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Q&A



Q&A: HILLARY SCOTT

Hillary Scott and her Lady Antebellum bandmates Charles Kelley and Dave Haywood returned to touring, in support of latest album *Heart Break*, in 2017 after a much-needed hiatus, and spent last summer on the road before Scott returned to Nashville in October to accept a CMT Artist of the Year Award. She spoke with *Las Vegas Magazine's* Matt Kelemen by phone in advance of the trio's 15-date *Our Kind of Vegas* residency at the Pearl Theater inside Palms Casino Resort.

I just became your 566, 001st follower on Instagram.

Well, thank you! (laughs)

You go in a much more personal direction (on Instagram) rather than use it as a publicity platform. It seems like it's your communication to fans about how much ...

Absolutely.

... with some boundaries, you want to bring them into your personal life, a little bit.

Yeah, you kind of hit the nail on the head. I feel like it's a way to engage in a conversation and be a little bit more personal. In the beginning I went back and forth in my head, and honestly my heart, about whether I wanted to have a personal public Instagram page, because we have one for the band, and that's where you get new info about new music, where we're playing shows and all things Lady Antebellum, but I felt there's things I'm interested in and other people are. Obviously being a momma, I think there's a lot of people that relate to parenthood in general, and just trying to be authentic as I can be in my personal and professional life. Like this morning, I literally Insta'd a story that I'm drinking celery juice every morning. (laughs) There's other, more exciting people to follow, but you'll get my real life.

It's authentic without being so intimate that it allows people to be voyeuristic.

I really try to be intentional about what I post and what I don't. With little children in my house that I'm in charge of raising into good humans, there's definitely some boundaries there and I know there have been some moments when I have skirted that line a little too closely, but it's one of those things, like, we're all works in progress. That's my heart. Most of time, every day, we are all the same. We're all struggling with the same stuff and celebrating the same stuff, just in all walks of life. It's just been a way to ... engage.

Where are you calling from? Do you live in Nashville?

Yes, I do. I'm actually calling you from my car. I'm heading to my first writing appointment, with Charles and Dave, of 2019. So I'm heading to the songwriter's house, to the studio, and we're gonna hopefully get a great song today to put on our new record.

So you're getting some creative time between now and the residency, before things get crazy here.

We are. We're really trying to be as productive as we can, also wanting to take advantage of cold days here in Nashville with not much to do and kind of being refreshed after the holidays. Feeling refreshed, it's nice to get in and get creative because that process works a lot different for us from year to year as our families grow. We actually have three days in a row this week that we're going to write. It's fun. I feel like I walk out of my house and I put on that hat, and now the drive and talking to you, I just basically get to just dream and envision what our inspiration's going to be. What are we gonna talk about? So it's really going to be kind of fun.

You're refreshed after the New Year, and it feels like a blank slate. That's an optimal time to be getting together in an organized way like that.

Knowing we've got these shows in Vegas coming up, imagining ourselves in the live environment, definitely affects the way we write a song. It's been really fun to have that in mind and, as these songs we've been collecting and writing and over the last year are coming together, what we're missing in that pile. And actually, we're going to be able to be in the studio just before our residency there, so it'll be nice to have that experience too. We find ourselves creatively inspired when we have several things going at once. I find myself personally, if I know we're about to go on tour or play a bunch of shows, it's fun to get creative in the writing room or in the studio. ... It was a lot easier to do that in years past because with the list of priorities of our families and our children it's few and far between, but man do I love it when we have it. This week is really going to be something special.

You're fortunate in the way that you're all in sync with your vision.

Oh my gosh, yes! There's a push and pull to that that's really healthy, I think, and we're trying to just be open communicators and knowing that there are ... my twin girls are almost 1. They'll be 1 at the end of the month, and my daughter is five, and my bandmate Charles, he has a son that's almost 3, and then my other bandmate Dave has a son and daughter that's almost 1. We're kind of in that place where the years are flying by with our kids, but we love what we do and we're trying to stay creative and do good business, and enjoy our career. I

feel this season we're in where we have babies at home is just so short. ... Thankfully we give each other grace and patience, and know we're going to look back in this season and it's going to look like a blink. Creatively it's going to have an immediate effect.

You hinted at the residency enabling a creative conduit between Las Vegas and Nashville. Are you going to have musicians and artists that are not as above the radar as Las Vegas audiences are used to coming in and playing with you?

We have been brainstorming ideas for months, and one idea that we really are going to bring to life at our show is ... the three of us started as songwriters. Dave and Charles started writing together back in 2005 and we started the band in 2006, but before the band we were just three songwriters that loved the process of crafting a song and loved writing together. I don't know if it will be every single show, but several of them, a majority of them, we will be bringing out a co-writer, a friend of ours, and show the work that we've done with them, and just show a little bit of the process of what it's like. ... In the awesome Ed Sheeran documentary (*Songwriter*) that just came out in the last few months, he shows you kind of his process of writing. It's amazing. It feels like you're a fly on the wall, and we want to showcase our friends that we love, that we have created, that we feel are so talented, and let everybody in that room know every night know their place and know their voice, and know their story. That's how it started for us, and I would say even after all these years as artists, we consider ourselves songwriters first. That's a huge part of the show.

I was going to ask you next how you would distinguish from other residencies, but you just answered that.

That moment is definitely going to be a huge part of the show. It's just a gift to be planted in one place several days at a time over the course of four months. I'm sure every artist you've ever interviewed says the same thing. Just the consistency that brings from the standpoint of the stage, but every single night the crowd is different. From a logical standpoint, from a staging standpoint, that there's such security staying in the same place for several days at a time. You get so comfortable. The only experience I've really had in that was when I first started performing. I was in junior/senior year of college and I did a family Christmas show with my parents, with my mom Linda Davis, who's a country artist, and my dad (Lang Scott). My little sister at the time was like 4 years old. We did that together. It was a lot more shows in a row, having the same stage and the same room. I'm definitely looking forward to that. ... We're definitely going to have that more intimate behind-the-scenes songwriter moment, but our songs over the years that people know, like high energy, we're going to have the balance. The big moments are going to be really big, and the moments that are small and intimate, more up close and personal, we want you to feel like you're in our living room.

I imagine you've has a vision of what the four Scott-Tyrell girls. (Scott has three daughters, including twins that turned 1 last month, with former Lady Antebellum drummer and current dedicated dad Chris Tyrell.)

Yes! (laughs) I've been doing a lot of Googling about what to do in Vegas with children for sure, because we're gonna be able to be there as a family. It's going to be a different experience, but I will say having us all together is the best. It's honestly the healthiest for us, it's the best for everybody, and I'm excited for them. They get to explore a new place. The girls, my twins, have traveled a good bit on the bus but they haven't been out west yet. I'm really excited for them to see new weather, new ... even the geography, the topography. Just seeing the way Vegas looks so different than when they go out on their front porch.

Until Vegas I had never been to a place where you can go outside and do a 360 and see mountains everywhere.

One of my favorite hikes I've ever taken was in Vegas. It's got so much to offer. Between our shows we have a few days off here and there. We might road trip over to Hoover Dam, maybe pop over to Disneyland for a day. There's a just a lot of opportunity to just explore, and bring them along for the ride. I'm really excited.

Has there been talk of using the Studio at the Palms?

Yes. Oh my gosh. We don't have anything locked in, but knowing that's there is such a luxury. Because we're having writers as part of show, we'll be writing with them during the day on some of those dates that we have with them, so knowing there's a great spot we can go and bring it to life in the studio is awesome. I'll be curious to see how many times we end up using it.

You're going to a songwriting powwow right now with the apprehension of coming to Vegas, then you'll have whatever creative spark coming out of playing live here.

Absolutely. Yeah! I'm a firm believer that all of the things that you just mentioned are for a purpose, and all of those things that are lining up, it's all a part of the story of this album and how it's all coming together. Looking for those possibilities, those opportunities, is definitely like ... we can't wait. We really can't.

Do you have a target date for a new album release?

We're really early in the process. We haven't even put one note to tape. It's very fresh and new, but we're definitely wanting new music—a single in the first half of the year, and then a record, if all goes well, by the end of the year.

So last year was mainly about getting back on tour and being on the road.

Last year was about playing shows, yes, the live environment and truly kind of figuring out, at least for me, how to have a family of five and find my pace, my boundaries, all of those things. It's ever evolving. And just wanting to play shows and continue to nurture our incredible fans and the relationship we have with them, but then also do what we feel comfortable doing, really reestablishing the new chapter. We made a label change. We really dug in together as a band and worked on our communicating and listening to each other, speaking up and all of those things. It was a year of growth, for sure. Physical growth in numbers (laughs) and also just looking ahead and trying to really take care of our business well, take care of others well, and be creative as best we could in the process.

When you try to write a song early on and it doesn't come out the way you heard it in your head it might be frustrating, and then when you accept that as the path leading to the song, then I think you're an artist.

I agree, absolutely. It's funny, to go back to that Ed Sheeran documentary, one of the things he said that really stuck out for me in that was he went back to his old high school and was talking to some of the students there in a music class, and they were asking about songwriting, all these things, and he goes "I just encourage you when you are writing a song, even if you know it's bad, finish it." His whole point is you gotta get that out. You gotta purge that out even if you know it's going to hold up to the rest of your material, to make room for the brilliance, for what's next. For the song or songs that are gonna be the special ones.

The process is the path and the path is the process.

Yeah, and I just love that. It's really stuck with me since I watched that. Even going into a writing appointment, whether it's today or next month, it's kind of freeing to know. Just push through, whatever it is. Embrace it, and be present in it. Creating for a living is such a gift. It really is.

I just saw a photo of you and the band in a huddle, with the caption indicating you were creating the set. How did you distinguish it from the nearly 20-song set from the summer tour?

My bandmate Charles, I have to say, is so unbelievably gifted at set lists, and just pacing of shows, and so I kind of let him take the lead on that. We all collaborate together to solidify it all, but initially, at least the first couple of rounds, I just him take it and run with it, because he's great at it. He really is. ... You want to come up with something that people can really sink their teeth into and bring that energy up, but then you also want to tell a story and kind of take them on a journey. We are going to shoot for doing that to the best of our ability, especially because of the environment we're in. Because it's a small theater, it's going to be more up close and personal.

You chose songs to cover on the last tour like "Strawberry Wine," "Honky Tonk Women" and "Landslide." Are you bringing new covers into the mix?

We are. We go into rehearsal in about a week and a half. We have our list of "let's see how these go, let's try these out." We've not landed on any yet, but we can't play a show top to bottom and not sing a song that's been sung and written by our biggest influences. That's such a part of why we're here, because of our influences that inspired us and came before us.

I can see Darius Rucker joining you onstage. He has a pretty big presence in Vegas and you toured with him (during the summer), but do you think some of those covers might bring out some other guests. Have you thought about doing "Does He Love You?" (A No. 1 duet by Reba McEntire and Davis on the *Billboard* Hot Country chart in 1993.)

That is a great question. We joked for years that it would be really awkward for Charles and I to sing that together, but because – actually because you just asked me that I thought "Reba's in Vegas with Brooks & Dunn." That could be really awesome. ... I got to sing that song with Reba early in our career, which was so surreal. We opened up for her in Bloomington, Ill., and it was such a full-circle moment because of the years my mom and dad were both in Reba's band, and my mom had that duet with Reba that was so successful – one of the greatest duets of all time, in my opinion. To be able to sing that with her was awesome. Yeah, you just totally planted a seed.

My initial thought was maybe your mom would come out as a guest and maybe sing that with you. Both of them could be there.

That would be awesome. I know my mom and dad and my sister, they're coming out in February for a couple days to catch the show and just kind of hang out as a family on a couple of days off. So she'll be there. I feel like she's probably going to take the show in as a mom, but I also know she's where I got the performing bug so if I ask her she'll be like "Heck yeah, I'll show up."

What can you reveal about production and stage design? Are you turning the Pearl into Nash Vegas?

If you look at all the promos for us, like the main photographs of us. It's a little bit dressier, a little bit more formal. I would say it's got an art deco feel. It's gold and black and really clean lines. It's going to be beautiful, but because of it being such an intimate environment, a smaller space, we're not going to overfill it, but the things that are in there will have great purpose and be really suitable.

Was curating a wardrobe for the show a major bonus? I imagine there will be a few costume changes.

Yes. I'm so excited. I have a stylist, Ilaria Urbinati. We're collaborating with Alice + Olivia for my wardrobe and I'm super excited. My fitting is on Friday. I'm just pumped to wear beautiful clothes, make a couple of costume changes, and getting to work with them is just amazing.

Can you describe the first time you brought your voices together in harmony? What was it like? Did you feel magic right away?

When we wrote together for the first time, there was just a really natural, organic connection, and then our voices. We put them together and harmonized together ... that blend, it either works or it really doesn't. You just never know, and when you're writing it doesn't really matter because if you're writing for other artists they're going to hear that song, and they're going to hear it in demo form, but they're gonna go and make it their own. For us, it was like we were writing, we were just putting out vocals down, like we don't know where the song is going to end up, but when we listened back we were like, "Man!" And then with Charles and my voice kind of trading off lead vocal, and then Dave harmonizing on the low end, it just worked. It meshed and had this blend that was bigger than us, that felt so divine, like a divine purpose. It was just magic. It felt like magic, and so we knew that we had something special.

Congratulations for winning your own CMT artist of the year award.

Thank you. (Carrie Underwood, Miranda Lambert, Kelsea Ballerini, Maren Morris, Karen Fairchild and Kimberly Schlapman also received the honor in October.)

That was mainly due to the 2016 album your family collaborated on with you, right?

Yeah, and I think CMT wanted to really wanted to showcase the women in country music, and so it was neat to be celebrated as a part of Lady A, being the woman in Lady Antebellum. It was awesome. It was such a night of celebrating female artists in country music, and how you can be healthy and beautifully competitive without being comparative, and still being your own person, your own artist and true to yourself. I think it was incredible for CMT to showcase and shine light on that fact, the fact that we root each other on and celebrate that we're all really strong, powerful women getting to do this for a living, but that we're all different too, and that's awesome. That's cool.

In video of you guys singing to Reba McEntire at the Kennedy Center Honors last month, the cutting between you and Reba says it all right there. I don't know if you went back and saw that, but the editing that they created a symbol of that celebration and bond between women country artists.

Thank you. Thank you so much for saying that.