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Kip Moore Deals with Painful Regrets on New Album: 'I Had That Bottled Up Inside of Me for Years'



On *Wild World*, country's searcher explores his passions and restless spirit, and he finally confronts the impact of his father's death

Kip Moore says he's "always been a searcher," and from the sound of his new album, he appears to be making headway on his restless journey.

Released Friday, *Wild World* is filled with bold signposts about the enigmatic artist, his rebel appetite and his "reckless heart" (as he describes it in one cut). But no doubt the most revealing song — and "possibly my favorite on the whole record," says Moore — is the album's final track, "Payin' Hard." Set to a driving beat, it's a full confession of personal regrets, particularly over missed opportunities with his father, whom he lost to cancer, at age 63, in 2011.

"I had that bottled up inside of me for years," Moore, 40, tells PEOPLE exclusively. "I've carried that weight of regret with a few situations. I kept it all pressed down, and then I let it out, all in one go."

Moore says he'd tried several times before to write a song about his father, "but it all felt contrived and forced."

Then a guitar lick, riffed by band member Dave Nassie in a backstage dressing room, put Moore on a new path. "That day was a very natural awakening of emotions," he recalls.

When his father became ill, Moore's career was just taking off, and he recounts how he was suddenly faced with difficult choices. "I remember having all these shows booked, and I wanted to get home and hang out with him," Moore recalls, "but I also felt the pressures of having to live up to these agreements."

Moore says his dad gave his blessing: "Don't worry about me. I've had a good life." But Moore says, "I look back now and wish I would've had my priorities a little more in line."

Or, as he sings in the song's refrain, also co-written with Blair Daly and Westin Davis: "My life's a credit card / Play hard, pay later / and I'm payin' hard."

When the time came to record the demo, Moore was left with no doubt that he'd tapped into a rich emotional vein. "It was the only song that I have ever not been able to get through," he says. "It took me quite a few times to gather myself because I kept kind of breaking down during the middle of it. But I'm so close with Blair and Westin that I was able to be that vulnerable in the room."

The rest of Wild World's 13 tracks are all steeped in Moore's emotional depths and rambler's spirit. "Southpaw" reimagines him as a Black Hills outlaw; "Red, White, Blue Jean American Dream" puts him out on his beloved road in search of adventure; title track "Wild World" is a mother's advice to stay "a wild man" and "find yourself a good girl."

The lifelong bachelor has yet to take that latter counsel, but that hasn't kept him from knowing his way around a love song, and he's turned in five heart-soaring cuts for Wild World, including top 30 lead-off single, "She's Mine."

He couldn't write romance, he says, without having felt the emotions. Actual names may be changed in the lyrics, but he confirms the songs are all inspired by real-life experiences.

"A hundred percent," Moore says, adding, "I'm a private person. There have been moments through my career when I have been by myself and there have been moments when I haven't. I just don't let the world know what I'm doing. I don't do things for any kind of show. If I want to tell somebody that I love them, I'm just going to roll over and tell them I love them."

He also acknowledges, as his lyrics reflect, that he can be a challenge. He points out a line in "Crazy for You Tonight" — "I don't care what your friends are saying / to tell the truth, girl, they might be right" — and he matter-of-factly confirms it, saying, "I try to paint myself in an honest standpoint. I have lots of flaws, and I try to just own stuff like that when I sing about it."

Indeed, he says, he's more honest in his music "than I think I am in my own life a lot of times."

That's just one of Moore's contradictions. Here's another: A self-described introvert in an extrovert's profession, he craves solitude as much as the stage. Overdrive is his gear of choice while on tour, he says, and "I tend to break down kind of spiritually and emotionally if I'm going too hard like that for too long."

Like his 2017 album, *Slowheart*, his latest album was kindled by stretches of isolation in back-to-nature settings, including Costa Rica and Hawaii, two favorite spots for the avid surfer. Still, Moore wonders about how much longer he can maintain the career pace he's kept in recent years.

He alludes to it in "Payin' Hard" with a haunting premonition in the final verse: "So long, my friends / I guess this is my farewell / Damn all these pennies swimming in my wishing well / Told every single story that I have to tell."

Moore doesn't take those lyrics lightly, especially with hearing problems (still unresolved after three surgeries) that can muffle sounds.

"I have truly felt at times I might not last very long in this career," he says, "and those are the things that I've had to learn about myself through my journey. I don't know if I can do this for a very long time. I will be the person that, out of nowhere, just vanishes. It's not going to be like, 'Hey, guys, this is going to be my last tour.' I feel like the minute I don't have the same heart that I've had before, and I'm just picking up a check, I'll walk away. I won't say a word about it. I'll just be gone."

Probably not any time soon, though. At the moment, the COVID-19 pandemic has forcibly taken Moore off the road; he was booked to support Sam Hunt's tour this summer, but that was canceled earlier this month.

Despite his disappointment, Moore is finding solace and inspiration while quarantined at his rock-climbing lodge, Bedrock at the Red, in eastern Kentucky.

"I've already written half of my next record," he says. "I'm just recharging by seeing new things, relaxing, experiencing nature and obviously doing some physical activity."

He's also still feeling his familiar restlessness to keep searching, as he says, for "his place in this world" and "for that joy and peace that seem so elusive."

"I think I've always had a sense of urgency," Moore says, "because I feel like you owe that to yourself. I feel like we all do. I think about my dad passing at an early age when he was Superman to me. I never saw him sick [before he developed cancer]. I never saw him hurt and out of nowhere — boom — he's gone. That was a very awakening thing for me. This life is moving really fast, and you gotta soak it up as much as you can."