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DIERKS BENTLEY ADDS SOME DEEPER SONGS TO HIS REPERTOIRE OF PARTY ANTHEMS



Back in 2015, just days after the Chicago Blackhawks took home the Stanley Cup, a few of the team's premiere players decided to get together and bring the almighty symbol of hockey excellence to the stage of Country LakeShake — and hand it over to Dierks Bentley.

"I drank out of the Stanley Cup [in 2015], but only with Patrick Kane's permission," laughs Bentley during a recent chat. "That was a crazy night. I mean, I shotgunned a beer with Duncan Keith. Seriously, I love Chicago." (Of course he also suffered the wrath of diehard hockey fans for [hoisting the Cup](#) above his head, a tradition generally reserved for victorious players/team members only).

Hopefully all that is way behind him, as the Arizona native headlines the fourth annual Country LakeShake June 22-24 alongside country superstars Blake Shelton and Florida Georgia Line, as well as rising stars such as Cole Swindell, RaeLynn and Russell Dickerson.

COUNTRY LAKESHAKE

When: June 22-24

Where: Huntington Bank Pavilion at Northerly Island, 1300 S. Linn White Dr., Chicago

Tickets: \$99.50 – \$150.50

Info: lakeshakefestival.com

“It’s crazy that we are playing on a piece of land that used to be an airstrip, but it works,” said Bentley of the LakeShake venue, Huntington Bank Pavilion, on the site of the former Meigs Field. “I’ve played the bars there and the clubs there and the arenas there and Lollapalooza. It’s been a fun ride.”

And it’s a ride that shows no signs of ending anytime soon, as Bentley finds himself in one of the sweetest moments of his career, a time when he says he can truly be himself and showcase the heart that has beat within country music since his first hit “What Was I Thinkin” back in 2003. His latest album, “The Mountain,” features 13 new tracks that read like a tapestry of Bentley’s soul.

“I started with a blank slate for this album and a goal that I just wanted to be open and honest,” said Bentley, whose party songs like “Drunk on a Plane,” “Somewhere on a Beach” and “5-1-5-0” remain crowd favorites. “I really had no idea how it would turn out at the beginning. My mind was just looking for a purpose.”

And it was this purpose that Bentley had a tough time finding for a little while. “I can get really discouraged by social media,” he said. “You can almost have too much digital data flooding your head.”

It’s something he knew about firsthand.

“My kids were such teachers to me when it came to that,” recalled Bentley. “I mean, looking at your phone is not living. Who wants to be a spectator staring at some phone and missing out on one’s life? It forced me to live in the moment and create songs that were a bit deeper.”

So he released the anthem “Woman, Amen” alongside a powerful video showcasing the real-life struggles of a mother and daughter from Nashville, and began to see it make an impact with his fans. “I think people are relating to it because of our universal stories,” said Bentley of the song that ultimately became the 17th No. 1 single of his career. “These songs are inspiring in all sorts of ways, and through these songs, I see people using social media in a more powerful way. It’s been helpful to me because I’m getting to reconnect because of it.”

Of course, playing these songs live are also taking his work to a whole new level. “There is a power to ‘Woman, Amen,’ especially when we play it live,” said Bentley. “It’s not only something new and fresh for the tour, but also is one of the most powerful moments of the show.”

To call Bentley a new man might be a bit of a stretch, but it’s true that he seems to look at life differently these days. Recently, he announced the creation of the Seven Peaks Festival, which will take place Labor Day weekend amongst the Colorado mountains that inspired his current album.

“Working on a festival from scratch is kind of like a song in the way you get an idea and everyone thinks you are crazy,” laughs Bentley. “But I’ve always wanted to do a festival like this, and I feel like I’m at a time in my life when the moment is right. It all just feels right.”