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In 'Wild World,' singer Kip Moore turns a mirror on himself

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — When country singer Kip Moore wasn't performing, he was traveling the world to places like Iceland and Costa Rica looking for the next great wave to surf, or a cliff to climb or a remote trail to hike. But when the coronavirus pandemic hit, the Georgia-born globetrotter found himself pretty well suited to isolation as well.

"I've always kind of been an introvert at heart that's forced to be an extrovert because of what I do," said Moore, from his rock-climbing lodge near the Red River Gorge in eastern Kentucky.

When other artists have decided to postpone releasing albums during the pandemic, Moore on Friday is putting out "Wild World," his fourth album and one of his most soul-searching releases yet.

"This is a time of need for people," said Moore. "I think there's so many messages on this album that it will help people dig up those bones of what they've suppressed and analyze them and process them."

Moore made his name in 2011 with his multiplatinum hit "Somethin' 'Bout a Truck," but to lump him into the truck and beer-focused bro-country set that has dominated country radio over the last decade would be selling him short. When programmed beats and pop-influenced country is the sound of the moment, Moore's heartland country-rock songs with his growling voice feel muscular, nostalgic and honest.

"He's probably one of the most reflective, introspective humans I know," said Cindy Mabe, president of Universal Music Group Nashville. "And that's not necessarily common DNA in the entertainment industry. He really is soul searching every day."

The album's title track isn't just an apt description of today's uncertain times. In the lyrics of "Wild World," he's thinking back to the life lessons his mother and his late father taught him around their kitchen table. On "Fire and Flame," which builds like a U2 "Joshua Tree"-era arena rock song, Moore addresses his tendency to sometimes neglect his faith.

"When I am taking the time to pray and meditate and stay grounded in that, I am so much more in peace," Moore said. "But yet, I still push it away and I'll walk away from it for a long time. I still hold onto it, but I don't spend time nurturing it. And that's when I get really dark and lost feeling."

Moore tends to put the most important song at the end of record, which are also the album cuts that fans gravitate toward the most, whether they are played on radio or not. On this album's closer, "Payin' Hard," he shares his remorse of not spending more time with his father, who died in 2011 just as his career was starting.

“Payin’ Hard’ was the single most personal song I’ve ever written,” Moore said. “Those are deep-rooted, dark-kept things I’ve had in the closet for a long time with regret.”

Moore didn’t expect to be trying to promote his album remotely from a lodge in Kentucky, but he’s trying to make the most out of the situation by focusing on the simple things, like writing songs and rock climbing in the nearby sandstone cliffs.

“This has given me a chance to take a little breath, sleep in the same bed every night for a little bit,” he said. “I’m ready get back out and play now, but I needed a little bit of this pause.”