

Rolling Stone

(9.2.2019) - <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-country/dierks-bentley-seven-peaks-chris-shiflett-podcast-879125/>

DIERKS BENTLEY, CHRIS SHIFLETT TALK SEVEN PEAKS FESTIVAL ON 'WALKING THE FLOOR' PODCAST

Shiflett goes backstage at the Colorado country fest

Dierks Bentley talks with Chris Shiflett backstage at Seven Peaks Festival in Colorado.

Recorded at the Seven Peaks Festival in Buena Vista, Colorado, [Chris Shiflett](#)'s newest episode of *Walking the Floor* finds the songwriter backstage, talking with acts like Kendell Marvel and festival co-founder [Dierks Bentley](#). Shiflett performed his own set at the festival, too, joining a bill whose 29 artists included Nineties country hitmakers (Travis Tritt, Diamond Rio), modern mainstays (Luke Bryan, Maren Morris), and bluegrass heavyweights (Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, Steep Canyon Rangers).



Clocking in at 23 minutes, Shiflett's behind-the-scenes peek at Seven Peaks marks one of the shortest episodes of *Walking the Floor*. Even so, Shiflett intentionally casts a wide net, talking with everyone from headliners to opening acts. The result is a quick look at a destination festival that's earned a reputation not only for its diverse bills, but for its dedication to artist hospitality.

"Here's me as a roving reporter, out in the mountains outside Seven Peaks Festival," says Shiflett.

The artist-only amenities at Seven Peaks Festival are top notch.

Massages. B12 shots. Marijuana edibles. An oxygen bar. A barber. Those were among the backstage offerings at Seven Peaks. Dierks Bentley, who launched the festival with help from Live Nation's Brian O'Connell, is to thank for many of those amenities. "The details, man," he tells Shiflett, emphasizing the importance of the small things. "You want a great fan experience, obviously, but part of what makes a great fan experience is when the bands are happy, because then they walk onstage and they bring all that love out there."

Another important detail when it comes to throwing a memorable festival: find a memorable location.

“We’re out here looking at the flowers,” members of the Australian country duo Seaforth tell Shiflett during a mini-interview before their own set. The festival’s gorgeous scenery wasn’t lost on any of the Seven Peaks artists, and that’s just the way Bentley wanted it. During the fest’s inaugural year, headliner Miranda Lambert even cancelled her private flight back home and stayed another night, looking to spend more time in the mountains.

“I love the mountains,” Bentley says. “I’m always looking for an excuse to come to Colorado. We just needed to find the right location that felt like Colorado, because when you’re in Denver, it feels like you’re in the big city. It’s a little work to get here, as you know...but once you get here, there’s not a band that’s been here that hasn’t said to me, ‘Man, I wish we were staying longer.’”

When it comes to festival organizers, you don’t get much more hands-on than Bentley.

“I’ve been to every show,” Bentley says to Shiflett during their short interview. “I sit side stage and watch every band. I haven’t missed a band yet.” Later in the pair’s conversation, Bentley likens the process of planning a music festival to the challenge of making a new record. “You’ve gotta make an album for yourself,” he says. “You can’t make an album for people, because then it sounds like you’re pandering, and it’s gonna have no heart to it.”

Of course, it helps to have a partner like O’Connell in your corner.

As Live Nation’s President of Country Touring, Brian O’Connell spends most of his year on the road, working with the genre’s headliners and up-and-comers. He helped Bentley develop Seven Peaks Festival, too. “He’s done Watershed in the Gorge, Washington; LakeShake in Chicago; Faster Horses in Michigan,” says Bentley, rattling off a string of O’Connell’s past festivals. Working together, the two have built a festival that’s meant to exist on the same tier as American institutions like Bonnaroo. “All the festivals I started playing, you got a box lunch,” Bentley adds, comparing those entry-level amenities with those offered backstage at Seven Peaks. “So we’re trying to get country music to the same level of respect as Coachella or something...but this is better than Coachella.”