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Lady Antebellum took a Jimmy Buffett approach to making 'Heart Break'



When the going gets tough, what do you do? You go to the beach.

That's how Lady Antebellum tackled the challenge of *Heart Break*, the superstar country trio's sixth studio album, out Friday. The usual routine in Nashville is to hunker down in studios, isolated from everything but the ticking clock and the urgency to write.

Instead, Dave Haywood, Hillary Scott and Charles Kelley decided to get away from it all and turn the project into more of a celebration than a struggle against deadlines.

"We wanted to get back to those first two records where we wrote a lot more," says Scott, 31. "So Dave had this idea: Why don't we just get out of town and go somewhere? We'd always talked about how a lot of these rock bands rent a castle or do something crazy like that."

"When you're in Nashville, somebody's got to take the kids to an appointment," says Kelley, 35. "Or you've got to go to a meeting. Something is always pulling at you. When we were able to take away all of these responsibilities, it felt like we were starting again."

"It was really refreshing to have a break to focus on the music and stay in the studio all night long," agrees Haywood, 34. "We hadn't worked together in a studio until 2 in the morning since the early days. We'd eat lunch and have big dinners at night and then hang out by a bonfire."

"We told a bunch of stories and drank way too much," interjected Kelley, smiling.

"A lot of nights, we had so much fun writing and working that we didn't want to stop," Scott adds.

Everyone also developed a new appreciation for Haywood's kitchen skills. "But Dave was the early bird, so he'd have this big breakfast and coffee laid out," says Kelly, the late-riser of the group. "Then later in the day, he'd make these great craft cocktails. It was like adult summer camp."

The importance of delivering an album beyond expectations was on everyone's mind. In the fall of 2015, the group had announced on *Good Morning America* that it would be taking a hiatus from writing and recording to

pursue solo activities. It was also important, then, to all three that they rekindle the spark set them on course 10 years ago toward seven Grammy Awards, 18 million album sales and nine No. 1 hits.

The prolonged break also allowed the band members to spend time with their young families, because as Scott told *The Arizona Republic*, "You've got to live some life to really write about it ... Giving ourselves time to be with our kids and our friends and our spouses, we gleaned a lot from those experiences and came back with a lot to say when we got back in the room together."

The room was actually a house on Florida's Rosemary Beach, lined up by Kelley's wife Cassie. They spent a week there working closely with musicians, recording techs and support staff. Most important were the songwriters who answered the group's invitation to join their adventure in creativity, which the band documented in the lyric video for the first single *You Look Good*.

They also recruited famed producer Busbee to helm the project. During a second oceanside retreat in Southern California, they began by playing the demos they'd cut in Florida. "The thing about Busbee is that he's not afraid to say 'the song's not done until it's done,'" Haywood says. "He would say, 'This could be a hit but it just doesn't sound like a Lady Antebellum hit.' That was hard to hear sometimes but we really benefited from his honesty."

If measured by the variety and depth of their music, that beach time was well spent.

"I'm just proud that we're still together, closer than we've ever been," Kelley reflects. "Not many groups can say the same thing. No matter how long we do this, how old we get and how much our lives change, at the core we're still three best friends doing what we love together."