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## Lady A's 'You Look Good' Tips A Hat To The '90s — And, Maybe, Maren Morris

If it's true that absence makes the heart grow fonder, it's fair to assume that "You Look Good" is Lady Antebellum's best way to convey its feelings about reuniting after a self-imposed hiatus to work on outside projects.

Its sexy lyrics, ragged feel and brassy horn parts all converge in a celebratory, New Orleans-style gumbo, as the trio cruises toward an anniversary this June: 10 years since the group's members — **Charles Kelley**, **Hillary Scott** and **Dave Haywood** — signed their first recording contract with Capitol.

"This song seems to match how fired up we are, how excited we are and kind of the innocence of how we felt back in the early days," says Haywood. "Our whole goal was to try to get back to what we felt in 2006 when we met each other."

The first single from the album *Heart Break* (due June 9), "You Look Good" is a slight anomaly on a project built predominantly around songs that Lady Antebellum wrote. The trio very deliberately took short working vacations in Rosemary Beach along the Florida Panhandle and in Los Angeles' Beachwood Canyon, near the Hollywood sign, to write songs that fit the next step in its venture. They did the first round of recording in Los Angeles with songwriter/producer **busbee** (**Maren Morris**, **Keith Urban**) at the helm. But it was only after they returned to Nashville that busbee pulled "You Look Good" out of his back pocket. As an outside song on the mostly self-written *Heart Break*, it served a specific purpose.

"We had a great collection of work," recalls busbee. "But we needed our car crash, we needed our disruptive moment, because the first single has to be disruptive. So I said, 'You guys, I want you to listen to this,' and I pushed play on the demo."

The horn parts already snaked in and out of the funk on that very elaborate demo, underneath the voice of newly signed Sony artist **Ryan Hurd**. Lady A was won over on the spot.

"This song caught us all off guard in a great way," says Haywood. "That's a testament to somebody like busbee to push us in that direction."

Busbee was intimately familiar with "You Look Good," since he and Hurd co-wrote it with **Hillary Lindsey** ("Blue Ain't Your Color," "Dirty Laundry") on May 26, 2016. Just two nights prior, busbee and Hurd had taken part in a '90s Night party at Nashville's Basement East, where **Brothers Osborne**, **Lucie Silvas**, surprise guest **Cassadee Pope** and Hurd's singer-songwriter girlfriend, the aforementioned Morris, sang a string of 20-year-old pop covers.

With the good times still ringing in their heads, the goal at the writing session was to come up with something upbeat to help fill out Hurd's album project. Busbee whipped out a squat, propulsive bassline, and the groove set the tone for the day. That sound led Hurd to the title, "You Look Good," and they collectively zeroed in on a storyline filled with fashion statements and body movement.

"We talked about walking into a club, so you're trying to paint the visual picture of what that would actually look like," notes busbee. "That doesn't leave you a lot of room. You gotta deal with what she's wearing, the colorful language, black sunglasses and all that stuff."

The inspiration, busbee suggests, was Morris herself: "As one of my friends so eloquently put it, she said, 'I feel like I sit with Ryan and write love songs about Maren, and I feel like I sit with Maren and write love songs about Ryan.'"

So we're writing about Maren, of course, because that's his love interest."

Hurd doesn't think Morris was specifically the woman in the original lyrics, though her influence was certainly felt.

"She's pretty inspirational," he says. "I'd be lying if I said that most of the things I write aren't about her. I think most of the time people take stuff from their own life and try to make it relevant to a lot of people."

The chorus is rather long — 10 lines — starting off with a "Who dat there?"

response as she walks through the door, winding its way to a "cameras in Hollywood" setup for the "You look good" hook. The "cameras" line conjures images of red carpets, glamour shots and paparazzi.

"People who actually have to deal with paparazzi don't like them, but I think it's a fun thing for an everyday girl to think about the fact that she's hot enough for someone to come take her picture in California," observes Hurd. "It's like aspirational almost. It's a fun way to say, 'You look like a celebrity.'"

Hurd sang the demo, and busbee — a former jazz trombone player — wrote trombone and trumpet parts, and enlisted New York musician **Nick Vayenas** (**Michael Bublé**, **Herbie Hancock**) to lay down the horns. Hurd ultimately decided "You Look Good" was out of place on his project, and it soon landed in **Thomas Rhett**'s camp. Rhett put it on hold, but he ultimately passed on it, leaving it available for busbee to show the band.

Within 24 hours of hearing it for the first

time, Lady A worked it up at Nashville's Blackbird Studios, though the musicians balked when busbee asked them to play a new version.

"They were like, 'Why are we rerecording this? It sounds awesome,'" remembers busbee.

The tracks may have been in good shape, but the second verse needed a re-write for Kelley and Scott to trade voices. So busbee and Lindsey cranked up a new set of lyrics, paying homage to a guy in "black faded jeans."

"Some of the stuff that we took out was very fashionable, like boyshorts, which is, I guess, a type of underwear, and then Wet N Wild lip gloss, and stuff that a girl would wear," says Hurd.

The band's vocals came together fairly easily at busbee's East Nashville studio with at least one new, subtle wrinkle. When Scott sings "I'm thinkin' everybody" in the pre-chorus, Haywood joins her in unison an octave lower. It's a blend they haven't used before — at least, not on a single.

"That was the hookiest melody," says Haywood. "The horns play that same melody in the intro, and we wanted to really accent that part."

One other vocal nuance was a last-minute fix. Late in the game, they decided to soften the original opening line in the chorus — "Damn, you look good" became "Hey, you look good," and busbee quickly assembled a small cast to overdub the one-word "Hey" as a gang vocal.

And hey, they've gotten a reaction so far. Following its release to radio on Jan. 19 via Play MPE, "You Look Good" has sped to No. 27 on Country Airplay and No. 28 on Hot Country Songs in a mere four weeks. "You Look Good" sounds so good that the reunited Lady Antebellum made that phrase the title of its tour, which launches May 26 in Bakersfield, Calif.

"That song, with the freshness of the horns, the freshness of the groove, that all just fell into place," says Haywood. "It represents how we feel as a band sonically right now." ●

