

People & Places

Music

Lady Antebellum get honest

Beck 'shoots' into the galaxy for new album

By Mark Kennedy

'Hyperspace', Beck (Capitol Records)
We've heard Beck when he's down. And we've heard Beck when he's up. Now hear Beck go past up to something else. Cosmic? Celestial?

The 11 songs on the aptly named "Hyperspace" are airy and psychedelic, with warm textures and waves of shimmering synth. This is the soundtrack for a 12-year mission to Mars, songs you can imagine playing in a slowly spinning space station as astronauts float about peacefully.

"Hyperspace" seems a natural progression deeper into the light for Beck, whose last album "Colors" won the Grammy in 2018 for best alternative album and was his lightest, most dance-y offering. This new CD achieves greatness via stardust.

Seven of the new tracks were written and produced with multi-instrumentalist Pharrell Williams and the pair have combined for lazy drums and lush, thick ribbons of keyboard. Sometimes that keyboard is so tinny it sounds like one of those toy ones played by kids. Often, they layer in cool samples or loops and let Beck's falsetto free. There is not a boring moment on the entire album.

The lyrics show a preoccupation with outer space, with references to a falling star, the moon, the sun, gamma rays and the stratosphere. "I'm so high," Beck sings in one song. In another, he's "Far above the ground/Halfway to oblivion". In a third: "High as the moon". (Was everyone doing bong hits in the studio?) Things get so weird that Williams is credited with "mumbles" in one song.

Beck's sorrow has been raw (see his 2002 "Sea Change") but now even when he explores being lonely and his own damaged soul ("Dark Places"), it's accompanied by pillowy choruses and starburst strumming harmonies.

So strong is Beck's gravitational pull here that Chris Martin of Coldplay stops by for "Stratosphere", but he is barely noticeable. Was he even here? What is here anyway? Why is everything rotating? And is that Beck, up there? Weightless, going into the sun? Hold on, man. We'll join you in a bit.

Country vocal group Lady Antebellum know how to move people to tears with their songs and their newest record feels as vulnerable and honest as a therapy session.

The trio of **Charles Kelley**, **Hillary Scott** and **Dave Haywood** are known for their heartfelt harmonies and emotional resonance on songs like the Grammy-winning "Need You Now", but on their new album, "Ocean", they looked inward at their own relationships.

"It's been inspiring to watch that honesty come out," said Haywood. "It's been exciting for this season for us to be very self-aware and be vulnerable, be courageous and not be afraid and not have any fear to say those things."

Kelley co-wrote "Be Patient with My Love" after feeling like he was letting his emotions get in the way of his relationships, saying things he didn't mean to his wife, and not taking care of his spiritual health.

"That was kind of my first time I've really been really honest with myself on a song," Kelley said. "My wife, when I played it for her, she was really proud of that. It's nothing new to us. There's a lot of that, say something you didn't mean, wake up the next day, apologize, move on. Seven months later, back in the same spot."

On "What I'm Leaving For", the trio, who all have kids, address how it feels to leave children behind when they travel so much, something that Scott, whose parents are also well-known touring artists, knows intimately.

"I was that kid that we sing about and now I'm that mom," Scott said, who has three girls. "My husband is a full-time dad at home and I travel."

In the music video for the title track, Scott was moved to tears as she sang the lyrics about wanting to drown yourself in someone that's emotionally unavailable. Her vocal delivery feels so lonely and lost as she pleads for a human connection.

"There are so many people hurting, myself included," Scott said. "I just feel like this world we live in, we're one of the most stressed-out cultures. It's talked about in just about every headline you see.... That's what this is about and that's what I am seeing resonate with people."

The record also includes a contribution from their longtime friend, songwriter and producer busbee, who died in September at the age of 43. He produced their last record, "Heart Break" in 2017 and co-wrote their single "You Look Good", from that album. The band and busbee wrote an uplifting banjo-laden jam called "Alright", which is how the band wants to remember him.

"He was such a light. He was this big tall guy with so much love to give," Scott said. "It's just talking about how no matter what happens, that it's going to be alright and that this life is beautiful. It's so encouraging."

Also:

LOS ANGELES: In an article published recently under the rather alarmist headline "Beck fears most of his music has been destroyed", the artist expressed concern that some of his early master recordings could have perished in a 2008 fire that tore through the archives of Universal Music Group, although he admitted that he is unaware whether any damage took place.

More than 500,000 song titles are estimated to have been destroyed in the fire, the extent of which was revealed just last summer in a New York Times report.

Beck conceded that he's short on details. "I have a feeling that my management is not telling me because they can't bear to break the news," he told the Sydney Morning Herald in an article published Tuesday. Referring to certain unreleased sessions from early in his career, he added, "I don't know [whether they're gone], nobody's telling us anything. We didn't hear about it until the last year."

Reps for Universal and Beck did not immediately respond to Variety's requests for comment, but in the months since the publication of the Times article, UMG reps have stressed that the company is not withholding information but simply doesn't have answers for all artists yet, considering the vastness of the archive and the disorder common to nearly all studio record-keeping. (Agencies)



Beck



Cher performs during the 'Here We Go Again' tour at the United Center on Nov 27 in Chicago. (AP)



Actors Sam Claflin (right), and Aisling Franciosi pose for photographers upon arrival at a screening of "The Nightingale" at the Curzon Soho, central London on Nov 27. (AP)

Variety

LONDON: The Pussycat Dolls are reforming for a reunion tour kicking off in Dublin next year, the American girl band said on Thursday.

A decade after they split, the group — originally formed as a burlesque dance troupe and known for songs like "Don't Cha" and "When I Grow Up" — will hit the stage from April in Dublin before putting on shows around Britain.

"The stars have aligned and the Dolls are getting back together," singer **Nicole Scherzinger** told Britain's Heart Breakfast radio show in a joint interview with fellow band members **Ashley Roberts**, **Jessica Sutta**, **Carmit Bachar** and **Kimberley Wyatt**.

"There's been unfinished business. It's been 10 years... we just all were ready to do it," Roberts said. (RTRS)

LOS ANGELES: **Martin Armiger**, a musician turned record producer, academic, and film and TV composer, based in Australia has died. He was 70.

Born in the UK as John Martin Armiger, he relocated to Australia with his family as a teenager. He is known for Australian film classics Yahoo Serious' "Young Einstein", and the Alex Proyas-directed "Dark City", on which he was music producer and arranger.

Armiger kicked off his music career as a singer, songwriter and guitarist for legendary Melbourne based rock band The Sports. In 1972, he started his screen profession composing music for a short film called "Drac". From 1984, Martin was musical director for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation series "Sweet and Sour", a 20-episode, weekly pop music, drama TV series. He provided backing vocals, lead guitar, bass guitar, keyboards, drums and lyrics and produced the soundtrack album.

His other screen credits include the feature film "Thank God He Met Lizzie",

Music

Madonna cancels shows

Dion soars to top of chart

LOS ANGELES, Nov 28, (RTRS): Celine Dion's first album in three years and Billie Eilish's first new song in six months have soared to the top of the Rolling Stone Album and Songs charts, respectively.

"Courage", Dion's first album since 2016's "Encore un Soir", racked up more than 120,000 album-equivalent units, pushed along by sales of the album that accompanied each ticket sold to her world tour behind the album.

Dion topped rapper Tory Lanez, whose "Chixtape 5" debuted at No. 2 with 87,000 album-equivalent units, including 92.1 million streams. Post Malone's "Hollywood's Bleeding" and Taylor Swift's "Lover" both hung in the top 5 with 70,500 and 55,800 album-equivalent units, respectively.

As of Monday afternoon, Billie Eilish rode the buzz around her American Music Awards performance to see her newest single, "All I Ever Wanted", climb to the top of the Top 100 Songs list, with 20.5 million streams.

The Rolling Stone 200 Albums chart tracks the most popular releases of 87,500 equivalent units the week in the United States. Entries are ranked by album units, a number that combines digital and physical album sales, digital song sales, and audio streams using a custom weighting system. The chart does not include passive listening such as

terrestrial radio or digital radio. The Rolling Stone 200 Albums chart is updated daily, and each week Rolling Stone finalizes and publishes an official version of the chart, covering the seven-day period ending with the previous Thursday.

Also:

LOS ANGELES: **Madonna** canceled her intimate "Madame X" tour dates in Boston on Wednesday, stating she was experiencing "overwhelming" pain and would not be able to perform at the Wang Theatre during her scheduled dates from Nov 30 to Dec 2.

"Please forgive this unexpected turn of events. Doing my show every night brings me so much joy and to cancel is a kind of punishment for me, but the pain I'm in right now is overwhelming, and I must rest and follow doctor's orders so I can come back stronger and better and continue the Madame X journey with all of you," Madonna shared in an Instagram post to her 14 million followers.

Her tour promoter, Live Nation, confirmed the news, saying in a statement, "As we are unable to reschedule the Boston dates due to the tight scheduling through the balance of the year, refunds will be automatically issued to the credit card on which they were ordered."

No changes have been announced for the remaining dates on the tour, which picks up Dec 7 in Philadelphia.

the television series "The Secret Life of Us", mini-series "Come In Spinner" and "Bodysurfers", "Police Rescue" and the documentary "Cane Toads". (RTRS)

LONDON: **Clive James**, an expatriate Australian writer and broadcaster who wrote incisively and often hilariously



Armiger



James

Music

Females vulnerable

Deaths spotlight K-pop dark side

SEOUL, South Korea, Nov 28, (AP): The death of South Korean singer and actress **Goo Hara**, whose body was found at her home in Seoul this week, has again shone a spotlight on pressures that stars, especially females, face in the cutthroat K-pop industry and in deeply conservative South Korean society.

Goo's death at age 28 came less than two months after the death of Choi Ji-ri, or Sulli, another K-pop star and Goo's close friend. Experts say both Goo and Choi faced extensive cyber-bullying and sexual harassment from the public and media throughout their careers, which took a toll on their mental health.

Police say they are still investigating Goo's death and found a "pessimistic note" at her home.

Once popular mostly in Asia, K-pop has spread far beyond South Korea, thanks to wildly popular groups such as "BTS" and "Blackpink".

Goo debuted in 2008 as part of the five-member girl group Kara, which shot almost immediately to fame and helped pioneer the K-pop global phenomenon.

Successful

She later launched a successful solo career in South Korea and Japan.

Sulli began her career around the same time as Goo, debuting as a member of the girl band f(x) in 2009. She also had multiple acting roles after stepping away from her singing career.

Goo made headlines when she took her former boyfriend, Choi Jong-bum, to court last year. Choi claimed to have been assaulted by her, while Goo accused him of threatening to release a sex video of her.

During the dispute, Goo's Korean agency didn't renew her contract. A court sentenced Choi to 1½ years in prison on charges of coercion and assaulting and blackmailing Goo. The jail term was suspended, keeping him out of prison. Choi appealed and the trial is still ongoing.

K-pop is highly competitive, with dozens of groups debuting each year. Industry experts have long warned about the dark side of the scandal-ridden industry. Aspiring artists, as young as their early teens, train for years. Only a few debut and even fewer are commercially successful. The likelihood of their success increases if they sign with a handful of top entertainment agencies.

The industry is known to have strict rules for their stars — including dating bans, spartan training and diets, and sometimes slave-like and unfair contracts. Experts say the industry has additional requirements for its female artists, unspoken rules reflective of South Korea's patriarchal society.

Park Hee-A, a K-pop journalist and writer of "Interviews with K-pop Stars", said female stars are bound by rigid societal rules of femininity.

"Some female idol members have gotten ostracized for not smiling in a television show and reading a book about feminism that contradicts male-dominated patriarchal South Korean society," Park told The Associated Press.

Expectations of purity and chastity govern women in South Korea. Goo faced a barrage of hate comments following media reports about the sex video despite her being the victim of revenge porn.

"The topic of sex is taboo in South Korea compared to western countries," said Tae-Sung Yeum, attending psychiatrist at Gwanghwamun Forest Psychiatric Clinic. "There's a high moral standard required, especially for female celebrities, because South Korea is a patriarchal society."

Malicious

Sulli, Goo's long-time friend, also made headlines, often malicious and misogynistic, for speaking out about subjects such as ageism and feminism. She was criticized for wearing shirts without a bra, calling older male colleagues by their first names and openly supporting feminism.

Yeum said it's difficult for K-pop stars to seek professional help for depression, especially in a country where many people believe that psychiatric disorders can be "treated with one's will." He said multiple suicides in the industry stem from stars being plunged into a hyper-competitive system with a plethora of abuses from a young age.

When Sulli was found dead in her Seongnam home, Goo bid farewell to her friend in a live-streamed video. "I will live more diligently for you," Goo cried while apologizing for not being able to make it to her funeral.



Goo