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6 Music



RICK DIAMOND/GETTY IMAGES

If you go

**Lady Antebellum**

With Kelsea Ballerini and Brett Young on Saturday at Jiffy Lube Live. Show starts at 5 p.m. [jiffylubelive.com](http://jiffylubelive.com). \$33-\$66.25.

Also appearing on Aug. 13 at Merriweather Post Pavilion. Show starts at 7:30 p.m. [merriweathermusic.com](http://merriweathermusic.com). \$56.75-\$199.

**Charles Kelley, Hillary Scott and Dave Haywood of Lady Antebellum last month at the CMA Music Festival in Nashville. The Midas-touch trio's lead single from its new album, "Heart Break," is in the top 10 on the country-radio charts.**

BY EMILY YAHR

Over the last decade, country trio Lady Antebellum has experienced a whirlwind of success, fueled by platinum records, No. 1 singles and a monster hit with the 2009 drunk-dialing anthem "Need You Now." So the last song on the group's new album ("Heart Break"), called "Famous," might raise some eyebrows with the lyrics.

*"Damn, she's famous, everybody knows what her name is/ Kind of breaks your heart when you think about everything she gave and the life they stole away,"* Hillary Scott sings on the melancholy track. *"Looking through the lens of make believe/ Ain't a mystery why a star goes down in flames."*

The trio is quick to clarify that the song is *not* about them. They were inspired after watching "Amy," a 2015 documentary about the late "Rehab" singer Amy Winehouse. Winehouse's death — alcohol poisoning at age 27 — struck them as "incredibly sad and avoidable," according to Charles Kelley, and they wanted to write a song about the perils of mega-fame, especially as they reflected on the importance of having a support system as they became stars.

"We don't quite feel that level of fame," Kelley said in a phone in-

## HOW TO GET BACK TOGETHER

After a break, Lady Antebellum recommitted, emerging with songs it says are stronger than ever

terview. "We get the best of both worlds. We get to live this rock-star fantasy onstage and then walk off and still be able to go down to the Walmart."

True, but there's a good chance that if Scott, Kelley and Dave Haywood sauntered into a store together, they'd attract some attention. Their sixth studio album went No. 1 on the Billboard country charts when it debuted last week. And they recently kicked off a world tour, which stops by Jiffy Lube Live on Saturday and swings back around to Merriweather Post Pavilion in August.

The stakes were high for this record, arriving after Lady Ante-

bellum took a two-year hiatus. When the band members announced they were taking a break in 2015, they assured fans it was just temporary. True to their word, after working on individual projects (Scott recorded a Christian album with her family; Kelley released a solo album; Haywood got into producing), they were back together. But they knew they needed to recharge to kick off the new era.

So they came up with a plan — hit the beach. Specifically, in Florida for a two-week writers retreat, where they collaborated with some of their favorite songwriters, followed by a few more weeks in

Los Angeles, where they recorded with their producer, who goes by Busbee. With their spouses and kids back home in Nashville, they could concentrate solely on the work. They returned with about 40 new songs.

"We tried to really get back to the way we started [the band], where there was no set schedule," Scott said. "As we got used to traveling and being on the road, and our families grew, it became a little bit more of a challenge to do that."

When the three formed Lady Antebellum more than a decade ago, Kelley and Haywood were living at the house of Kelley's brother (singer-songwriter Josh Kelley), outside of Nashville. Scott would come over, and they would hang at the pool, get the guitars out and write.

"This just reminded us of that experience," Haywood said. "I feel like we tried to get back to that innocence of writing, just from a purely enjoyment place and stuff that we really believed in and loved."

As the group learned, it's much more difficult to do that when your band takes off (as Lady Antebellum did in 2008 after its self-titled debut record) and there's a significant amount of pressure from the industry to quickly follow every hit with another hit. The

band had some single misfires that didn't climb the charts, and, as Kelley once put it, the group essentially became a "machine."

Now, Kelley said, this album boasts their strongest songwriting in a long time, with such songs as "Heart Break," the pop-infused title track about taking time between relationships; and "This City," an upbeat tune about a night on the town. Those are familiar topics for the band, but this time, they pushed the boundaries with production — including the buoyant horn section on "You Look Good" (one of only two songs from outside writers), the lead single that just cracked the Top 10 at country radio.

Speaking of radio, the trio agrees that Busbee — suddenly one of Nashville's hottest producers — pushed them out of their comfort zone and encouraged them not to settle on a song because they thought it "sounded" like a radio hit. Instead, they were more careful than ever to whittle down the final selection to tracks that they truly believed in.

"We have to record music that we are all three equally passionate about, and could live or die by these songs," Haywood said. "So every song is a special moment. There's no filler for us on the record."

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