

FOLK BY CORTNEY HARDING

Moore Or Less

Daniel Martin Moore Reinvents Childhood Hymns On 'In The Cool Of The Day'

For such a quiet, reserved, folksy singer, Daniel Martin Moore can certainly push his fans to bang their heads, repeatedly. Only they're not doing some sort of Willow Smith-style dance to his music—rather, they're banging their heads against their stereos in frustration.

It's not on account of anything that Moore has done. Since he signed to Sub Pop on the basis of an unsolicited demo in 2007, he has released one album with stunningly original songs and one album with his friend Ben Sollee that addressed the issue of mountaintop removal (MTR) coal mining. He's about to release a third effort on Jan. 18, a collection of his takes on the hymns he heard growing up in Cold Spring, Ky., as well as a few new songs.

By rights, Moore should be an NPR darling, a Starbucks favorite, the go-to musical choice for cool dads all over the country. Soft-spoken, unpretentious and worldly, Moore spent time in the Peace Corps before he started his recording career. He's signed to a

tastemaking label that has proved it can break folkier acts (see Fleet Foxes); he counts My Morning Jacket's Jim James among one of his biggest fans (James produced "Dear Companion," the MTR album, and has played shows with Moore); and he's even the musical voice of a political cause that was featured in the most recent Jonathan

Franzen novel.

But whatever the cause, Moore's career hasn't really taken off. His debut, "Stray Age," has sold 3,000 copies, according to Nielsen SoundScan; "Dear Companion" has sold 6,600. For his label, the low sales are frustrating for both artistic and business reasons.

"I thought his first record was a natural heir to the Iron & Wine albums we had put out," says Stuart Meyer, an A&R manager at Sub Pop. "He did find some fans, and he definitely developed

as a live act. And while he has a lot of higher-profile fans, it never really got beyond a core group."

Meyer says that without a loud buzz about Moore, pushing him to triple A radio is too costly. "When Pitchfork reviewed the first album, they didn't kill it, but they didn't love it," he says. "I felt like he's someone you can't push on people."

Despite these factors, Meyer says he wouldn't be shocked if Moore's latest album, despite the religious overtones and quirky subject matter, is the one that breaks him through to a larger audience. "Because so much of the record is public domain, there are lots of licensing possibilities," he says.

Moore says that when he started working on the album, he didn't plan to even release it formally. "For me, it was just a fun project. I was just recording with friends and didn't think Sub Pop would be that interested," he says.

Now that the album will have a real release, Moore says he's planning on touring behind it starting in 2011. Meyer adds that Sub Pop will release a series of short videos of Moore performing songs from the record, which were filmed in a monastery. But even Moore admits this new one won't be an easy sell, saying, "I'm sure there is a lot of knashing of teeth at Sub Pop over how to promote this record."

Rewriting history:
DANIEL MARTIN MOORE

