

SUMMER ARTS PREVIEW

Lady Antebellum takes flight on 'Wheels Up' tour



Hillary Scott, the lady in Lady Antebellum, admits that when it came time to hit the road for the country trio's current "Wheels Up" tour in support of its latest album, "747," she was a bit skittish. Understandably: Last month, her tour bus caught fire en route to the ACM Awards.

"Thankfully, we're all OK," says Scott, who was asleep on the bus when the fire occurred, and is grateful that her young daughter was not aboard. "The first weekend out, I'm not going to lie, it took me a good hour to really fall asleep and be at peace with where I was, even though it was a totally different bus."

But Scott, the child of a music-industry family, knows the show must go on, so she's back on the proverbial horse with bandmates Dave Haywood and Charles Kelley. The Nashville trio has enjoyed a string of hits since forming in 2006, including "Just a Kiss," "Downtown," "Bartender," and the Grammy-winning soft-country-rock crossover monster hit, "Need You Now," and is excited about playing those songs and more on a tour that comes to the Xfinity Center on May 30. The group's biggest production to date, the trek features as opening acts white-hot newcomer Sam Hunt and popular young singer, songwriter, and guitarist Hunter Hayes.

We recently chatted with Scott by phone from her home in Nashville.

Q. When "747" came out, it felt like you'd purposefully loaded it with more uptempo and charged songs to help pump up your live set.

A. Absolutely. It also makes those more dramatic songs, those more introspective, slower moments, more impactful whenever you have that balance of a good punch of energy throughout the show.

Q. Because you have to book these tours so far in advance, I'm guessing you signed up Sam Hunt before he blew up.

A. We could sense that a lot of buzz and excitement was rumbling around him, but yeah, we got him signed, sealed, delivered as quick as we could — and not just because we knew that he would be such a hot-ticket item, but because we're just such huge fans of him. Honestly, before we had confirmation he was coming out on tour with us, his record came out, and I just fell in love with it and I'd listen to it getting ready for shows. I'm such a fan of what he's doing, and thought it was so innovative and exciting and different, so for me it's like listening to my iPod.

Q. So now you can hear your warm-up music live, just by propping open your dressing-room door.

A. Exactly! It's awesome. And when you see it live, he's just got so much charisma. And Hunter is the same — he's got such an amazingly loyal fanbase. We've always had a wide range in our audience, from toddlers to grandparents; especially after "Need You Now," we got the most variety in our audience. But, I will say with Sam and Hunter on the bill, there are more younger girls coming, which is so much fun, because I look out and see a bunch of girls like me or my little sister or my friends. It makes for a really energetic audience and it's been amazing.

Q. Are you planning to play together at all?

A. Yes, we've created a couple of moments with them. We showcase Hunter and his musicianship and his vocal ability on a couple of songs, and Sam hops up for a huge cover moment. The way our set came together, it just feels like all the stars are aligning.

Q. Several albums and many singles deep, you now face the problem of how to balance new songs, hits, and deeper cuts. What's your approach?

A. What you're describing is the most challenging part about putting a set together. We will never be that band that will roll into any town, anywhere in the world, and doesn't play the songs that we know people want to hear. Because as a music fan, I would be so disappointed and just because we could doesn't mean that we should. I'm so thankful to say this, that because we've been blessed with so many singles, the majority of people know that we're going to do those, which leaves fewer slots for the new stuff, but we have created moments for them. It's definitely the most high-energy show we've ever had. We kind of just press "go," and don't stop until 90 minutes later.

Q. "She Is" from "747" is about a girl from Boston. Will you be playing that one here?

A. It's one of my favorite vocals I've ever heard Charles sing. It's not one I think we've ever performed live yet, but when we were in tour rehearsals, I was like, um, the first line of this song is "She hails from Boston" — we are playing this in Boston!