



Lady Antebellum adds frisky songs to their repertoire



Dave Haywood, guitarist/keyboardist for Lady Antebellum, readily says the kind of songs that come most naturally to the group are ballads and mid-tempo song pieces.

That has worked fine so far, transforming Haywood and his bandmates, singer Hillary Scott and singer/guitarist Charles Kelley into headliners of outdoor and arena shows, like the one the group will perform June 25 in Wheatland.

“Those were the kind of songs we tended to write a lot of, a lot of nostalgia, a lot of heartbreak,” Haywood said.

But the group's talent for writing compelling and heartfelt ballads and mid-tempo material has created one problem for the trio.

"Obviously, some of these songs are massive songs for us, and they do so well, and we love them," Haywood said, "but when you do get on a big stage, you kind of start to look at the set list over the past few years, and we've gone 'Oh wow, there's a ballad, now I guess we have to follow it with this ballad.' You kind of start hitting that wall."

Realizing that they needed to add some juice to the live show, Lady Antebellum set a specific objective for "747," its latest album: to write songs that would bring more energy of the live shows.

"We had to push ourselves, I think, out of our comfort zone a little bit more," Haywood said, pointing to the frisky song "Bartender" as an example. "It feels a little different for us, you know, as a band known a lot for 'I Run To You' and 'Need You Now' and 'Just a Kiss' and these songs, to sit there and (write lyrics that) talk about being on the dance floor and having a party, doing all these fun things. But that's what's fun."

As Lady Antebellum follows up tours of Europe and Australia with an extensive U.S. run in support of "747," Hayward is already seeing the difference from the stage.

"I do think for the first time in Lady A history, we've really paced out a show that is really, I mean, the ballads become some of those big moments because there are so few of them now," he said. "And there is such an exciting pace and energy to the show, because we've got (uptempo) songs like 'Bartender' and 'Long Stretch of Love,' 'Freestyle' and a lot of those songs from the new record that are able to carve out a great set list. ... which is a lot more high-energy and on-your-feet. It feels a lot more like a Lady A party this year."

Of course, this still leaves the question of how the friskier songs on radio. So far the results are mixed. "Bartender" did well, reaching No. 4 on "Billboard" magazine's Hot Country Songs chart, but "Freestyle" stalled out at number 24, a rarity among Lady Antebellum singles.

Otherwise, Lady Antebellum has been one of the most consistent hitmakers in country over the past seven years. Its four previous albums have produced a half dozen No. 1 singles on the Hot Country chart (including "Need You Now," which won the 2011 Grammys for Song of the Year and Record of the Year) and a handful of top 20 singles.

Nearly all of the hits were produced by Paul Worley, but for the deluxe edition of Lady Antebellum's fourth album, "Golden," the group had Nathan Chapman

(known for his work with Taylor Swift) produce the song "Compass," which became a top 10 hit.

Lady Antebellum decided to stick with Chapman for "747," but Haywood emphasized that this was no knock on Worley.

"I'd never want to say anything bad about Paul because we have all the intention to continue to work with Paul," Haywood said. "We got a taste of working with Nathan, and I think we caught a bug of the excitement that he really shares. Nathan is very, I think, very unique and special in the fact that he is just like a little kid in the candy store in the studio. He is so excitable, and it's infectious. And that was fun. We really latched onto that and wanted to pursue that. Really I think the moment we were at in our career lined up with the moment that works for what his sound is as a producer."

LADY ANTEBELLUM

What: Wheels Up 2015 Tour with Hunter Hayes, Sam Hunt

When: 7 p.m. Thursday, June 25

Where: Toyota Amphitheatre, 2677 Forty Mile Road, Wheatland

Cost: \$32-\$204

Information: ladyantebellum.com