

# Rolling Stone

(07.17.18) - <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-country/kip-moore-on-building-a-loyal-audience-why-music-row-wears-blinders-700338/>

## Kip Moore on Building a Loyal Audience, Why Music Row Wears ‘Blinders’

“You can have these hits on radio, but it doesn’t really translate,” says Moore, who despite any major chart success has cultivated an extensive international touring base.



It’s barely 11:00 a.m. on the second day of Nashville’s summertime centerpiece, the **CMA Music Festival**, and **Kip Moore** is sitting outside of the HGTV Lodge stage in the blazing June heat, waiting to perform. Moore, who just returned from months of sold-out European and Canadian dates, isn’t exactly used to starting gigs before noon. But as Nissan Stadium looms across the river, waiting for the night’s CMA Fest lineup of radio-friendly all-stars, he’s no less

ready: for Moore, a show is a show, and he'll give it everything he's got, even if he's barely finished breakfast.

"A lot of artists put it on cruise control," Moore tells *Rolling Stone Country*, sitting in a director's chair in jeans, a black sleeveless shirt and boots. "A lot of times, stuff feels stock. They might put on the same exact show, and have the same exact conversation with the audience, and eventually the audience picks up on it. I always try to stay very present during my shows. I've never missed a soundcheck in my career. I think that pays dividends."

Indeed, Moore, who will be launching a new run – the **After the Sunburn Tour** – in September, with the Wild Feathers, Jordan Davis, Caroline Jones and Jillian Jacqueline joining on select dates, is quickly becoming one of country music's most tireless and powerful live draws, and not just within the United States. From sold-out shows in Australia, to multi-night stints in Canada and a recent appearance at Wisconsin's Summerfest, where he broke the curfew and incurred a several thousand dollar fine, he's carrying the torch for the art of the organic performance: an art the genre's most bankable acts often lose sight of in favor of calculated pomp and circumstance. As with the audience at an Eric Church show, Moore's fans are notorious for appreciating the album cuts, and some even mark milestones on their skin. "I've seen fans with tattoos of their 75th shows," Moore says. "It's a very special thing we have going on."

But Moore (and Church) are in the minority. For many of the mainstream artists performing this year on the CMA Fest's biggest free stage, the Riverfront, a Top 10 song is more easy to cultivate than the type of devotion that would make a fan tattoo show tallies on their person. In some cases, the Music Row machine boosts songs by all-but-anonymous singers to the top of the charts before the artist even has a chance to build a fan base on the road. Which Moore has carefully, if slowly, been fostering since his first hit single, "Somethin' 'Bout a Truck." "That song brought in a new fan base," Moore says, "but you have to ask: Once the fans are there, how are we going to keep them? That's the difference. Can you keep them once they show up?"

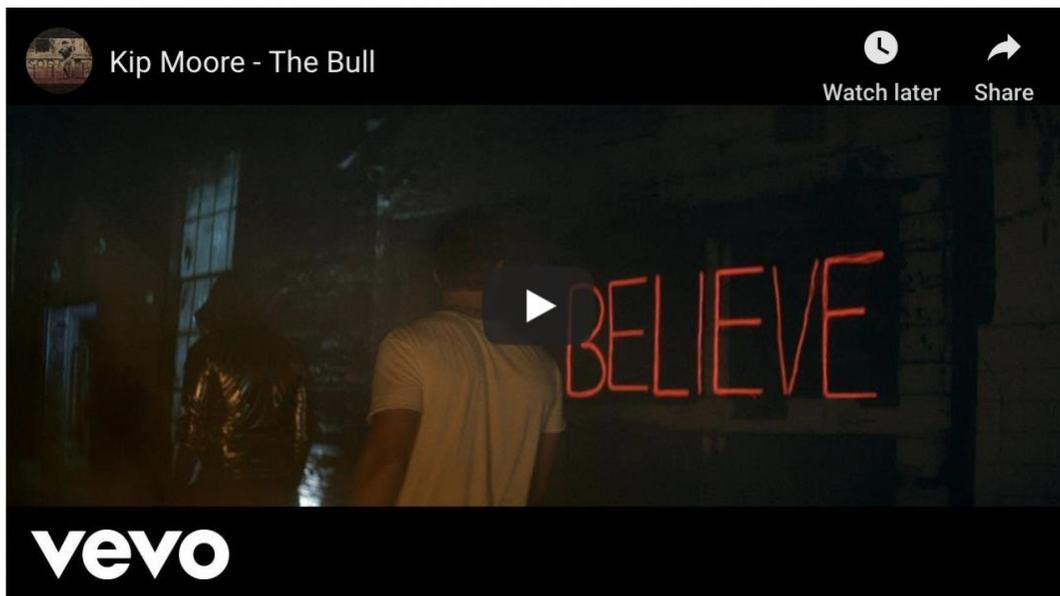
Moore's not the only example of country's potent disconnect between American radio play and tangible fan bases, particularly when it comes to international audiences. Kacey Musgraves draws huge numbers abroad and brought the promotion for her album *Golden Hour* to Japan, the Cadillac Three have become bona fide rock stars in Europe, and Cam's "Diane" hit Number One in the U.K., while Margo Price sold out three nights at Nashville's Ryman Auditorium. None of these artists, however, have seen major traction at home on *Billboard's* Country Airplay chart.

"I think sometimes the town can have blinders on, and it's not really their fault," Moore says about Nashville's somewhat myopic view of what defines success. "They're not out there in the real world, seeing what's going on. You can have these hits on radio, but it doesn't really translate: sure, sometimes it does, but sometimes it doesn't. But I try not to worry about things that I can't control, and what I can control is us being a well-oiled machine that goes out every single night and sells tickets and has an audience that is growing."

Moore's audience has indeed been expanding exponentially, especially internationally and in traditionally unconventional U.S. markets, despite the fact that his most "successful" record, in terms of Music Row standards, was his very first. One of Canada's most well-known concert promoters, Jim Cressman, has long been noticing the trend. "The first time I realized there was something very special about Kip was one of our first club shows," Cressman says. "I didn't expect the audience to be singing back album cuts. In country music, it's a hit-driven business. Usually the fans know the hits. Kip's audience, there is something special there. They know a lot of the music that, by regular standards, they are not supposed to know."

Moore's last two albums – *Wild Ones* and *Slowheart* – were both critically lauded, yet received no recognition from any award shows, from the CMAs to the ACMs ("Kip might be the kind of guy who starts winning Grammys before he is a regular at the ACMs, though," says Cressman). Moore's newest single, "Last Shot," is hanging in the 30s on the Country Airplay chart. None of that mattered, however, in stops like Brisbane, Australia, where Moore sold out his dates and led audience sing-alongs to songs like *Slowheart* album cut "The Bull," conducting the crowd from atop a speaker as hollered lyrics drowned him out.

"Kip plays every show like it's the last he'll ever play," says Charlie Worsham, who toured with Moore in 2014 and again in 2018. "And here's what I know: he works harder than anyone. He appreciates his band and crew more than anyone and he will stop at nothing to deliver his absolute best to his fans. I'm envious of how well Kip shrugs off the lack of recognition the industry has shown him. He is concerned about one thing and one thing only: 'How can I give my audience the best experience possible?'"



Moore's fine with maintaining that laser-like focus on his live show, and refusing any concessions, even if it keeps him on the fringes and sometimes more at home in the rock world than in country. "He's an album artist who approaches touring as the engine of his entire

career,” says Marc Dennis, Moore’s agent and co-head of CAA’s Nashville office.

Up next for Moore? Another album, or three. “I’m working on an acoustic record and then two other full project records,” he says, as a fan tries to snap a photo through the fence (“I’m doing an interview,” he tells her, smiling. “I’ll getcha after”). Some songs off of *Slowheart* have been gaining traction on rock radio in Europe, so he feels a bit freer to veer even deeper in that direction. “You have the ability to be a little more obscure with your lyrics [with rock],” he says. “You can still paint a picture, but it doesn’t have to be laid out perfectly with a neat bow around it, as you do sometimes in country music. I enjoy going back and forth and kind of straddling those lines.”

Though now, it’s time for the show – where he’ll play some songs that made the radio, and some that haven’t, finishing with “The Bull,” a particular moment of honest self-awareness that speaks directly to the naysayers. “Sure feels good to laugh when I look back and flip the bull the bird,” he’ll sing as a fan in the audience waves a wedding photo in the air for him to sign.

“My fans, they’re with me for the next 20 or 30 years,” he says, standing up and slipping on his sunglasses before disappearing to fetch his guitar and join his band. “Hopefully I’m going to get to play music for a long time, because we built something that’s solid. Our foundation is not going to blow away in a storm. It’s gonna stay there.”