



DIERKS BENTLEY LONG TRIP ALONE

“I think every album has been a snapshot of where I’ve been at that moment in time,” says Dierks Bentley. “This album is a conscious effort to tie in the road and the studio. There’s a vein throughout the whole album of the bigger thoughts and questions that you have when you spend too much time on the road, and you grow up a little bit and start thinking beyond songs about beer and little white tank tops. From the outset, this record was always going to be really different than the previous records.”

The last few years have seen Bentley emerge as the hottest young star in country music. With two Platinum® albums – 2003’s DIERKS BENTLEY (with the #1 debut smash “What Was I Thinkin’) and 2005’s chart-topping MODERN DAY DRIFTER (with the back-to-back multi-week #1 hits “Come A Little Closer” and “Settle for a Slowdown”) – and a long list of honors, he has established himself as one of the most acclaimed artists in music today. In just one year, he jumped from winning the 2005 CMA Horizon Award to a 2006 CMA Male Vocalist of the Year nomination. He also won the ACM Top New Artist Award in 2004 and went on to receive a nomination for the 2005 ACM Top Male Vocalist Award. After two tours of duty on the George Strait tour and three for Kenny Chesney – he makes the leap to the next level as a touring artist when he launches his first major headlining tour sponsored by Bud Light (who have only sponsored tours for two other artists – George Strait and Tim McGraw).

Meanwhile, his blistering live show and marathon touring schedule – he spent over 300 days on the road last year – has earned him a reputation as one of the hardest workers in the business. With the release of LONG TRIP ALONE, Bentley keeps that momentum rolling, building on the rock-solid base he’s been amassing while expanding his music with newfound range and depth.

“We aren’t scared to have albums that are always a little different from the ones before,” he says. “We want to break people’s expectations, without straying too far from who we are. I put a lot of pressure on myself as far as upping the ante on every show. Every night’s gotta be better than the night before, and every record has to be a step up from the one before.”

“Every Mile a Memory,” the first single from LONG TRIP ALONE (which shot straight to the top-10 of the country singles charts after only six weeks and is currently still climbing), serves as a starting point for the album’s journey. “My last four years have been spent on the road,” says Bentley. “I’ve traveled a lot of miles and made a lot of memories, so that’s a good way to kick off the album, talking about where things have been and where they’re going.”

The album’s eleven songs tell the story of a young man being pulled toward both the far-flung work that he loves and those at home who make it possible for him to keep on moving. From the raucous road stories of “That Don’t Make It Easy Loving Me” to the contemplative “The Heaven I’m Headed To,” LONG TRIP ALONE brings a new sense of maturity to the songs of a performer known for keeping a tapped beer keg flowing onstage during his show.

Of course, life has gotten a little bit different for the Phoenix-born guitar slinger in the last few years. Aside from reaching new sales heights, touring with the likes of Kenny Chesney and George Strait, joining the Grand Ole Opry, and collaborating with such heroes as George Jones, Bentley also experienced some changes on the home front.

“For one thing, I got married last year,” he says. “Certainly that’s reflected in this record – the idea of missing someone back home, and starting life a little bit. Songs like ‘Long Trip Alone’ and ‘Soon As You Can’ are all about the relationships in your life and how important they are. Other songs are very inspired by new feelings I’ve experienced from being married. Good thoughts and bigger ideas, but also different tensions and pressures. Balancing the two has made for some songs that have a little deeper meaning.”

If all of this makes it sound like LONG TRIP ALONE shares some themes and feelings with old-school country music, well, that’s no accident. Bentley says that he stills draws on the lessons he learned when he first moved to Nashville and spent long hours logging tape for his job at The Nashville Network, filling notebooks with his own study of the genre’s masters.

“The great thing about country music is it truly reflects life,” he says. “There’s the sinning mixed with the asking for forgiveness. You’re drinking a beer at night and then you’re working out in the day trying to sweat out the beer you drank the night before. There’s all this balance, and I think with an album, you should reflect all the sides of life.

“Country music is such a wide umbrella,” he continues, “and we really feel tied to where it came from, to Johnny Cash and Waylon and Willie, Merle Haggard and Buck Owens and Ray Price – the stylists. So we try to take that hillbilly spirit and bring it somewhere new.”

To help him translate these ideas into sound, Bentley once again turned to the two men who have been by his side since his first studio recordings – producer Brett Beavers and co-producer Luke Wooten. “This little team here, the three of us, have really spent a lot of time developing a sound that we think is unique,” he says. “This time, Luke and Brett came out on the road to see the live show to help get some of that edge across in the record. There’s an energy and a magic to songs when they’re played a lot on the road, sometimes that is missing when you go in to record.”

The sweep of “Every Mile a Memory,” the urgency of “Soon As You Can,” the spirited “Free and Easy Down the Road I Go” – LONG TRIP ALONE is filled with evidence of a new, more hard-charging approach to recording that builds on the power of such recent hits as “Settle for a Slowdown.” The greatest challenge, though, was getting anything on tape around Bentley’s breakneck touring schedule – so jam-packed that on one very rare off day, he flew from Chicago to Nashville, recorded vocals for “Trying to Stop Your Leaving,” and got back on a plane to rejoin the band the next day.

“When you’re in country music and you’re trying to make it,” Bentley says, “my philosophy is that you’ve got to tour non-stop to separate yourself from everybody else and lay a foundation. So when it comes back to making records you kind of lean on the team that you have. Once you lock into a sound, you try to keep a team together and grow. And it seems to be working - you can see the growth in each record, and it’s probably because we know where my music has been and we know where we want to take it.”

Not that Bentley is complaining about his life on the road. “The way I stay focused is the live show,” he says. “Everything revolves around being on stage. And the busier it gets, the more important the show is to your sanity. That’s what keeps everything else in check.”

To document the live Dierks Bentley experience, he recently shot a DVD at Denver's Fillmore Auditorium to be released in early 2007, "a kick-ass rock bar with four thousand people standing up with a beer in one hand and a fist up in the other, just to capture that moment before we move up to playing arenas."

LONG TRIP ALONE catches an artist in transition. Dierks Bentley is no longer a rookie dreaming of stardom, but he's still waiting to find out what heights he can reach. He's grown up enough to get married and think about life's bigger meanings, but still young and carefree enough to enjoy the ramble of the road and the new experiences it brings. Most of all, he's still pushing himself as a singer, a songwriter, a musician, and a performer, becoming not just a promising talent or a rising star but a true career artist.

"When we have to call a rare meeting to work things out, I tell the guys in the band and the crew that I'm not satisfied with where I am," says Bentley. "We haven't reached the point I'm trying to reach. I don't think I'll ever find out who I truly am as a songwriter, as a singer, as an entertainer. Those are all areas I'm trying to get better at.

"We're always looking for new songs, new sounds, new melodies. And if someone thinks we've reached the right place – some plateau – then they're in the wrong gig."

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