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Kip Moore puts doubts, fears aside on 'Wild Ones'

Kip Moore only drinks coffee and smokes cigarettes when he writes songs. It helps him think.

And one night early this year when the temperature dipped to 19 degrees, Moore needed all the help he could get. The country singer was writing his second album for the second time. For a variety of reasons, his first attempt was ditched and he was shouldering his way through try two. He stepped outside on his back porch, lit up, took a drag and watched the smoke roll off his lips.

"In that moment for different reasons, people that I cared about ... I felt like I was losing a lot in my life," Moore said. "I felt like I was losing myself ... It was the most vulnerable, desperate and alone that I've ever felt."

Moore's friend and frequent co-writer, Dan Couch, was inside Moore's house waiting on him. The two had been working on a song for weeks and couldn't get the lyrics right. Late that night, his heart broken over a relationship that soured, Moore asked Couch to come finish the song. As the country singer exhaled and watched the smoke bounce off the window pane, the lyrics to "Heart's Desire" came to him.

Night's falling on me like a big black coat/Staring through a window at the empty cold/Thick white smoke rolling off my lips. My chest is feeling heavy like a cannonball/Got sweat rolling down me like a waterfall/'Cause I let love slip through my fingertips.

"I just think for the first time since I've known him that someone else had the upper hand," Couch said. "That song was spawned out of ... having lost something that he wasn't ready to lose. It was his fault ... but I don't know that he ever thought that he couldn't get her back."

"Heart's Desire" is from Moore's long-awaited sophomore album, "Wild Ones," which was released Friday. The album is the follow-up to the singer's critically acclaimed debut, "Up All Night." The best-selling debut album of 2012 and 2013, "Up All Night" is

home to consecutive No. 1 songs “Somethin’ ‘Bout a Truck,” “Beer Money” and “Hey Pretty Girl.” More than three years have passed since Moore released a new studio album, and just as he poured his feelings into “Heart’s Desire,” he paid the same attention to every song on “Wild Ones.”

“I’m going to try and paint a picture to make you see it, to truly visualize something when you hear that song,” Moore said. “I don’t want to write a song to make you sing along. I want to write something that makes you feel like you are in the song. That’s what the greats did for me. As good as I can do is put you in that moment.”

On a recent, humid August afternoon, Couch and fellow songwriting buddy Westin Davis finished a songwriting session with Moore at his townhouse. While the singer had plenty of cigarettes and coffee, the latter he bummed from his neighbor, Moore had yet to eat lunch. After his friends left, he washed a few dishes, grabbed a takeout box of fish and pineapple and perched on a stool at his kitchen counter.

Kip Moore works with co-writer Dan Couch in Nashville. Moore's acclaimed debut, “Up All Night,” was the best-selling debut album of 2012 and 2013.

In his own words, he was feeling “good,” but anxious about the release of “Wild Ones.” Moore has never hidden his passion for his music or his uneasiness about his future in the music business. Before “Somethin’ ‘Bout A Truck” went to No. 1 in 2012, he worried he never would have a hit.

After the song hit the top of the charts, he worried he would never have another. When “Beer Money” and “Hey Pretty Girl” followed, he got more comfortable only to plunge back into self-doubt when his next two singles, “Young Love” and “Dirt Road,” failed to meet expectations. The two songs, released months apart, were each meant to launch his second album – one that was due out more than a year ago and was never released. Because, as Moore pointed out, “I can’t release a record around a song that stalled at 48 (on the country radio airplay charts).”

The situation messed with his head.

“I got in this really bad spiral,” Moore said. “I have a strong faith, but I fall off from that a lot of times. I don’t mean I go start doing really bad things. I do straddle the line between good and bad a lot. I lost myself in the whole thing, and then I had a spiritual awakening.”

Through that, Moore was able to free himself from much of the fear that plagued him – Was he going to fail? Would people like the new music? Would it ever be released? Would he lose his record deal? Would he still get to play music?

“Once I let go of that, it was like it spawned this whole new creativity,” Moore said.

Through the doubt and fear, Moore never stopped writing songs. Those combined with fresh material penned from his new place of freedom gave the singer the songs he needed for “Wild Ones.” When he pitched the new batch of songs to his label group, Universal Music Group Nashville, Moore said executives could see how “crazy passionate” he was about the project so they gave him the green light to re-record.

“Kip’s drive never wavered as I’m sure the process motivated him to dig deeper,” said Cindy Mabe, Universal Music Group Nashville president. “The result is an album that is well worth the wait. It shows depth and growth and further solidifies how unique Kip is in our format. ... He carries a slight chip on his shoulder to remind him how hard he has fought for his chance to succeed.”

“Wild Ones” features 11 songs all co-written by Moore, including four with Davis and three with Couch. In the album credits, the singer thanks Davis and Couch for “always being my brothers. You’ll have a lot of buddies in this lifetime but very few friends. I’d take a bullet for y’all and I know you would for me.”

In many ways, “That Was Us,” a song the trio wrote in early 2014 for “Wild Ones,” could have been inspired by their friendship. Moore and Davis cite the storytelling mid-tempo as their favorite song on the album. Moore said the inspiration came from their shared background growing up near the Florida/Georgia line. Both men had a group of friends when they were growing up that included a girl that they considered family. If anyone “messed with her,” they would get “hurt.”

While rolling through Montana on Moore’s bus that January, Davis stood on the other side of a door and listened to Moore strum through the idea that became “That Was Us.” Moore started singing the melody: “If we got high, we got stoned/If there was a fight, we got it on/If there was a backseat, we made love.”

Davis joined him and at first the men tried to figure out what Moore was trying to say. When the singer came up with the hook, “That was then, that was us,” it took the friends back to how they lived in the days before they moved to Nashville.

For Davis, writing “That Was Us” on the bus with Moore that morning was when it clicked – that he and his friend had made it.

“I took a moment and looked out the window at the beautiful landscape and here it is 7:30 in the morning, and we are doing exactly what we sat out to do,” he said. “Here we are writing a song on his tour bus and he has a record deal. We’re doing exactly the same thing we were doing 10 years ago in his crappy apartment where I would sleep on the floor.”

Moore still works to accept that peace that Davis found in the Montana countryside. With this album, he’s getting close.

