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Concert Review: Lady Antebellum show helps secure the Amp's spot as TO's country venue

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IMAGE: LADY ANTEBELLUM

If it hadn't been clear beforehand, it was made plainly evident on Thursday night: the Molson Canadian Amphitheatre has become one of Toronto's premier country music venues. Though often associated with hip hop thanks to Drake's annual OVO Festival, the Amp has tapped into a fervent audience of cowboy hat-wearing, plaid-clad country boys and gals of late. This led to the creation of a [Country Mega-Ticket](#), something of a season's pass for country fans.

The latest show in the series took place Thursday night when Lady Antebellum came to town on their Wheels Up 2015 tour. On a nice, warm night by the lake, the likable Nashville trio of Hillary Scott, Charles Kelley and Dave Haywood was greeted by a vocal, energetic capacity crowd of almost 15,000 fans over a fun two-hour performance.

Before Lady A, as they're popularly known, even took the stage, the crowd warmly received a pair of opening act rising stars in Sam Hunt and Hunter Hayes. While both young talents have some growing to do in terms of performance, Lady Antebellum showcased what it takes to be a headliner with a crisp, polished set with an array of familiar hits (to the country crowd, anyway) separated out by a smattering of interesting covers. The band stayed true to their roots in covering Fleetwood Mac's "Landslide", offered up a local nod with Shania Twain's "Any Man of Mine" and served up some

diverse stylings with Ed Sheeran's "Thinking Out Loud".

Lady Antebellum's hits certainly struck the right note with their sing-along-happy fan base, none more so than an early offering of "Hey Bartender" and radio favourite "Need You Now", which came during a three-song encore. The biggest crowd buzz, though, were inspired by the band's mid-show stroll down the far right and left aisles of the Amp. Even in a setting so near the heart of downtown Toronto, there was an undeniable country vibe to the night, just as there was two weeks ago when Darius Rucker performed and just as there surely will be in the coming months as Tim McGraw, the Rascal Flatts and Jason Aldean arrive at the Amp. The open-air venue creates an environment that is alternately relaxed but also fervent and impassioned, allowing fans to dance to their heart's content on the lawn or listen to the show while over-looking the lake and the skyline as they sip a beer.

On Thursday night, Lady Antebellum caught a nice weather break and were clearly able to make the most of their surroundings. It was, however, the support of a lively country crowd that really enabled Lady A to "own the night".