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INSIDE LADY ANTEBELLUM'S 'FEARLESS' NEXT CHAPTER: THREE NEW BABIES AND A LABEL CHANGE (EXCLUSIVE)



"We just knew we needed a change."

After more than a decade together, "change" has presented itself in many forms for Lady Antebellum. Presently, Hillary Scott is describing the band's exit from its longtime label home of Capitol Nashville in favor of Big Machine Label Group, which on Friday released their new single, "What If I Never Get Over You."

"There was so much change going on in our personal lives and we just started to feel like we really needed something different," Scott tells ET in a recent interview, addressing the transition publicly for the first time.

Musically, that has manifested in "a very artistic season and a very fearless season for the band," according to Charles Kelley. But when it comes to the biggest change since their 2008 debut, the trio agrees (emphatically) that it's their families.

Between them, Scott, Kelley and Dave Haywood are parents to six children, three of whom were born following the release of their 2017 album, Heart Break.

"I think I've learned that I have to work smarter and not harder," says Scott, who is a mother to 5-year-old Eisele and 1-year-old twins, Emory and Betsy. "My time and my heart is divided with three children. But I would say, creatively, I feel like my heart grew times two."

In her songwriting, Scott has found herself taking stock in the messaging behind her music. In raising daughters, she says, she aims to empower them to fearlessly exhibit both strength and vulnerability.

Deep in the trenches of her fourth trimester with two newborns, Scott was moved last year to write about the internal struggle that is so often sparked by the beautifully, deceptively curated world of social media.

"There's a song that I wrote when my babies were eight weeks old called, 'Let It Be Love.' It's really inspired by them and just how we fight within ourselves with all of the things that we have going on in our day-to-day life," she says. "Whether it's comparing yourself to someone else on Instagram, so you're dealing with envy or comparison, or you have anger towards someone or something -- all of these feelings that we have are OK and important to feel. But at the end of the day, you want to cover all of that with love [and] meet everybody in love, human-to-human, knowing that all we want as human beings is to be seen, known and loved."

Matters of the heart reign supreme in Lady A's catalog and the first taste of their forthcoming full-length offers comfort in aching familiarity.

"It just sounds like the essence of the band," Kelley says of the single, a mid-tempo ballad in which he and Scott trade heart-wrenching post-breakup verses. The band will perform it during a Facebook Live stream on Friday at 7:30 p.m. ET/4:30 p.m. PT in front of an intimate group of hand-selected fans, shortly before they hit the stage for their Our Kind of Vegas residency at the Palms Casino Resort in Sin City.

"If I had to say what are songs that represent the band the most, I'd put, 'Run to You,' 'Need You Now' and now this, 'What If I Never Get Over You,' right at the top of the list," he muses.

Ironically, "Never" is one of only two songs cut for the next LP (so far) that was not written by the band. Those credits belong to Sam Ellis, Jon Green, Ryan Hurd and Laura Veltz. Still, the Dan Huff-produced record is undeniably Lady A -- and that's not by accident.

"This song, initially, was [written from] a male perspective," Kelley reveals. "That's one thing we always love to utilize, if we can, is that dual male vs. female perspective. There was something that made it a little bit more heartbreaking that both sides were feeling the same thing because I do think that happens. ... Both people are kinda remembering it and romanticizing it in a way."

It's the same duality that runs parallel to the very first, fateful song that brought the group together.

"All We'd Ever Need," featured on Lady A's self-titled debut, was the first song Scott, Kelley and Haywood ever wrote together -- and it was intended for a solo Scott.

"It started out as a female lead and then we went in to do a demo of it and I'm like, 'Charles, put your vocal on the second verse,'" Scott relays. "From the very beginning, truly before we were a band, that was the first song that really led to us becoming a band."

Kelley, quick to cut through the weight of any situation, proclaims: "We were trying to write a song for Hillary. We knew she was gonna be famous. She just decided she wanted to split things three ways, so we said, 'Sounds good to us!'"

Scott, with an easy smile from years of banter, replies: "It's way more fun in groups."

Behind any good group is a great team. With this album, Lady A has joined Big Machine Label Group and, in a way, made it a homecoming.

"It's very familiar," Scott says of reuniting with BMLG president Jimmy Harnen, formerly of Capitol Records.

"He worked our first couple singles there," Scott says. "So in a lot of ways, [Big Machine] feels super homey." (Beyond that, Harnen previously worked with Scott's mother, then a DreamWorks recording artist, Linda Davis, when Scott was a child.)

"They've really reenergized us as a band," Kelley praises the BMLG team, "and gave us the confidence to chase down the art knowing that they can control the rest. They say, 'We've got it. We'll get it out there. You just concentrate on the art and let us do our job.'"

"And really encouraging and reminding us, 'Be the most you. Be the most authentic version of yourself as a band,'" Scott echoes. "That's the most freeing thing in the world as creatives. To be like, 'Oh, we can go do exactly what we feel is the most true to us in this process and we have their full support,' which is amazing."

At the core of Lady A's success, though, is their support of one another.

"It's like a marriage," Haywood says of their secret to longevity. "You're always working on compromise, listening to others and finding a common voice. I do think we're very lucky that we get along so well and genuinely love hanging out. When we're off, we're all at the beach together and hang out. We genuinely have a great time getting to do this with each other."

That's not to say that expanding their families hasn't presented its own set of new challenges.

"We used to, at the drop of a hat, say, 'All right, let's write a song. I got an idea. I'll see you in 20 minutes,'" Kelley recalls. "Now, you have to have a schedule in a little bit of a way. It doesn't mean that doesn't happen, those spontaneous moments, but you have to be deliberate with it."

"It's kinda just adulting," Scott chimes in.

With their new project, the band is prepared to embark on previously uncharted territory -- welcoming another artist into the fold. While they previously sang with Stevie Nicks on an alternate version of their song, "Golden," and lent their harmonies to pal Darius Rucker's hit, "Wagon Wheel," Lady A has never recorded a proper collaboration for one of their own albums. Kelley says that the timing is right and he has some "feelers" out among friends.

"This is the first time where we wrote a song that's just screaming for a collaboration," Scott elaborates. "So now we're racking our brains as to who's going to be the right fit. We're going back and forth between wanting it to be a really classic legendary country artist or maybe someone newer who we're really great friends with, and it would feel really natural."

For now, Lady A is focused on promoting their new single and will re-enter the recording studio this summer to finish up the full length. They've cut six tracks so far and plan to play them for fans attending their Las Vegas residency and this summer's festival and fair circuit.

"This has been a way more personal process, especially from the songwriting standpoint," Kelley says of the new tracks. "It seems like the last record, we started really touching on some things and some honesty between us, the three of us as band, and what we want out of this career."

"Even since then, there's been even more crazy highs and lows that we've gone through as a band and in our personal life and I've definitely come out the other end with a much stronger connection with my spirituality and just an awareness of who I am," he continues. "There's a lot of songs other than the single that really do kinda dig into that. It's definitely kind of a layer is pulled back of us, the three of us, a lot more honest songwriting. I'm really excited for people to hear that."

Scott describes the new collection as "passionate."

"There's songs that are really light, having a great time, hanging out with your friends, being who you are, and we're fiery and passionate about that," she says. "And there's other things that we talk about that are a lot more introspective, more raw, more revealing about the ins and outs of who we are and our struggles, that I think everyone will hear eventually and be like, 'Man, I've been there too.'"

"I mean, I think that's what music does. That's what music is. It's such a therapy and it truly is that for us," she concludes. "I think being bold and fearless in that with this album is really exciting."