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Next Big Thing: Lanco set to close huge 2018 with a bang



Lanco packed more into 2018 than most bands — and, of course, has two months left on the calendar. And yet the year has passed quick. Drummer Tripp Howell called it “one of the most incredible whirlwinds in our lifetime.”

“We went from guys, four or five years ago, working terrible jobs and practicing in a warehouse to the last two years, especially, have just been nonstop,” Howell said. “... It’s what you want. It’s what you sign up for.”

The young-gun country act — whose members represent a true survey of the South, hailing from Georgia, Kentucky and Tennessee — owns numerous markers of success. Its single “Greatest Love Story” was certified double platinum last month. The band has earned Academy of Country Music and American Music Award nominations, and is up for vocal group of the year at next month’s Country Music Association Awards. And yet, for Howell, Lanco’s most exciting development is one many young artists prize.

“People are singing our songs really loud — and excited about it,” he said. “... That’s all we wanted to do, set out to build a culture around Lanco. And we’re starting to do that. We’re starting to see the fruits of that labor.”

The best adjective for the Lanco sound is big. Big hooks courtesy of frontman Brandon Lancaster. Big drums from Howell's hands. Big energy as the band's five members play as one. Especially live, the band takes cues from rock acts like its friends in Cage the Elephant. But its songs have an undeniable sense of setting.

"We've always been attracted to that aspect of rock 'n' roll," Howell said. "But we're from the South, so we write these songs about ... what we grew up with or what we're a part of, and trying to describe our geographical location."

Passion and energy drives the Lanco sound. Howell admitted he couldn't recount the exact specifications of his drum set — but he can play it with fervor. That zeal is what he heard in the band's early practices, and what brings him back to Lanco night after night.

While most of the cuts on the band's debut, "Hallelujah Nights," reach for the rafters, at least one hints at a more interesting future for Lanco. The closing title track stretches out over nearly six minutes, Howell sparking its crackling grooves and framing vocals that range from spit-fire to soaring. The chorus fits indie-rock and pop-country together in a pleasing call to *carpe diem*. Synth hits and a heartland jam reminiscent of a modernized John Mellencamp differentiate the song from the rest of the album and its greater pack of peers.

During one of many 9 a.m. to 3 a.m. marathon studio sessions, "Hallelujah Nights" emerged around 1 a.m., Howell said. The blissed-out coda was a purely creative moment, he said, one free of calculation as the band let its collective gut guide it.

As the band steamrolls to the end of a watershed year, it continues to refine those gut instincts, letting its experiences bend and shape the band's personal and musical mettle. A headlining tour, which opens in Columbia, comes on the heels of a serious run with established acts Dierks Bentley and Brothers Osborne.

Lanco has been happy to learn at the feet of Bentley, a platinum seller with a heart of gold. From his example, they have seen what it takes "to be a good person on the road," treating everyone from crew members and fellow musicians to venue security with respect.

In Bentley's relationship to his audience, Howell has also witnessed, on a grander scale, the same exchange of energy that drives him and Lanco forward.

"There's 17,000 to 20,000 people singing his songs back every night — and he's connected with each one of them," he said.