

# Chicago Tribune

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## COUNTRY LAKESHAKE BRINGING THE BEST, THE BRIGHTEST AND EVERYBODY ELSE



Chicago has long been a welcoming home and major market for country music. This weekend, the city once again makes good on that reputation when it plays host to Country LakeShake. In its fourth year, the three-day music festival boasts major stars of the genre as well as a passel of up-and-coming acts.

Country LakeShake takes place at Huntington Bank Pavilion at Northerly Island on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Among the headliners are hit-makers [Blake Shelton](#), Dierks Bentley and Florida Georgia Line.

For country music enthusiasts, the event offers fun in the sun with a strong lineup on both the main stage and the Next from Nashville second stage. Among the many performers are Lee Brice, Billy Currington, RaeLynn, Chris Lane, Runaway June, Dylan Scott, Lanco, Charlie Worsham and Cole Swindell.

Country LakeShake features a view of the city's skyline, a variety of food trucks, a wine lounge, a Blackhawks bar, pop-up performances, interactive activities and line dancing. The family-friendly event boasts a kid zone with arcade games and face painting. It all unfolds to the sound of non-stop live music and a large audience of country devotees.

Festival offerings are wide-ranging. The members of Sober Shake, a group of alcohol and drug free music fans, will be at the event to provide clean and sober fellowship and support. On Saturday, the no-kill animal shelter PAWS Chicago will be on hand with adoptable puppies to encourage interested folks who want to connect with a pet.

For the artists, Country LakeShake is a major gig on the itinerary. It's a mondo festival that affords a performer the opportunity to connect with a vast audience of both established fans and new listeners.

"These are huge, pivotal, marquee events," says veteran singer-songwriter Tracy Lawrence, who performs Friday night on the main stage. "These events give you the opportunity to be in front of massive crowds. It's a powerful thing."

A Grammy-nominated star who has sold over 13 million albums, Lawrence released his first album in 1991 and scored his first No. 1 hit with the fiddle and steel laden debut single "Sticks and Stones." His traditional country sound and Texas-via-Arkansas twang grace the enduring hits "Alibis" and "Time Marches On."

Last fall, Lawrence released "Good Ole Days" (Lawrence Music Group), a collection of his early hits newly recorded as duets with contemporary country stars including [Tim McGraw](#), Big & Rich and Luke Bryan. During the project, he was struck by how much his material had influenced his younger duet partners.

"I was taken aback by the fact that so many were influenced by the music I put out in the '90s," Lawrence says. "I had a long conversation with Jason Aldean about that. Jason said I was a main influence. (When he was growing up) he even had posters of me on his bedroom wall. (laughs) Jason has a voice that is similar in texture to mine and he really tried to emulate some of the phrasing in my songs."

His fellow Arkansas native Justin Moore was even more glowing in his assessment of the older artist's influence.

"Justin made a statement that I was his Elvis," Lawrence says with a laugh. "At this stage of my life, it's cool to know that the work I've done over the years has had an impact on a younger generation."

His performance at this year's LakeShake will be Lawrence's first appearance at the Chicago festival. Besides his steady touring schedule, he stays busy as the host of the nationally syndicated radio show "Honky Tonkin' with Tracy Lawrence." The broadcast gig is another opportunity to share the emotional power of country music.

"I like lyrics that say things people can relate to in their everyday lives," Lawrence says. "Heartbreak songs. Cry in your beer stuff. I love the early Brooks & Dunn material and the old longing songs of Merle Haggard. That's the true essence of country music to me."

Newcomer Dillon Carmichael will perform Saturday at the Next from Nashville stage in the singer-songwriter's first appearance at the festival.

"I've done a lot of theaters all the way up to 2,500 people, but LakeShake will be the biggest stage I've ever been on," Carmichael says. "I'm really excited."

Carmichael mixes hard country and southern rock on his debut "Hell on an Angel" (Riser House Records), set for release August 17. The album was produced by Dave Cobb, the white-hot Nashville producer who has worked on acclaimed releases by Sturgill Simpson, Jason Isbell and Chris Stapleton. The top-tier studio players on the release include Robby Turner, longtime pedal steel guitarist for the late outlaw-country icon Waylon Jennings.

A native of Burgin, Kentucky, a town that boasts a population of roughly 1,000, Carmichael grew up in a family packed with country music talent. His father was a vocalist in a gospel quartet and his mother sang at regional gigs. Two of his uncles are bona fide mainstream country stars — singer John Michael Montgomery ("I Swear," "The Little Girl") and Eddie Montgomery of the hit country duo Montgomery Gentry.

His mother's famous brothers have given Carmichael advice on his career. Their guidance has been short and simple: there are no shortcuts to success.

"They've told me that I've got to play shows, write songs and spend years doing those things," Carmichael says. "It's not something where someone can make a call and make your career happen. It doesn't work like that. You have to pay your dues and put in the time and hard work. My mom and dad have also taught me a lot about having a work ethic."

He's looking forward to his inaugural gig at Country LakeShake.

"I've always loved every bit of playing live shows," Carmichael says. "I could play on a stage every single night for the rest of my life. LakeShake is going to be a good time for sure."

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**When:** Friday-Sunday

**Where:** Huntington Bank Pavilion at Northerly Island, 1300 S. Linn White Drive

**Tickets:** Single-Day Pass \$99.50 - \$150.50; 3-Day Pass \$150.50 - \$599.50; 800-745-3000  
or **[www.lakeshakefestival.com](http://www.lakeshakefestival.com)**