

billboard



2/2/2016 by Chuck Dauphin

Rascal Flatts Talk Las Vegas Residency & Tour With Kelsea Ballerini

Rascal Flatts is going back to Vegas. The award-winning Big Machine trio will be returning to The Joint at Hard Rock Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas for a second, nine-show residency. Called Rascal Flatts Rhythm & Roots, the string of concerts will kick off Feb. 17.

The group recently took time to answer some questions about their return engagement to Sin City -- and the fact that one of country music's hottest newcomers will be touring with them this year.

What was something about playing Las Vegas that stood out to you?

Gary LeVox: I think it was seeing people come in from other countries -- places like Brazil, where we've never been before. Seeing their signs and knowing that they took the time to come see us in Vegas...knowing it was their first time to see us in 15 years.

You have stated in the past that kicking off 2015 by playing Vegas really got the adrenaline flowing for the rest of the year. How so?

Jay DeMarcus: We learned how to tailor our show for that venue there. It's a smaller crowd, and more of an intimate setting than we're used to over the years. It was fun for us to rein it in a little bit, pull our band guys a little closer, and do a little more of an intimate show. We carried that feeling into the summer, and found that it really worked really well -- and gave the fans a different experience than they had previously seeing us. It re-energized us. Doing the same songs for so many years, you can get into a rut, but changing it up really helped us get a new energy.

At the same time, playing in a smaller venue probably also took you back to your roots, correct?

DeMarcus: That's where we cut our teeth. We started out as a bar band. We were sometimes playing in front of 20 people. There are elements of those days that we miss. You can't manufacture the feeling of being in a small crowd and connecting on every single level to the very last person in the very last row in the back. I think when you evolve into a headlining act and things get bigger, the intimacy, and some of that energy gets lost a little bit. So being in a room like that takes you back to the days where you are feeding off of the crowd every single second. That's one of the things I love the most about performing live. When we first started out doing covers in Printers' Alley, one of the most fun things was getting to see the crowd dancing out there, and know what they wanted next. When you do an arena show, and the lights have to sync up to the sound, and the sound has to sync up to the music, and all of that -- things are really mapped out, and you lose some of that spontaneity.

When the Hard Rock called, it sounds like it was an easy decision. Even though it's just for a limited run, what is it like playing at one place for a specific time?

Joe Don Rooney: It's pretty nice. We fly in on Wednesday, and back out usually on Sunday each week. It's nice to leave your stuff in the hotel. It doesn't move, which is great. It's nice to be in a bed that doesn't move, like on a bus. They treated us so well. We got the call to come back, and it was 'Yeah, of course. We can't wait.

After the Vegas run, you will be headed back out on the road this spring and summer -- with rising star Kelsea Ballerini with you as your opening act. With her undeniable success as of late, this has to have you very excited?

DeMarcus: She's on fire right now. Looking at the people that we wanted to take out, she was at the top of the list.

Rooney: We called dibs.

DeMarcus: Her manager, Fletcher Foster, and I are really good friends. I had mentioned it to him. We're all big fans of hers, and she's such an incredible singer

and bound to be a superstar. We reached out to her, and she was kind of enough to say yes. A lot of people were trying to get her, but luckily enough, she said yes to us.

Some of the artists that have opened for you in the past read like a who's who - Taylor Swift, Luke Bryan, and Jason Aldean, just to name a few. What is something that newer artists ask you when seeking your advice?

DeMarcus: I think the thing that I get asked is how to put a show together. We live in a world that is so quick to lose people's attention, and to move on to the next thing. We live in a YouTube world, so it's hard to build something slow like you did fifteen or twenty years ago. You have to have the kind of show that keeps people interested. That's hard to do, and not something you can do overnight, particularly with these artists that come off of reality shows doing the best piece of the best song they can find. That's the challenge that a lot of artists face.

One last Vegas question.....What's something you are most looking forward to about making the trip?

DeMarcus: There's a lot of great foods, and we'll be shopping and golfing. Sometimes, Gary will go with us.

LeVox: Life is frustrating enough. Your hobby isn't supposed to put you over the edge.

Rooney: In-N-Out Burger.