

## **bryan beller's view – official biographical content**

Bryan Beller is nothing if not a complex individual.

Most widely known as a uniquely talented (in terms of chops and preternatural ability) yet tasteful hired gun bassist for the more adventurous rock guitarists of recent times (ex-Frank Zappa guitarist/solo artist Mike Keneally, Steve Vai, Dweezil Zappa, ex-MC5 guitarist Wayne Kramer), Beller has lived more lives in his ten years in Los Angeles than most folks live in thirty.

His artistic pursuits not fully sated by playing bass, he became a freelance writer on the side, penning three years' worth of columns for *Bass Player Magazine*, and doing interviews for various M.I. industry publications on such industry legends as W.G. "Snuffy" Walden (*The West Wing*, *thirtysomething*) and Billy Sheehan.

All this somehow still not enough, Beller worked his way up (from 1997-2002) through the corporate structure of SWR Sound Corporation, the largest independent manufacturer of bass amplification products in the world. By 2002, he was the company's Vice President. Less than a year later, he was the pointman for the 20-year-old company's sale to Fender Musical Instruments Corporation, a searing and ultra-stressful event he witnessed at point blank range.

This last event coincided with Beller's desire to write and record a solo album (literally – the tracking and mixing were being completed while papers were being signed). Not coincidentally, *View* is the story of an overloaded life. It's a life filled with paradox: achievement and disappointment; egocentricity and self-loathing; the desire for quest without end, while trying to find a place where quest is no longer necessary.

All of these themes, as well as the personal by-product of such a frantic life, combine to construct Bryan Beller's debut solo album, *View*. It's the artistic statement of a musician looking back on a truly massive amount of spent energy...trying to sort out what was worth it and what was all just sound and fury, signifying nothing.

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Those familiar with Beller's main body of work – nine years, five albums and countless tours with Mike Keneally – are well aware of his ability to navigate the complex, sometimes impossibly dense forms and styles present in Keneally's work...all with the polish, simplicity and accessibility one might expect from a pop bassline.

But far from aspiring to bass heroism, Beller instead builds a carefully crafted, highly emotional tapestry of interweaving themes and styles – a true *album* in the old-fashioned sense. Drawing on influences as disparate as John Scofield and Rage Against The Machine, Michael Landau and Pink Floyd, Nine Inch Nails and his mentor, Mike Keneally, the resulting body of work runs the gamut from hardcore jazz/rock to vocal pop to thrash to acoustic solo to world beat while somehow staying thematically intact, all the while displaying equal parts density ("Seven Percent Grade") and sensitivity ("View"), melody ("Eighteen Weeks") and dissonance ("Projectile"), tranquility ("Elate") and furious release ("See You Next Tuesday").

"I've really been into the timbre of guitarists lately, far more than bassists," says Beller, 32. "John Scofield and Michael Landau in particular. Either of them, at any time, can take me to a place far away from the normal hustle and bustle of things. That whole 'alone on a dusty highway' vibe has always done a lot for me. I'm been looking for ways to escape urbanity for some time now. In a lot of ways, this record is about a secret wish to pull the plug and flee the whole scene entirely."

Starting in 2000, Beller and Keneally began appearing as clinicians on behalf of Taylor Guitars, in an "acoustic duo" format that Beller credits as the key to opening the creative door to an album's worth of

material after 31 years of no such mental activity. The haunting melody that opens the record ("Bear Divide") was the first creative spark of the project; soon after that songs began pouring out at an absurdly fast rate. Representing that original creative energy are the three solo acoustic tracks on *View*, a raw and stark contrast to the rich full-band arrangements throughout the record.

Though the Berklee College of Music graduate ('93) Beller occupies by default a place in the "muzo" world of players striving to make names for themselves based mainly on technical facility, it couldn't be farther from what he's after. "I have no desire to be the next Victor Wooten, or John Patitucci, or anybody like that. I couldn't even if I wanted to. I just wanted to make a record that carried an emotional message from the writer along with it, like my favorite albums from when I was younger. Pink Floyd's best records do that, and Nine Inch Nails does it in a different way – they both carry musical themes across a record without overdoing the 'concept album' thing. And always in a way that makes you try and think about what they were trying to say."

Beller brought together a tight group of friends and highly-respected musicians to make *View*. Keneally himself plays everything from baritone guitar to Hammond organ. Drummer Joe Travers – Beller's former rhythm section partner in Dweezil and Ahmet Zappa's band Z – is one of several Berklee veterans on the record that go back with Beller over ten years. Drummer Toss Panos (Toy Matinee, Steve Vai) completes a reunion of the '96 version of Mike Keneally and Beer For Dolphins; the power trio of Mike Keneally, Beller and Panos executes the incredibly difficult "See You Next Tuesday." First-call L.A. keyboardist Jeff Babko (Michael Landau, *Jimmy Kimmel Live* house band) lays down Hammond organ on the Meters' inspired "Supermarket People." Guitarist and fellow current Keneally band member Rick Musallam steps out as the lead instrument on one of the album's feature tracks, "Seven Percent Grade."

"'Seven Percent Grade' really became a special track. The combination of Keneally on piano, Rick on guitar and Joe Travers on drums did an incredible job on conveying what I was trying to say," Beller explains, "which is the sense you get when you're driving on a freeway with steep inclines and declines, surrounded by trucks, heading into some god-forsaken urban merge of twenty interstates at once."

Interestingly enough, Keneally's current drummer ended up being the main engineer for the project. Nick D'Virgilio – drummer and lead singer for progressive powerhouse Spock's Beard, and former drummer for Tears for Fears – didn't need to be talked into the job. "He *really* wanted to do it, and that kind of energy showed in what he was able to accomplish with it. He's a very gifted, multi-talented musician, and had access to a good studio that he was intimately familiar with."

That studio was Lawnmower and Garden Supplies Studio in Pasadena, CA, the main working environment of the late great Kevin Gilbert (Toy Matinee, Sheryl Crow), a singer/songwriter with a cult following that continues well beyond his untimely death. "Lawnmower is a professional-grade studio built by a musician for his own personal use, rather than a 'professional facility' built to solicit business, and the vibe shows it. It's an incredible place to make music."

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Beller characteristically carried the whole project on his financial back, and constructed his own label to get it off the ground: Onion Boy Records. "I told everyone when we got started that, even though it was going to be an independent project, I didn't want them to feel like it was an independent project. I wanted it to feel professional, like we had time to do what we needed to do to make it right. I think everyone responded very well to that kind of approach." Initial distribution will be through traditional online sources, with all avenues traveling back and forth through Beller's highly-detailed website, [bryanbeller.com](http://www.bryanbeller.com) ([www.bryanbeller.com](http://www.bryanbeller.com)).

Between *View*, Onion Boy Records, a continuing career with SWR Sound, and tracking a new record and touring with Mike Keneally, one wonders how long it might be before Beller finally crashes and burns, and starts over. "That's what this record is really about – contemplating that reality. There's a difference between thinking about it and doing it, though. If there wasn't, I would have bailed out a long time ago."