



Lady Antebellum Preview Soaring 'Wheels Up' Tour

Trio runs through their hits-heavy set and talks influence of Coldplay and Bob Seger

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Lady Antebellum perform at the ACM Awards. The trio recently previewed their upcoming Wheels Up Tour in Nashville. Kevin Winter/ACM2015/Getty Images

The big inspiration for Lady Antebellum's upcoming Wheels Up Tour? A certain British rock band with a penchant for lasers.

"We refer to Coldplay a lot," said Hillary Scott, talking to reporters after the trio gave a short preview of what their show will sound like (big hits) and look like (yes, lots of those lasers) when it hits the road in May. "They have an amazing ability to create moments."

Recreated for rehearsals inside a warehouse that, quite appropriately, looks like an airplane hanger, the Wheels Up Tour will be about highlighting the group's catalog of singles with a backdrop worthy of an arena rock band: a massive, oval-shaped stage truss and lots of spinning, darting lights. On Friday, they gave a taste of how it all will come together, running through a set of three songs plus a faux encore that included their breakthrough hit "Need You Now" and title track of their current LP, 747. On the screen behind them: a soaring plane.

"This is where you're supposed to lose your mind," Charles Kelley urged the small crowd — though he likely won't have to beg for any applause out on tour,

which makes its first stop in Lubbock, Texas. Kelley recently played fan himself at Bob Seger's show in Nashville, which prompted him to reflect on his own band's potential for "Like a Rock"-style longevity.

"Seger is close to 70," Kelley said, "He hadn't toured in a while, but it was all the way up to the rafters and I was just sitting there thinking, 'Wow, could we ever get to that point where we're in our fifties and we take five years off — when we come back, will people still be interested?' Seger, man! I was just a fan. I tried not to over-analyze it, but more than anything, just watching an act that can still get up there and kill it, I only hope that we can do that."

The trio can't resist, though, taking mental notes when they find the rare free occasion to go to another artist's concert, and Kelley is a sucker for music documentaries. "Every plane we are on, I look over and Charles is watching the Eagles documentary [History of the Eagles]," Scott laughed — the classic band's famously tempestuous relationship is about as far from Lady Antebellum's peaceful, family-friendly, Lipton-swigging one as you can get. "Either that or Fleetwood Mac."

Though Scott does admit there are times when you just want to get out and enjoy the music. Case in point: a recent Justin Timberlake gig. "That was a girls' night," she admitted. "I had some tequila and I wasn't note-taking, I was dancing along."

She also caught a night of Sam Hunt's club tour while the band was on a European leg. The "Take Your Time" singer will be an opening act for Wheels Up along with Hunter Hayes. Now that Dave Haywood has fashioned a portable studio for the road, they're hopeful for a little creative synergy along the way.

"I hope to do some [writing] with Hunter and Sam," Kelley said. "They're such amazing writers, and we just wrote a song that Hunter cut. I want to have those moments before sound check that's like, 'Hey Hunter, come check out this idea.' We might write the next big hit."

"Ideas come at any moment," added Haywood. "I'd hate for us not to have a way to put them down."

Soon it will be their tenth anniversary together, and they're putting a lot of thought into their legacy — what the future will bring, what their goals are (Scott wants to become a member of the Grand Old Opry), when they might be able to take a little time off. But one thing will remain constant: There will be no ugly fights or violent breakups.

"Our documentary," said Scott, "would be the opposite of the Eagles."