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See Lady Antebellum, Kelsea Ballerini, Brett Young Preview New Tour

"You Look Good" trio and their opening acts talk upcoming trek, riff on possible onstage collaborations



When Lady Antebellum hit the road on May 26th, the Grammy-winning trio will do so with a horn section in tow – not to mention opening acts Kelsea Ballerini and Brett Young. Ahead of their sprawling summer You Look Good Tour, Lady A's Hillary Scott, Dave Haywood and Charles Kelley gathered Ballerini and Young for a rapid-fire brainstorming session, running through possible onstage collaborations. They also sat down for our Ram Report cameras and a Q&A with host Ashley Eicher. Here's what Ballerini, Young and Lady A, who will release their album Heart Break on June 9th, had to say.

This marks the band's first major tour since you each took time for your own projects. What was it like coming together again to plan this run?

Charles Kelley: Like most tours, we want this to be an evolution of what we've done in the past. We want it to be fun. One of the main reasons we chose Kelsea and Brett was we felt like they were the new bar coming up in country and we want the best of the best. And we wanted it to be a big ol' party. And both of them are seasoned performers. We've been lucky enough to tour with Kelsea in the past and to see her grow into the rock star she's become. And Brett has always been a great singer. You've got years and years of experience. Not to say you are old, Brett [laughs].

Hillary Scott: We are coming into this new album and this tour with so much refreshed excitement ... for the three of us to have taken a little bit of a break from recording. We did play 30 shows last year, so we were never not together a lot of the time. But for the creative process, we just came in so excited and wanted to flip it on its head – every other record we've ever made and the process itself. We went to Florida and wrote with some of our friends and we went to L.A. and worked with a new producer, Busbee.

Kelley: We lived in the same house.

Scott: We did. We Airbnb'd a house together and Dave is an incredible chef and mixologist.

Kelsea Ballerini: We'll test that theory.

Scott: But it really was an incredible way to make a record.

Kelley: And I think it was really reflected in the music too. The first single "You Look Good," there's definitely an energy and a freshness to the sound. With the music tied in with this tour, we also wanted it in our openers to be two performers who really set the tone for the night. We get really lucky with our openers. A couple years ago we had Sam Hunt and Hunter Hayes out with us. We try to get these guys when they are on their way to super stardom, and Kelsea is already there and Brett isn't far behind. It's really fun to see this new crop of artists get in front of a larger audience and help bring a lot of fresh new fans to our shows as well.

Hillary, you've been a bit of a mentor to Kelsea, haven't you?

Scott: We've known each other for three years. Your 21st birthday party was a surprise at my house.

Ballerini: Yeah, she hosted my 21st birthday party with all of my friends, many that she hadn't even met yet. She just opened up her house for it.

Kelley: Well, thanks for the invitation! Must have been a girls' party.

Brett, what do you feel like you can learn from Lady A on the road?

Brett Young: At this stage, I still don't know who I am as a performer. I know what makes me comfortable, but sometimes you have to get outside of your comfort zone. I want to learn more from them about stage presence, but it is so much more than just being on stage. There are so many things that go on behind the scenes.

Scott: When we were on our first tour, we were opening up for Martina McBride and it was the first big stage we had ever had. And, to your point, that is exactly what we learned most. It was not only getting comfortable on a big stage, but it was how to treat people well and keep them happy. We always say the Martina McBride tour was like going to college.

Kelley: We want you guys to get out there and get the crowd fired up. So we try not to have too many restrictions when it comes to that. It should be a party. And we have a lot of fun backstage. We aren't one of those bands that sits on our bus all day. We pull out the ping-pong table, invite everybody in to have drink. I know we are working on some really cool moments to have these two come out on stage with us. So you are going to have to make sure when you get done, Brett, that you don't have too many drinks so that you can last. I know Kelsea is responsible, but I don't know about you [laughs].

Young: I got you, man.

Kelsea, you've known Lady A for a while now. What have you already learned from them?

Ballerini: I had the We Owned the Night tour DVD that they did. When I moved to Nashville, that's how I learned how to perform. I'd get all of these tour DVDs and watch them to learn. And theirs was one of my favorites. Then last year or the year before, when Sam or Hunter couldn't do a show, I would fill in for them. So it was the first time I got to play an arena. It was the first time I got to play a big tour like that. And it was incredible.

You're bringing a horn section on the road. What does that do to the Lady Antebellum live sound?

Kelley: We had been going back and forth on whether we have this horn section out on tour, because right now only one song, "You Look Good," really has horns in it. We started talking about all the other songs like "Downtown" that would really lend themselves to horns. And then we were like, "I don't know, maybe it's not the smartest play yet." But after the [ACM Awards performance], every person I ran in to at the after party said, "You are going to have a horn section on the road, right?" So we were like, "We've gotta do a horn section now."

Scott: Not a marching band though [laughs].

Kelley: It definitely makes us perform better. You feed off that energy. Dave and I were just talking before about what cover songs open themselves up to having this great horn section. We are going to get really creative. The next couple of months are going to be a lot of woodshedding and dialing everything in. One thing we've learned

too is we've got to do something to make it fresh for somebody who has come to our show every time we are in their town. We always mix up the set list a lot, but now adding a horn section is going to take it to the next level.

This tour has 65 shows and hits six countries, including your first-ever concerts in South Africa. How do you explain the global reach of Lady Antebellum?

Haywood: It is a testament to country music. With country music, you don't realize how global it is. We'll be doing London, Dublin, Scotland and already the response just with tickets being on sale has been phenomenal. There are so many great country fans around the world, which we had no idea until "Need You Now." Then we toured and thousands of people in all these countries are about it.

Kelley: They are loyal. When they buy into you as an artist, they really are with you on the journey. It's humbling.

You're planning some collaborations together. Anything specific locked in yet?

Scott: Well we have a lot of ideas brewing.

Kelley: We do. Hillary is a giant Beyoncé fan.

Ballerini: Who isn't?

Kelley: ["Crazy in Love"] is one we might try to work and we will see how that goes. We are going to keep thinking on some ideas. Brett has such a soulful voice, I want to try and find something. Maybe we can have a little dudes section, then a girls section and then maybe an all-sing.

How about backup dancers?

Kelley: No back-up dancers.

Scott: But we have a horn section and that's a good start.