Kip Moore: an unapologetic badass with a touch of Springsteen

Fusing modern country with arena rock, Moore's raspy wail and self-aware lyrics make him the most likeable and interesting country star of the moment

Taken at face value, Kip Moore could easily be written off as just another one of the much-maligned "bros" of country music. He arrived on the scene in 2011 with a song called Somethin' Bout a Truck and followed that with one called Beer Money. He dresses himself in cut-off T-shirts and red trucker caps, and frequently sings about hookups and parties. But writing off Moore would be misguided, knee-jerk snobbery. The truth is, the Georgia native is making some of the most interesting and wildly appealing music that mainstream country has to offer.

Moore's style fuses modern country with arena rock that evokes the heartland sounds of Bruce Springsteen and, to a degree, Eric Church. He's got a raspy wail and the gusto to back it up, and he cannily walks the line between rowdy and romantic in his delivery. Moore's bravura is on full display on his second album,Wild Ones, which finally got released last month following a sting of failed launch singles and the eventual success of his latest radio hit, I'm to Blame. The album proved likable right off the bat, but the more I've stuck with it over recent weeks, the more I've come to see Wild Ones as an impressively singular release from Music Row.

Though it's not a perfect album, Wild Ones sounds unlike anything else in country music at the moment, and it pulses with energy and strong rock melodies. Some might say "Well, it sounds like it belongs in rock music" but the rock radio market has all but collapsed over the past two decades, and country has become the default new market for rock sounds. There are worse things! Most of country's top male stars have been releasing Frankenstein-style albums over the past year, which include a handful of songs that sound vaguely country alongside songs that chase every currently R&B, hip-hop and disco trend in an attempt to stay relevant. That

Moore and executive producer Brett James take a decisive path in their own direction is refreshing and exciting.

Lyrically, Moore does cover much of the same subject matter as his peers, but where he excels is in owning his perspective. Male country stars have gotten a bad rap in recent years for their good-old-boy personas, which find them singing reductively about women and mindlessly about partying, all while espousing southern values and empty churchgoing gestures. They don't especially like when they're questioned on their seemingly contradictory themes, either. It's why so many artists bristle at the term "bro-country".

But part of Moore's brilliance is that he bothers to throw his critics a bone. He doesn't operate under the assumption that being a raucous party animal is the natural path of life, and his resulting wordplay lands squarely in the center of recklessness and gumption. "I like whiskey and tight denim, on good-hearted women/And for that, I make no apologies," he sings on That's Alright With Me. "Take your pistol-pointing finger right off of the trigger/I know where to aim: I'mto blame," he says on I'm to Blame. That Moore bothers to feel self-critical and even slightly apologetic throughout Wild Ones has the effect of making his perspective feel actually far more unapologetic than his peers, who often seem to be going through the motions of badassery without real oomph behind their words.