

TASTE OF COUNTRY

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DIERKS BENTLEY'S LEGACY? BEING COUNTRY MUSIC'S MOST ACCESSIBLE HEADLINER

Dierks Bentley jokes that in being omnipresent at the inaugural **Seven Peaks Festival**, he's being selfish. Actually, he may not be kidding.

Taste of Country sat shotgun on Saturday afternoon (Sept. 1) as Bentley drove his golf cart through VIP camping to an area known as Somewhere on the Beach. Along the way he high-fived fans who spotted him as we drove the tree-lined road, but mostly hustled to get to the festival ground's waterfront (a small pond wrapped in sand) before DJ Aydamn shut down the party at 2PM. From there he was to go to the Whiskey Row side stage to play with a local bluegrass band called Rapidgrass at 3PM. In between, he was scheduled to talk life, music and country music festivals and then (as it turns out) stage-bomb the **Cadillac Three** and sing with **Brothers Osborne**. It became difficult to keep up with him — blame the (*ahem*) high altitude — and Sunday's schedule was even more loaded.

Anyone who has covered an A-list star like Bentley knows that the perils of going out into the crowd lie in the return trip. First, a few fans want a selfie. Word spreads and before long, you have a 45-minute long line leading to where you came from. In a black T-shirt and jeans, with a craft beer in his hand and beige bandana around his neck, an almost-disguised Bentley takes pleasure in talking to every last fan. Later he'd marvel at the chill of it all, saying that in any other crowd he'd have his antenna up for trouble. But not here. One gets the sense that these are Bentley's people.

"I'm not a beach guy," he says seated comfortably backstage, gazing at the same 14,000-foot peaks that inspired his most recent album *The Mountain*. "I mean, I'll go for a little bit, but I'm more mountains — I love mountains. It's selfish. I'm picking the bands I want to be here. I'm picking the location ... and in a way, kind of picking the fans, picking the people that want to travel and are passionate about music and community and that's who you have here."

If you get a sense that the first Seven Peaks Festival is part of a longterm vision and that like his festival influences (Del McCoury at DelFest and Sam Bush at Telluride), he's lining himself up to be the "king" of Seven Peaks, you're right. But he'll never say it. Bentley is just too focused on living in the moment.

In a lot of ways, it seems like this festival is you setting up for the long haul and figuring out what you're going to do when it's time to slow down. And I'm talking in like, 20 years.

20? S--t dude, 10!

Ten years. You can do this and a few other shows and still keep your core audience and remain relevant.

Totally. That's the big thing with any singer is balancing time with a family and kids. So yeah. They're (his wife and kids) coming out here tomorrow and this is something my family will grow up being a part of, as long as the fans are nice enough to keep coming back out.

"My kids will probably remember me for some dumb thing around the house, like scary story time where I dress up like an animal and run into their room at night. They probably won't even remember me for doing music."

I just watched [Kenny \(Chesney\)](#) play in Boston and I learned a lot from Kenny over the years — just seeing what he's built up over his whole escapist, nostalgic vibe and beach vibe thing. I think we have a little of that going on with this mountain thing, to be able to curate this and keep that going, keep that spirit.

Kenny talks a lot about the community in the Virgin Islands and how it is locals mixed with transplants often looking for an escape. Is this community in Buena Vista similar?

I feel like it is. (Live Nation President of Country Touring) Brian O'Connell, whom I worked with on this festival, he has a festival called Faster Horses in Brooklyn, Mich. — the majority of people come from four states. Here we are in Colorado and we have people from 49 states. It blows his mind and mine, too. So it's a destination thing ... and it's a lot of trust on their part to come out here for this inaugural year. I'm trying to practice what I preach, which is about being accessible.

How are you going to define success for this festival?

If someone makes a lot of money but is miserable and hasn't done anything done anything good for their community, I don't know you'd necessarily define them as being successful. So I think it's about including, sharing — I think success is a combination of doing what you feel your life's calling is, but also community. I love country music, I love the mountains, I love our fans, I love this vibe, I don't know what I'm making off this first festival. We went and talked about this and I was like, "I don't even want money to be here." We can talk five, 10 years down the road if it's doing great, but let's put everything into the festival and make this fan experience so great and respect our fans.

I'm definitely not here for the money, I'm here for a four-day vacation. I want this to be here so every August I can have another reason to come back to Colorado.

The answer may be that if you're doing this next year, this year was a success.

Yeah. For this, success would be if it's here in 20 years.

Have you started to think about your legacy, and is Seven Peaks a part of that?

That's interesting. I've given zero thought to legacy. My kids will probably remember me for some dumb thing around the house, like scary story time where I dress up like an animal and run into their room at night. They probably won't even remember me for doing music. This

would be a cool legacy. To start a festival that kids and parents come out to, and grandparents come out to with their kids ... It becomes something that's woven into the fabric of their lives. If we were able to create that, that would be a cool legacy.

Will this festival and this area continue to shape your music?

I think so — I think so. The next album is way down the road, and I'm not sure that I would keep changing it up. I think I'll go where I'm inspired. I think this will continue to be ... look, I would live here if I could. I like Nashville. It's a good city. I've been there 25 years. Honestly it's too crowded and —

Will you retire here maybe?

Yeah, I'm going to retire here one day. I'm not going to die in Nashville, that's for damn sure.