there. I'm already sad that I won't be able to recreate it and I haven't even released the album yet! [Laughs] I'm already like, "Ah, well, we'll never do this again. What a bummer!"

**There's a song on the LP called "Living" which seems to really capture the be-in-the-moment energy of Telluride.**

I remember being at the Bluegrass Festival this summer and seeing an actual iPhone nailed to a tree and it's all shattered. That had a big impact on me. I've actually broken free of the grips of the iPhone, now. I use my iPad. That was a big living moment for me.

**Another major theme seems to be looking back on a pre-fame Dierks. On "Stranger to Myself," you sing about not even recognizing your old life.**

I look back on myself and I have a lot of compassion for that guy. He's trying to make it and going through the machine of Nashville and just the hair and the alcohol...It's such a tough business. "Stranger to Myself," "Traveling Light," and "Woman, Amen," are about having gratitude for my life now.

**Brandi Carlile is featured on that very bluegrass-y "Traveling Light."**

I saw her play at Bluegrass and she was just blowing my mind! I got her number and texted her up [about collaborating]. It was so easy. She's like, "I don't know whether to text or to call you because you're not on your iPhone!" I'm like, "I'm on my iPad!" [Laughs] I sent her the session and she sent it back two days later—and her wife went into labor that night! I'm like, "Make sure you have a bottle of champagne before you go to the hospital!" and she sends me a picture of her bottle of champagne already next to the go-bag. I cannot wait to see her, it's going to be like seeing a long-lost friend.

**You'll staring down months of tour dates. What are you most excited for?**

We've got a totally new set. And things like the Drunk on a Plane gag where the plane comes out on stage — I hate to lose that but it's gotta go! It's the same thing as when you're in the studio and you do a great vocal pass. The producer in your ear always goes, "That was perfect. Let's do it again." That's what keeps the excitement there — always tearing things down and recreating it.