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by Meghan Holmes

Minnesota-based musician MoeDeLL grew up in southern Virginia, and it's readily apparent in his songs – with country, bluegrass, and old-time music influencing his Americana sound. It's hard to tie the musician to a single genre due to his fluid style and emphasis on storytelling. "I write a lot," he says, "so I've put out about an album a year since 2016." His most recent, *Ain't that Something*, reflects on life, love, and even the global pandemic, although he wrote much of the record in 2019, before COVID-19.

MoeDeLL started how many young musicians do, teaching themselves guitar and eventually becoming part of garage bands. "I think I always liked telling stories, and from a very young age, I knew what I wanted to do, but my skill level was way behind where my brain was at. My grandparents and my mom raised me, and I remember telling them I wanted to play guitar, and they got me an old junker guitar, which I thought was the coolest thing ever. There was this one kid who played banjo, and he was amazing, and I wanted to learn guitar and be able to play with him. Of course, at the time, I could barely strum a G chord," he says.

MoeDeLL's talents improved with time, as he consistently focused on writing and performing his music, often performing solo with an acoustic guitar. He performs routinely as a trio with musicians Tim Sunde on upright bass and Chris O'Brien on

dobro.

Though there were no musicians in his immediate family, MoeDeLL fondly recalls his Virginia youth and the country and bluegrass music then. "In my household, there was a lot of Hank Sr. and Waylon Jennings, and to this day, I worship Waylon Jennings, and on the bluegrass side, we listened to a lot of the standards...Lester Flatt, Earl Scruggs, Doc Watson, and those guys. I remember this guy who played banjo took me to a bluegrass festival when I was really little, and Bill Monroe was there. I just remember seeing a man in a powder blue suit. I wish I had seen him when I was older," he says.

In addition to writing prolifically, MoeDeLL also performs upwards of 250 shows per year (COVID-related cancellations and closures notwithstanding). Following a piece of advice he received when he first began playing music for a living, he emphasizes "playing the same quality show in front of five people as you would in front of 5000." He performs at venues including festivals, wineries, farmers' markets, and bars. Most of his shows are near Minneapolis, though he also routinely plays in Wisconsin (and keeps an updated list of upcoming performances on his website).



“This time of year, things sort of slow down, and I take all sorts of gigs to pay the bills, anything from background music at a restaurant or brewery to a full-blown festival with a couple of thousand people – it varies,” he says. “I like playing so much, and I get a lot of gigs with people telling me I sound authentically country, like purely down south, and I can always say that I am from where the music comes from.”

MoeDeLL originally relocated to Minnesota to record with a now-extinct record label and stayed even after being offered

opportunities to return home.

“If someone would’ve told me the upper Midwest had a really good bluegrass scene, I would’ve said, ‘yeah right,’ but there are a lot of really good bands up here. I’m more of a mix of bluegrass with other genres compared to some of the other groups, but there’s a wide variety,” he says.

In 2019, MoeDeLL started writing the songs that would become his most recent record release – “Ain’t That Something.” His breakneck touring and writing pattern was interrupted in March 2020 with the arrival of COVID-19 in the United States.

“My very last show was in a tiny town in Auburn, Wisconsin, and at the time I thought nothing of it, like everybody else in the world, and then next week everything was shut down,” he says.

Shortly after, he wrote one of the album’s two singles, “Hummin’ Along,” directly addressing the complicated emotions surrounding the pandemic, as people felt like life had been put on hold and struggled to maintain social connections as well as a sense of normalcy. With lyrics including, “everything will be all right / I’ll just wait ‘til then,” he addresses “how I felt like everybody in the world was feeling,” he says.

MoeDeLL will be playing several shows a week in the Minneapolis area throughout the end of the year. In spring 2022, he hopes to tour the southeast either solo or with his trio, depending on their availability. In the meantime, he’s also working on his next record.

“I have a banjo player now on this record, so we are going to have a nice four-piece,” he says. “I want to stay a little more standard, and I’m excited to tour the south because I think the music will go over well there. I love Minnesota but, in my heart, I also know this is southern music.”