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A Spiritual Bottoming Out Led to Kip Moore's Most Creative Outburst

The songwriter outlines his new album, *Wild World*, and shares a brand new song, 'Crazy For You Tonight.'



Kip Moore has always been an oddball. In a genre that now relies heavily on programmed beats, EDM-style drops, and party hardy lyrics for chart success, the Georgia-bred songwriter has kept the candle burning for soulful, heartland rock. And while he may have found his first country radio hit with a song about a truck, the years that have followed have seen him emerge as one of the format's most introspective scribes. With tracks full of firebrand character studies rooted in small town life, rollicking, knowing accounts of love lost, and anthems for misfits and renegades, his catalog feels especially vital; occasionally, even rare.

"I don't know if I would have ever learned as much about myself if this had not been my life," Moore admits, calling from his rock climbing and hiking lodge in Kentucky where

he's been quarantining during the COVID-19 pandemic. (Should the virus relent, Moore is slated to join Sam Hunt on his summer tour.) "But I've truly gotten to a place where I have the confidence to trust whatever my gut is feeling, musically." The latest example of that arrives May 29 with his presciently-titled LP, *Wild World*. Across 13 cuts, 12 of which bear his name in the credits, Moore toys with arena rock arrangements ("Janie Blu," "Fire and Flame"), swampy flirtations ("Grow On You"), and outlaw swagger ("Southpaw").

Those are big sounds, but their energy was hard-won. In the immediate aftermath of releasing Moore's most recent set (2017's *Slowheart*), he felt depleted. "I was exhausted from writing, and all of it, in general," he recalls. "I was beat from the years of doing radio [promotion] and touring. There was one year I did like 210 shows. It was stupid." He took a break. But a spiritual bottoming out makes for its own muse, eventually inspiring the album standout "Payin' Hard." About the consequences and regrets that come from of a life spent on the road, the song lands the heftiest emotional wallop of his career.

"I've done so many other jobs in my life," Moore says by way of explanation. "From construction work to golf course maintenance to bartending to selling Sprint phones in a fucking mall at Radio Shack. But the demands of this job are unlike anything. There's so much beauty in it, but the emotional and physical toll is nothing I could have ever prepared for."

Years of cycling through a show's high and the low that follows had come to collect. "I had all these regrets on my mind," he says. "Did life play out the way it's supposed to? Maybe it did. But I wish I had done some things different." He and Westin Davis, who also teamed with the singer on songs like "Guitar Man" and "Just Another Girl" off *Slowheart* and "Magic" and "I'm to Blame" off 2015's *Wild Ones*, holed up in Moore's Nashville home along with Blair Daly until it was finished. "It's the only song I've ever written that, when it came time to sing it, I couldn't get through it. I kept breaking down. I've been carrying that around for a long time."

He adds: "I don't think I'll ever shed the feeling that comes with not just leaving my shows and going home to spend time with my dad before he died ... I deal with it a lot. But I think [writing this] helped."

The rest of the fare that makes up *Wild World* arrived in the handful of months that followed. Some, like "South," whose chorus would, in another life, feel right at home in the age of '80s hair metal, found their form during soundcheck. The blues-basted "Sweet Virginia," which he wrote with touring bandmembers Manny Medina and Erich Wigdahl, owes thanks to a night of post-show drinking in Scotland. "I was feeling that melody," says Moore. "We went in there and drank until like three in the morning, in the dressing room, writing that. When you set out to write music and be in a band, that's the kind of stuff you want to be a part of."

“Crazy For You Tonight,” all lust and longing—and out today—built itself upon its hypnotic melody. Esquire is thrilled to premiere it alongside an acoustic performance, the latest in the singer's In the Wild video series, of the track above. “It took me back to the music in the '80s that I loved,” says Moore.

He continues: “There are things about that song that I really love; things that I try to own up to and embrace, like [the lyric], ‘I don’t care what your friends are saying/And to tell the truth, they’re probably right.’ I never want to shy away and make myself out to be someone that I’m not. I try to keep that honest human element.”