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MUSIC

Lady Antebellum Illuminate Their 'Emotive Storytelling' on 'Ocean' Album: Review



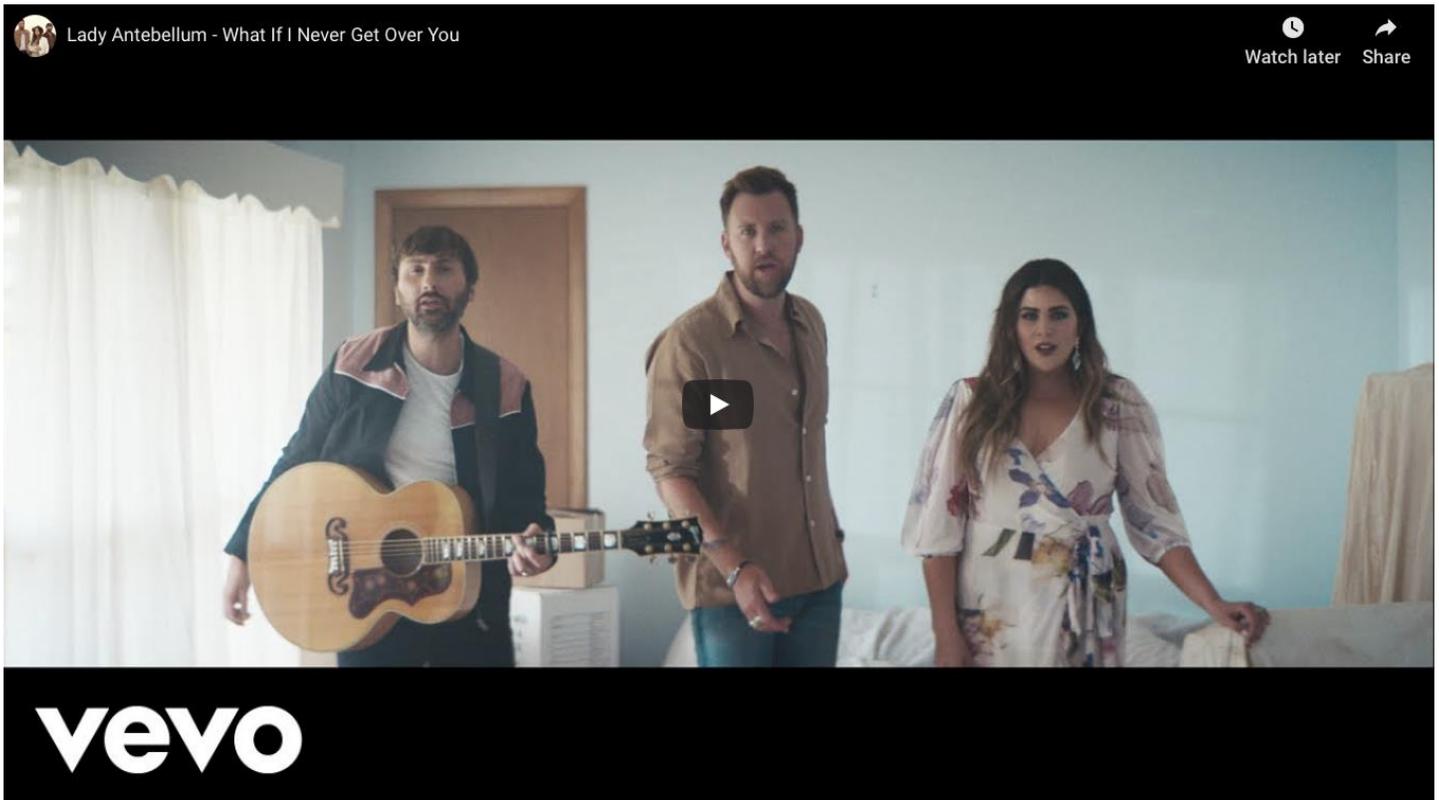
Sometimes change is good. After seven studio albums and 11 years with Capitol Records Nashville, Lady Antebellum are starting with a clean slate. Their latest, [*Ocean*](#) (out Friday, November 15), feels like a warm welcome home for the storied country group, who signed to a new label, BMLG Records, and hit the recording studio with a new producer, Dann Huff, to jumpstart their next chapter. The result is a wonderfully executed record, complete with emotive storytelling and pitch-perfect harmonies from **Hillary Scott**, **Charles Kelley** and **Dave Haywood**.

The album's infectious opener and lead single, "What If I Never Get Over You," is Lady A in their prime. It has a sense of familiarity for fans of their early hits "Need You Now" and "I Run to You," which similarly saw Kelley and Scott trading verses about love and the tribulations that follow along the way. Ryan Hurd and Sam Ellis are among the songwriters who crafted the track, with masterful lyrics such as, "What if I'm tryin', but then I close my eyes / And then I'm right back, lost in that last goodbye."

Scott and Kelley highlight their signature trade-off technique again on "What I'm Leaving For," which documents the struggle of leaving behind their families while on the road. It feels timely, as does "Pictures," on which Lady Antebellum share a friendly reminder that things aren't always as they seem on the surface in an age dominated — and, in some ways, tarnished — by social media. "Yeah, we sure looked happy in pictures / The camera doesn't show the way it hurt," Scott croons, juxtaposing the tune's laid-back, finger-snapping vibe with vulnerability.

Emotion remains at the forefront for much of *Ocean*. "Be Patient With My Love" is Kelley's soaring confessional about coming out of a dark place and reforming himself, while "Alright" finds Scott detailing a

bad day that does a complete 180 after a loved one assures her to just “breathe in and let it go.” The latter features a catchy chorus that only Lady Antebellum can master, cowritten by Busbee, who lost his battle with brain cancer in September. Eerily, it is a fitting tribute to the trio’s close bond with the late songwriter, telling a story of picking up the pieces after enduring tough times.



The arrangements on the album are top-notch, notably on the orchestral “On a Night Like This” and the closing title track. “Ocean” is a gut-wrenching piano ballad filled with imagery and bolstered by theatricality. “All I wanna do is swim / But the waves keep crashing in,” Scott sings, her voice nearly cracking. “No, I’m not afraid to drown / Take me out, take me down.”

Of course, Ocean has a number of surefire uptempos too. “You Can Do You” is a rollicking love letter to the hustle and bustle of Nashville. “It don’t matter where you come from, which side of the county line / We’re all here, searching for a good time,” Scott and Kelley sing in unison. “Boots,” meanwhile, is the perfect honky-tonk soundtrack, brought to life by some good ol’ fiddles and Kelley’s raspy, Fleetwood Mac-esque vocals.

Lady A rarely do collaborations, and only one is present on *Ocean*’s 13-song tracklist: “The Thing That Wrecks You” with Little Big Town. Together, the country powerhouse groups create an epic, unforgettable addition to both of their catalogs. It’s a shame this supergroup only lasts for four-and-a-half minutes, but Lady Antebellum sure can shine on their own.

3 stars (out of 4)