

## BRYAN BELLER'S BREAKTHROUGH TO GRATITUDE

LEIGH WILKINSON

**BRYAN BELLER ENGAGED IN SOME SONIC** soul-searching for his sophomore effort, *Thanks In Advance*, and the welcome result is a bona fide entry for bass album of the year. Beller's full-spectrum fretted and fretless basses play a largely foundation role, while still engaging and guiding four potent pairs of guitarists and drummers (including Mike Keneally and Joe Travers, Beller's compatriots in Keneally's band). But the featured stars clearly are Beller's compositions: newly-minted amalgams of vintage rock, blues, and jazz feels fostering fresh harmonies and angular muso melodies. The making of the disc is candidly captured in an in-depth DVD documentary, *To Nothing*, also available at the Nashville-based Beller's web site: [www.bryanbeller.com](http://www.bryanbeller.com)

What inspired *Thanks In Advance*?

It's actually the story of me getting over myself and reinventing the way I looked at life, put to music. I had a close friend—Wes Wehmiller, a great bassist—who suddenly passed away in 2005 at the age of 33. Up until then I'd never really felt truly happy or fulfilled, no matter how "successful" I was. I was always preoccupied with some noise in my head, a worry or fear or concern of some kind. But Wes's death shook me, and caused me to reevaluate everything I was doing, and especially thinking. It took a year, and some serious self-examination, but I ended up far less prone to anger and frustration, and much more grateful—not just for whatever life had in store, but for life itself. That's what the title infers: gratitude for the present moment, and also for an unknown future.

How did the music come to you?

I try to write conceptually and thematically, both song-wise and album-wise. As a mostly instrumental composer, I only have one opportunity in language to convey meaning and intention with a song: the title. So I'll start a new album by writing down a list of song titles that convey the narrative of the album, and then I'll write music appropriate to the emotional content of those titles. As a producer, that methodology helps me keep my eyes on the big picture as well as on the details, and it helps me gather the different musical genres I draw from into something that feels like an album, rather than just a collection of tunes and riffs.

The writing took place mostly on keyboards and guitar, not bass. I'm a piano player from my childhood, but the guitar was a new experience. Guitar is the main melodic voice on the album, so I learned to hack around on a beater Strat—sometimes playing it with my fingers like a bassist—just enough to make the demos and imply what I wanted as best I could. It took a full year to write the whole album, and I demoed every tune completely.

What was your bass approach on the CD?

Really, all I've ever wanted was to be the bassist in my favorite bands. They just happen to be from wildly disparate genres. In my mind, I'm in John Scofield's or Michael Landau's band one day, and then I'm in Metallica or Nine Inch Nails the next. At times, I might imagine myself with Jaco's Word of Mouth big band, Frank Zappa circa-1975, or late-'70s Pink Floyd. So

a song could spring out of my head that pulls randomly from any of the above, and it's my

### CAN BE HEARD ON

Bryan Beller, *Thanks In Advance*, [Onion Boy, 2008]; Mike Keneally, *Wine and Pickles*, [Exowax, 2008]; Steve Vai, *Sound Theories, Vol. I & II* [Red Ink, 2007]

### CURRENTLY SPINNING

Nine Inch Nails, *The Slip*, [Null, 2008]; Marco Minnemann, *A Mouth of God*, [marcominnemann.com, 2008]; John Scofield, *Bump*, [Verve, 2000].

### GEAR

**Basses Fretted and fretless** Mike Lull M5's, fretted Mike LullV4, '64 Reissue Fender Jazz Bass, mid-'90s Fender Precision, Taylor AB-4 ABG; electrics are strung with D'Addario ProSteels, (.045-.130)

**Live Rig** SWR SM-1500 head, Megoliath 8x10 and two Goliath III 4x10 cabinets

**Effects** Roland FV-50 Volume Pedal, Boss TU-2 Tuner, Boss OC-2 Octave, Xotic Effects Bass BB Preamp, Digitech Bass Driver, Aphex Bass Exciter, TC Electronics SCF Chorus, Boss DD-3 Digital Delay, Demeter Opto-Compulator, Dunlop MXR M-80

**Studio** Four channels: an ART TubePAC preamp into Urei/Universal Audio 1176 compressor; a SansAmp PSA-1, preset 32 (sub boost); a miked combo or cab, usually SWR Super Redhead, plus effects/EQ; and usually extra effects or heavier overdrive/distortion

"Whether live or in the studio, I like to start with a bright, new-strings version of the most accurate classic Jazz Bass sound I can get, then add warmth and sweetness to make it feel right, and then add edge and dirt to fill it in and make it speak—all to varying degrees depending on the situation."

