

THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

Lady Antebellum hits all the right notes at Go Fest

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The title of Lady Antebellum's latest studio release, "747," could easily refer to the Nashville trio's soaring career trajectory since the late 2000s as it steadily racked up chart-topping singles, albums and awards. Seeking to change things up a bit, members included several new songs that utilize pop-oriented programming and loops without being a major departure.

The group devoted half of its stellar 22-song set at Saturday's sold-out, seven-hour-long Go Fest at Irvine Meadows to "747" and its quadruple platinum 2010 album, "Need You Now."

The event, put on by L.A. radio station Go Country 105 FM, paired one of this year's hottest country music tours with up-and-comers on a side stage, line dancing, plus moonshine and Western wear vendors.

Starting with the stomping "Long Stretch of Love," all three members of Lady Antebellum walked onstage in unison and displayed some supple harmonies. The crowd immediately went crazy for the fun and hedonistic, laser-lit "Bartender."

When Hillary Scott sang "nothing's sweeter than summertime" during the comforting acoustic-based "American Honey," it couldn't have felt truer. She and co-lead singer Charles Kelley brought their usual intense dramatic delivery to "Just a Kiss" as a sparkling sky scene was projected onto the backdrop screens. Later, their connection proved equally riveting during "I Run to You" and the encore selection "Need You Now."

A spirited "Compass" had an appealing homey feel with prominent banjo and guest mandolin work by main stage opener Hunter Hayes. He remained onstage to lead "Where It All Begins," a great new song they all wrote and recorded together that recently entered the country singles chart.

Kelley provided a brief history of Lady A before performing the fervent rocker "Love Don't Live Here" (the group's first hit in '07). Then he, Scott and Dave Haywood headed to the B stage for an acoustic mini-set, including the tender "One Great Mystery," a sweet "Dancin' Away With My Heart," a cover of Ed Sheeran's "Thinking Out Loud" and an a capella bit of "Hello World." The slinky grooving "Downtown" was a highlight. Scott fared well during a feisty take on Shania Twain's "Any Man of Mine." Hayes and fellow opener Sam Hunt joined everyone for "Walk This Way." Hunt handled lead vocals on the raucous Aerosmith tune and almost got lost in the rapid fire wordplay.

"We Owned the Night" was an apt choice to close the lively proceedings.

Hayes immediately preceded Lady Antebellum. His engaging hour-long set was mostly a high-energy affair. The young, charismatic singer and guitar whiz kicked things off with a breezy "Tattoo," pogoed with his band and barely paused between songs. A circuitous "Storm Warning" and an extended "Somebody's Heartbreak" (containing some call-and-response action with the keyboardist) were winning showcases for Hayes' impressive fretwork.

The darkly intense rocker "Secret Love" was a standout, as were new songs like the poppy, insanely catchy "21" and "Young and in Love." While the earnest piano ballad "Invisible" (and heartfelt intro by Hayes) prompted some snide comments from a few older male concertgoers, the song has an important message for kids. The buoyant closer, "I Want Crazy," prompted young females in the audience to loudly sing along.

Hunt's set included an odd mix of acoustic guitar mixed with hip hop during "Single for the Summer"; the edgy rap rock of "Breakup in a Small Town" was even odder. But the energetic country chart topper "Leave the Night On" went down a storm.

Among the side stage acts in the concourse area, a giddy Cam was delightful. Performing songs from her new Arista Nashville EP, the Long Beach native often reminded of a young Dolly Parton and received an enthusiastic reaction from the crowd.

Amie Mangola's ballad-heavy country set was pleasant enough but really didn't kick into gear until the Jimmy Buffett-style "Tequila and a Broken Heart." Earlier, Mo Pitney had a style that brought to mind an edgier Randy Travis. He did a mildly engaging tune about meeting Merle Haggard and a passable cover of Cheap Trick's "I Want You to Want Me."