

(7.18.19) - <https://www.freep.com/story/entertainment/music/brian-mccollum/2019/07/18/kip-moore-faster-horses-country-rock/1755526001/>

HEADED TO FASTER HORSES, KIP MOORE BUILDS LOYAL COUNTRY AUDIENCE WITH A NOD TO ROCK 'N' ROLL



Kip Moore was a rising act with a hot breakout hit when he made his first country-music fest appearance in Michigan — a late afternoon slot at the Downtown Hoedown in 2012.

But a funny thing happened to Moore on his way to career longevity: He never did repeat the commercial success of that early bloom. “Something ‘Bout a Truck,” from his debut album, remains the lone No. 1 Billboard single of the Georgia native’s career, and he’s landed just three Top 10 hits on that chart since.

Still, there he’ll be on Sunday, commanding the main stage for 40,000-plus fans at the latest edition of the Faster Horses Festival at Michigan International Speedway — one big, resounding testament to the vitality of an artist who’s built an audience in an unconventional way.

“It’s been a very organic grow,” Moore said this week from his home in Nashville. “We’ve never been much of a commercial darling. I don’t ever want to be misconstrued: As a writer and artist, you always want hit records. But the blessing of the style of music we play is that you know not every one of them is going to hit in the commercial space. The beauty of our fan base, through all the ebbs and flows, is that they haven’t gone anywhere. And it’s growing every single year.”

You can chalk that up in large part to the 39-year-old singer-songwriter's much-praised live shows — equal parts high-energy showmanship, sincere audience connections and formidable musicianship from Moore and his band.

Moore and his band are hitting Faster Horses with a fresh new spark: They're back playing full-power shows after a spring acoustic tour that stripped down his sound — an experience made the band even tighter, he said. They're part of a three-day fest bill that will include headliners Keith Urban, Maren Morris and Zac Brown Band.

In an age of tightly tracked, by-the-script concerts, Moore and company are an old-school live outfit, reading crowds and adjusting their sets on the fly. It's the sort of approach that can lock in a distinct, enduring loyalty among a certain sort of fan, one that's not reliant on a hot track of the moment or pop-culture buzz.

Moore says he started to notice the phenomenon two or three months into his tour in support of the 2015 sophomore album "Wild Ones."

"It didn't garner a single hit record. But we saw what a cult-like atmosphere that record was creating," he said. "That's when I got me the confidence to really keep stretching my legs. Whatever I'm feeling I want to write, that's what I need to go for. 'Wild Ones' was the true indicator: 'Up All Night' had created a real fan base, and now we had locked 'em in."



The album was an anomaly in the country world of 2015. Moore bucked trends dominating the format at the time — the bro-country phenomenon was at its peak — and opted for a musical and lyrical approach more akin to the heartland rock of Bob Seger. The approach carried over to 2017's "Slowheart," an album that got a shot of inspiration from another key Detroit source, courtesy of his dad's musical tastes.

"Motown was the main thing played at my house growing up," he said. "A lot of Temptations and Smokey Robinson records, constantly. And that kind of bled over to the rock 'n' roll element too. There was a lot of Seger being played in the house. If you listen to Bob Seger, you can tell he was influenced by that. Or Van Morrison records — there's a lot of it bleeding through there too. So Motown had a huge influence on the soul of the music I write."

Moore's chosen career lane has often landed him comparisons to the classic-rock artists before him: performers whose audiences are there for the deeper stuff as well as the fun times. He resists quick labels, but concedes he has built an audience that's a bit outside the modern-country norm.

"I try not to focus on that stuff too much," he said. "But I know a massive chunk of our fan base are older guys and girls that used to go see Seger and Springsteen and Petty play. Now their daughters or sons got them to one of our shows, and they tell us they've fallen in love with this, that it reminds them of the old concerts they went to."

Moore has also has another unconventional feather in his cap for a contemporary American country act: a devoted and growing overseas following. It's a phenomenon that was stirred four years ago, he said, when he played his first C2C festival in Europe and "could feel something different was happening in the audience while we were playing."

"I think maybe it's my lyrical structure. It's not so focused on (typical country themes). 'Something 'Bout a Truck' definitely covers the country stuff, but my subject matter stretches a bit," he said. "There was a relatability to the music that didn't feel just so small-town all the time. The music has a little more street to it. The rock 'n' roll elements definitely didn't hurt us at all either. That audience was ready for that kind of music."