

VOICES IN THE HALL  
**DIERKS BENTLEY EPISODE TRANSCRIPT**

**PETER COOPER** Welcome! It's Voices in the Hall, with Dierks Bentley.

**DIERKS BENTLEY** I've gotten really good and just the second we walk off stage like [snap] going right back into being who I was before. And that's, it's a really, it's an acquired skill. The moment's over, right? Why do I want to linger in like that whole thing? I think it's a bigger reflection of just my life in general, just trying to be present in every moment I'm in. The second it's over, it's over! Those people out there, they're getting in their cars. The feeling's there, the high is there, and hopefully that'll carry them the rest of their week. They'll have that, "Ah man that was such a great show, the Dierks concert. It made me feel good." That's the way I feel leaving a concert. I was not doing this to try to be a star. I was doing this because I loved playing, loved the lifestyle, loved everything that went with it, the drinking, the hanging out, the...It's so odd how it all works out. You just don't know what door's going to open, what door's going to close, so you gotta be present, you gotta be going after all of it. But yeah, it's just, I take it less for granted now and I appreciate it now more than I ever have. The second my boots hit that stage it's like electricity comes up. I look out in that crowd, it's like oh my, I can't believe we're doing this. And it's a very authentic, my reactions on stage and my, it's always authentic and it's always. I think it's more so than ever.

***"Free and Easy (Down the Road I Go)" - Dierks Bentley (Long Trip Alone / Capitol Nashville)***

**PETER COOPER** That was Dierks Bentley with a number one Country hit from 2007, "Free and Easy (Down the Road I Go)." Dierks Bentley is an arena-filling Country music star. He cut his musical teeth in Nashville clubs like the Station Inn and Wolfy's. He has a reverence for the sounds and singers of the past, and he has great enthusiasm for the cutting edge music of the present. He's been nominated for 14 Grammy awards. That's pretty good. Dierks, welcome to Voices in the Hall. Welcome to the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum. It's always great to have you here.

**DIERKS BENTLEY** Yeah man. Great to be here. Just walking over here through the, you know going through the Hall of Fame, the exhibits, it's pretty special. Pretty special place to do a podcast, so thanks a lot man.

**PETER COOPER** Glad to have you here. It is a special building. It's kind of. It's a new building filled with ghosts.

**DIERKS BENTLEY** Yeah.

**PETER COOPER** You know.

**DIERKS BENTLEY** I know. Just seeing, you know you just walked by Bill Monroe's mandolin and Earl Scruggs' banjo and it's like wow man. Mother Maybelle's guitar. It's pretty, it's a really special place. And never spend enough time here. Always reminds me I need to come back and hang some more. So let's try to do that, take me on a little tour.

**PETER COOPER** All right. All right. You're welcome here any time. Dierks, you were raised. You're an Arizona kid. Not a state known particularly for country music, though there was there was some of that going on. When did this music first hit you?

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**DIERKS BENTLEY** Yeah that's a great. You know like Mike Bub, bass player extraordinaire here, an upright bass player. He's from Arizona as well, and he told me when he came out here people told him you need to know what four five four means, 454 Engine. You need to know what the number 3 means you know for Dale Earnhardt, and how people are trying to tell him about what's country, what makes you know stuff country. And for him and for me to, Arizona, growing up in Arizona I feel like we are at the center of the country music world. You know I don't really know what existed beyond the Mississippi, New Mexico, let alone Mississippi. And I just thought we were the West and you know all these great bands came through town. And my dad grew up watching Waylon play at some bars in the early '60s like Wild Bill's and J.D.'s, and you know he knew about Buck Owens' history there and Marty Robbins. And it just felt like, to me Arizona felt like it was you know where it was all going down. 'Course I didn't know about WSM or the Opry, any of that stuff but. You know I left home when I was 14 and went to a prep school in New Jersey of all places. My mom was really intent on me getting out of Arizona and kind of getting away from the friends I was running around with.

**PETER COOPER** Were you a trouble child?

**DIERKS BENTLEY** Oh I just ran with a couple of buddies that you know we'd get, we'd get picked up and taken down to the local police station for drinking or just dumb stuff you know. So it was kind of, it was, she really wanted me to get kind of beyond Arizona which I didn't. I just wanted to stay there and really enjoyed it. But I left, and I think when I left I really oddly enough you know just that idea of lonesome, the feeling of lonesome just, and understanding what lonesome is, I was in a place where no one else from my home state, people I had no, I mean New Jersey might as well been Russia. I had no idea where I was or whose these people were. And I make friends pretty easily. But I was, there was like a homesickness, a deep homesickness, really lonesomeness. And I think I connected that to country music, to my dad. That's really where it all kind of started for me.

In particular when I was 17 my senior year of high school. I'd listened to a bunch of different music up to that point in between leaving home. Home was all country music. I guess my freshman, sophomore, junior year I was just experimenting, but Senior year I heard of Hank Williams Jr. and it just was like this is, it all kind of tied together. It was the most, that one moment, you know I have had a few of those moments in my life, meeting my wife, a few things like that where it just, only way to describe it is like a coin going down a machine and clicking all the right levers and just everything lines up and boom, I just knew exactly what I wanted to do, and it was I wanted to be a country singer.

**PETER COOPER** Do you remember what the Hank Jr. music was?

**DIERKS BENTLEY** It was a song called "Man to Man." "I want to speak man a man with a man that used to moan the blues." I mean this rockin', maybe Hank's like most rockin' song. I mean crazy screaming electric guitars, and he's. He's not, he's singing, it's so much testosterone in that song. He's not, he's not trying to sell you on a hit song. He's just singing a song about how he wants to talk to his dad up in heaven and raise a little hell together. And I just was like wow this is, this is country? This is amazing. This is what I've been looking for.

***"Man to Man" - Hank Williams, Jr. (Lone Wolf / Curb)***

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**PETER COOPER** The song that sent Dierks Bentley on his path when he was a young man, that was Hank Williams, Jr. with “Man to Man.” So Dierks, you were a fan of Hank Jr.’s as a teenager. Were you playing guitar at this point?

**DIERKS BENTLEY** I was playing, I started off playing electric guitar, when I was 13 I discovered that instrument. Another huge moment in my life, like seeing that you could actually participate in the music and not just be a spectator. A friend of mine had an electric guitar and I was like wow you can, you can just play, you can play that? You can do that? Like you can just like change your mood in three seconds, all of a sudden be like happy? This is amazing. So I got a Hondo electric guitar. And then I ended up painting it red white and blue like, like a Buck Owens guitar, and a Crate amplifier, and I dragged that around with me. And you know then I got, when I was 13 and 14 I got into Van Halen and all this stuff so I was learning to play the power chords and all that. But around 17, 18 I kind of put the electric guitar away and started playing more acoustic. But as you and I both know my playing revolves more around strumming than picking. I'm a big admirer of pickers, but I am a strummer.

**PETER COOPER** Well Nashville is a good place to find pickers.

**DIERKS BENTLEY** Yes exactly.

**PETER COOPER** So Dierks, you came to Nashville to attend Vanderbilt University, a great school. Did you come here because of that school’s reputation or did you come here because you saw being in Nashville as a way of entering the Country music industry?

**DIERKS BENTLEY** I saw, I needed time. Yeah I knew I needed like three or four years, I wish that's all it took, of time to like get it together, get my craft together and to work on stuff, and I saw college as a way to like to have the space to work on that, buy myself some time basically.

**PETER COOPER** And were people telling you hey man you're great, you should be a star?

**DIERKS BENTLEY** No. Nobody was telling me that. You know. When you first. I got here and the first thing I did when I got to, the day I got here I went to the CMA, the Country Music Association and got an internship so I could kind of start learning, you know to me it's like a shotgun blast just, the more places I could be the more I could learn about the business and the town and the songwriting and the singing and the cover songs and the history and so I was kind of all over the place. But I was writing songs at that point. And yeah to your point about telling you you're a great star. You know I'm playing some songs for friends and family, they thought I was pretty good you know. I had people saying that's a good song, and I had my 10 songs in a three ring binder. Each piece of paper was inside a plastic sleeve, you know protecting my typed up lyrics. This is I'm sure everyone, you're probably familiar with this, like had my songs you know.

And I end up working for Randstad staffing organization, a temp organization, and they put me all over town. And I was working at Famous Music which is now a yoga studio on Music Row, but I remember being in there and at the end of the day I got a chance to hang out with these guys like Brett Jones and Hillary Lindsey, great songwriter, huge songwriter. This was a long time ago. They were just starting off. And I played my songs for them and they gave me the first like, well at the time it was, truly it was just honest criticism, at the time it felt like just you know they were being really harsh...

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**PETER COOPER** Body blows.

**DIERKS BENTLEY** Yeah like "I don't really get the hook." That's the worst thing you could tell a songwriter like "I don't really get the hook," or "Man it took you a really long time to get to the hook," which I kind of got. So it's like wow, you know. And then I wrote one day, not one day this was much later on, but I had a chance to write with Tony Martin, I probably told you this story before, Tony Martin's a huge songwriter and we wrote "Settle For a Slowdown," and a bunch of hits. But he would write on post it notes you know, and so each verse would fit on one post it note, the chorus was allowed to have two post it notes. These are little post it notes right. The small ones. And we'd get done writing a song, he'd take those post it notes, stack them on top of each other, we'd sing the demo, he'd wrap them around the demo tape, a little cassette tape, toss it in a drawer. Literally I remember seeing him toss it. You know this song that was, I thought was pretty amazing. All right. Should we try to write one more? You know I'm like. To me I'd been like saving my stuff, using white out if I changed a lyric. This is one of the guys destined to be in the Songwriters Hall of Fame. And I learned a lot.

And from another guy, Brett Jones taught me too. He said "you need to write about 500 songs and just put them in a drawer, and then come find me and we'll write some stuff together." And I thought he was being a real jerk, and maybe he was, but that was actually great advice to kind of remove the preciousness of songwriting. And that was a couple of great lessons. I'm not sure how we got here, but we can backtrack a little bit, but that's. So no one was telling me I was great. I had to. And I'm not. And I think being a student is the key to the whole, always being a student is the key to the whole, whole thing.

**PETER COOPER** Right, so always a student. You admittedly weren't a great student at Vanderbilt. You were a great student though at Nashville clubs like the Station Inn and this dive bar called Springwater.

**DIERKS BENTLEY** The dive-iest of dives. I mean if it rained, you'd be getting wet on stage. There was holes in the ceiling. And you know there's that Merle Haggard song, "Now there's no one to sing for but the band and they all say I'm playing grand." There's a lot of nights was singing for nobody but the band. I turned the microphone around because even the bartender walked out. There's nobody in there to begin with and the bartender went to make a phone call and it's like wow. But it was great. I loved it. It was so awesome. And we got free natural light beer. That was our pay. And that led Manny Skaggs, Ricky Skaggs' daughter, somehow the connection was made there, maybe through John Golden or somebody, but she was hostessing, working the door down on Second Avenue at a bar called Market Street Brewery. And got me in there, and I think I was the first band to even play music there. They had a little stage set up, a TV above us, which was always funny because people would start cheering for no reason and you'd realize...

**PETER COOPER** Touchdown.

**DIERKS BENTLEY** Yeah touchdown or homerun. Oh I thought it was my G run. Apparently not. But that was I mean mind-blowing just. I have a gig on Second Avenue that you know I had to load my own P.A. in every day. You know I don't know nothing about P.A. systems. I bought little 15 inch speakers and put them on sticks and I had an EQ that I made it look like a smiley face because I don't know how to EQ stuff, still don't. But you know I got it good enough. And we'd play, drink some beers, sober up, four hours later load it back in my truck, go home. It was

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the greatest deal of my life. Got paid 25 dollars a person. We had to pay for our bar tab so there definitely was a negative net income, but it was so fun.

### *“Every Mile A Memory” - Dierks Bentley (Long Trip Alone / Capitol Nashville)*

**PETER COOPER** That was Dierks Bentley with “Every Mile A Memory,” a chart-topper from 2006. Kenny Chesney has told me that he’s fine with going out in front of 50,000 people at an NFL football stadium and petrified of playing the Bluebird Cafe or the Station Inn. Which is harder for you?

**DIERKS BENTLEY** Oh man it's for sure, the smaller the venue the more intimate. You know the other night you and I were at the Ricky Skaggs, well the Hall of Fame inductees for 2018. So it was Skaggs and Dottie West and the fiddler...

**PETER COOPER** Johnny Gimble.

**DIERKS BENTLEY** Johnny Gimble yeah. That is terrifying. I mean that'd be terrifying for anybody. You look out in the crowd and see you know those faces out there, not just the musicians, singers, but the industry. Absolutely terrifying singing in front of Ricky Skaggs. But sheesh. With Garth Brooks and Chris Stapleton on the wings looking at you. But a small, just playing a small, anything I do small is always a little more intimidating. I think you get. Interesting thing about country music, there's not just one thing. You're not just like oh I'm a great, I'm a country entertainer. There's so many different levels of entertaining. And like a wedding band is. I have so much respect for a wedding band. That has such a skill. I can't do that. People want me to come to their weddings. I'm like you don't want me to come play your wedding. Unless you're the biggest, my biggest fan, and all your guests are huge fans, they know every one of my songs, I can't entertain you. You need to get someone that can do like these, that can do that. For me, you know that's, it's two totally different skill sets. And if I'm going to do one or the other I need to spend a little time prepping for them.

And what I'm really good at doing right now is, I feel like I'm really good doing right now is I bring people together. You come to my show, whether it's backstage, the people come backstage for three hours before I go on stage, you know guests, VIPs, friends, radio stations. I'm really good at hosting that and making that special for those folks. When I go out onstage, fans that I've met through the years over my music, all ages, all people, I found a way of, I'm really good at bringing the energy all together and directing it towards something really positive and inspiring, and that's, it's almost, music's more of a tool that I'm using to do this other thing. So it's. And I've gotten really good at that, I feel like. I'm really proud of that. You know it's like cups of water that have holes in the bottom of them and you constantly have to tend to them. If you're a guitar picker and you haven't played for a week, your licks are going to be flat. If I haven't done a solo acoustic gig in a while, that shows me I need to spend more time pouring some water into that cup and getting it back up to an acceptable range. And it requires constant, for some like me that's like a tradesmith, you have to constantly be working at it. It just doesn't come naturally.

**PETER COOPER** Well Dierks, a lot of your early hit songs depict this rambling, wreckless bachelor guy out on the road. And then you get married. And so, that has to change.

**DIERKS BENTLEY** Yeah, I have someone back home waiting for me. And so that added responsibility and just that person I wanted to be with too, you know I wanted to be with her. And then as a songwriter, what am I writing about? I've got to figure out you know. And just, I

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hate the attention that gets drawn to you. For me I wasn't a big fan of the whole married thing. I didn't. I didn't wear a wedding ring for 12 years. I just started wearing one this year really. Which is like, I just don't want that attention drawn to me. I used to wear like a cross necklace and people'd come up to me and be, "Oh or you're christian," I was like you ah, you know I just don't like being like lumped in any sort of like groups. I'm very independent. And I just don't like. I don't. That familiarisation that people have with you, like you don't know me. So let's. You're married, I'm married. Yeah but you don't know my life. It just was a whole turnoff for me that, people having that much like, thinking they know me because.

It took awhile. And as a songwriter trying to figure out what am I going to write about? What am I comfortable writing about? You know you start having kids, people are like, "Oh you're gonna write songs about kids." I'm like no. So it really took a while, but obviously all good things come with, through stuff like this. And with my wife and with life, I found as a songwriter like the stuff I'd been writing about before was so surface level. And now with her you know just digging in, you know roll your sleeves up and start getting your hands dirty in the real workings of life. You know it's hard to write about that stuff when you're not doing it. And for me, you know I was getting older and it's like heartache is just kind of like losing its appeal as a songwriting subject matter you know. Oh poor pitiful me, this girl broke up with me. The older me is like you're not even married man. Like it's like renting a car. You just return it and get a new one. Like there's no invested, there's nothing invested in this relationship really. Getting a little cynical about it.

But I felt like with my wife and with kids it's like wow, I was starting to get some real stuff, I was started to get more comfortable being like a man and not being a boy, and there's a lot more dirt to deal with, you know to dig into as a songwriter when you have a kid and you have a marriage and you have both lives. You still get to go out on the road and act like you're 13 years old but you come home you have these real responsibilities, and it's a real joy and real life. And so it, you know I obviously couldn't get to where I am now as an artist without having those tools to draw from.

### ***"I Hold On" - Dierks Bentley (Riser / Capitol Nashville)***

**PETER COOPER** That's the autobiographical "I Hold On" from 2013, and that's my guest on Voices in the Hall, Dierks Bentley.

Are your best songs your hit songs?

**DIERKS BENTLEY** "I Hold On" is probably one of my most important songs to me personally and it's a huge hit, a song that I wrote after my dad, started writing when my dad passed away. I wasn't even trying to write a song, I was just trying to figure out who I am, now that I'm the captain of the ship here. Why'd I hold on this old pickup truck that he gave me. And it's a big part of who I am. I just. I'm fortunate enough now to have a little spot, a little farm house. And my dad passed away and he had this terrible green lazy boy. I mean it's like the worst color green. I won't even describe it, it's terrible. And it's all worn out from you know where he sat in it. The handle lever's got a big wear and tear on it. My mom was...

**PETER COOPER** Like putt-putt green?

**DIERKS BENTLEY** Yes, putt-putt green. That's exactly what it is, putt-putt green. I wish I had, if I had my cell phone which I don't have I'd show you a picture. Putt-putt green. That's exactly what it is. And I'm like No you can't get rid of it. I'll take it. So she sent it to me on a truck to

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Nashville. My wife sees that, she's like, where's that going to go? So it's been out in the garage. Well I finally just found a great place for it in this porch in West Tennessee. But I hold onto stuff. So the song was kind of about that, why do I hold onto these things. That's probably my biggest hit that's also my most special song. But no I think like anybody that writes songs and songwriter makes albums, just always songs on there you know aren't going to be hits that're super important to you. And you always think well I'll find a way to play this in a live show, and you never do because your live show, go back to talking about Kenny and what we do in the bigger level stuff, there's just no room for. You got one or two spots for that slow kind of. You know he'll do like "She's From Boston" or something. You get one slot for that and it's like "hey, hello we came here to have a good time, like don't bore us with you're like cool indie craft songs, like play the hits."

But for me, I've been fortunate of all the hits, even songs that I'd call kind of goofy like "5150" or "Sideways," these have an important role in my overall roller coaster ride that I'm trying to take my fans on every night, they have an important role. I'm not going to go sing them alone in my house. I don't play them. I don't sing them in the shower, it's not something that I'm going to do at the Bluebird, but they are rocket fuel for a live show. So they're all important but. I think the goal of every record you make, you're trying to always just narrow that gap between what's going work in your live show and what you can pull off creatively. Like this album "Woman Amen," "Burning Man," those are both songs that I feel like are a little left of center that I, that are both big hits and big celebration party songs, party songs meaning songs that like the live show's gonna like, this is going to make people feel good singing along to. But it's doing it in a way maybe a little differently than I had in my past of like "What Was I Thinking" or "Sideways," I'm still reaching that goal at the end of like hands in the air, feeling inspired, but coming at it from a different route.

**PETER COOPER** Is it more fun now than when you were trying to make it?

**DIERKS BENTLEY** It's, the live show. Everything is just better for me. I just think I have more appreciation gratitude with every moment of my life. And certainly the show. I mean I walk out there. The sense of joy and wonder every time I hit the stage, it's. If my wife was sitting here she'd tell you it's groundhog's day everyday. I call my wife around five. I'm so tired man. I'm just. I am tired. I am really tired. OK. Call me after the show. You know. I call her after the show. Oh my god it was the best show on earth. It was so good. You wouldn't believe the crowd. I did this, they did that. Everyone did a whole wave. They were doing a wave around the stage and. Okay. I mean she has to just put up with the same situation every day. It doesn't matter how tired I am or what's going on, the second my boots hit that stage it's like electricity comes up. You know I look at that crowd, I'm just like oh my god I can't believe we're doing this. And it's a very authentic. My reactions onstage and my just being just blown away by what's going on is always, it's always authentic, and it's always, you know it's, I think it's more so than ever.

**PETER COOPER** You've done the folks who believed in you proud.

**DIERKS BENTLEY** Well I still got a ways to go. I want to make a record that you and Eddie Stubbs put in your top 50 list. So I got some stuff. I got some stuff I'm working on this year that's going to be really really exciting so.

**PETER COOPER** Can't wait to hear it.

**DIERKS BENTLEY** Yeah. Thanks man.

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**PETER COOPER** Thank you.

**DIERKS BENTLEY** Thank you.

***“Burning Man (feat. Brothers Osborne)” - Dierks Bentley (The Mountain / Capitol Nashville)***

**PETER COOPER** “Burning Man,” written by Bobby Pinson and Luke Dick, recorded by Dierks Bentley featuring Brothers Osborne, T.J. and John Osborne. It’s been a pleasure to have Dierks Bentley here on Voices in the Hall. I’ve known Dierks for nearly two decades, and he’s always struck me as one of the most committed and driven and intelligent people in Nashville. If you’re a fan wondering what he’s really like, you don’t have to wonder. He is exactly the guy you think he is, and that you would hope he’d be.

Dierks and I talked quite a bit, so there’s plenty more of Dierks at our website [Voicesinthehall.org](http://Voicesinthehall.org) and on our social channels, @VoicesintheHall. Follow us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to learn about upcoming episodes. This podcast is produced by the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum with Ben Manilla and Jennie Cataldo for BMP Audio. It was recorded by Grammy winning audio czar Alan Stoker. I’m Peter Cooper, thanks for listening, and come see us at the Museum in beautiful downtown Nashville, Tennessee.