

## Viktor Krauss



Those who know Viktor Krauss primarily by his supporting roles with Lyle Lovett, Bill Frisell, Jerry Douglas, and scores of others, might be surprised by the eclectic range of the original music on his new recording *II*. On the other hand, listeners familiar with Krauss' remarkable 2004 solo debut, *Far From Enough* (Nonesuch), and attuned to the finer details of his recording and touring credits—with everyone from Carly Simon, Elvis Costello, John Fogerty, Emmylou Harris, and Graham Nash to Chet Atkins, the Chieftains, and Jakob Dylan—will find *II* quite consonant with that eclectic track record.

Although *II* is clearly kin to *Far from Enough*, it is less a sequel than a bolder and more colorful expression of Krauss' ebullient and multifaceted musical personality. From the low rumble acceleration into the gleaming guitar-driven glide of the opener "Hop," through six more richly textured instrumentals and three stunning vocal turns by Lyle Lovett, Shawn Colvin, and Ben Taylor, *II* reflects Krauss' restless curiosity and masterful ability to integrate his interests in film scores, jazz, rock, R&B, and pop

"I wrote 'Hop' in 1996," recalls Krauss, born in Champaign, Illinois, in 1969, and now a Nashville resident. "I was influenced by the feeling of Tennessee as it turns grey in winter. Now I get visions of a jet moving down a runway, and when the full drum kit comes in, we've lifted off, and now we're coasting. It's one of the favorites I've ever recorded."

Such vivid visual imagery comes easily to someone who listened obsessively to evocative instrumental music and motion picture soundtracks as a child (and who was invited to the Sundance Institute last summer). As a toddler, Krauss' favorite record was Paul Winter's *A Winter's Consort*, and, he says, "I had always played with toys while listening to movie soundtracks. They dictated what I did with my Lego set." He remembers the John Williams score for *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, which he bought when he was nine, as "the first record I ever really wanted—I wore that out for years."

By then, young Viktor was already playing piano, and he took up trumpet in the fourth grade. He was drawn to the "ominous" look and sound of the double bass at a middle-school concert, and by his early teens, when R&B, soul, and rock became consuming passions, he was ready to move beyond the instrument's conventional school-orchestra role. Inspired by Stevie Wonder, Marvin Gaye, the Police, and, especially Led Zeppelin, Krauss began writing his first genre-bridging music.

At the University of Illinois, Krauss studied bass performance; wrote music for bowed Fender bass, delay/echo, and voice, and a 12-tone "serial" piece for electric 12-string guitar; and played in an original satire-rock band often compared to Frank Zappa. Shortly after graduating with a degree in music composition, with an emphasis on electronic and tape music, and minor in voice, Krauss launched his professional career, recording and touring with Peter Rowan and the Free Mexican Air Force (1992-'93) and, in 1994, striking up the long-term musical relationship with Lyle Lovett that has encompassed many tours and such recordings as *Step Inside This House*, *Songs from the Movies*, *Live in Texas*, *My Baby Don't Tolerate*, and Lovett's latest, slated for release this year.

By 2003—his résumé brimming with credits that include multiple recordings and tours with Bill Frisell; contributions to Mindy Smith's *One Moment More*, slide guitarist Jerry Douglas' *Restless on the Farm*,



*Lookout for Hope*, and *Best Kept Secret*, John Fogerty's *Deja Vu All Over Again*; and composing credits for the films *Twister* and *Dr. T. and the Women*—Krauss was ready to step out with his own recording, *Far From Enough*, which reached No. 6 on the *Billboard* Contemporary Jazz chart, featured Frisell, Douglas, and drummer Steve Jordan, with Alison Krauss adding viola and vocals.

For *II*, Krauss tapped guitarist Dean Parks and drummer Matt Chamberlain as his core band. “Dean is the ‘composer’s guitarist’ of the film-score world,” Krauss says, “and my love of soundtrack music made that a perfect fit. Matt is thought of as a rock guy, and that’s my headspace, as well. I call those two guys ‘the insurance policy.’” Bill Frisell adds his distinctive guitar sounds to two tracks, and classical Indian singer Shweta Jhaveri colors three with her atmospheric vocals.

Notorious for his extensive collection of vintage gear (especially effects pedals and analog synthesizers), Krauss made extensive use of his home studio in Nashville before and after four days of recording at L.A.’s Sunset Sound Factory. “The whole process was one of construction,” he explains, “because this is a record about parts and colors. The music was notated, but I wanted Dean and Matt to bring their instinctive interpretations to it, and I wanted to be able to sculpt the sound a bit more than the first album.”

The results, produced by longtime associate Lee Townsend, include virtual miniature soundtracks such as “No Time Like the Past,” which takes its title from an old *Twilight Zone* episode, and, Krauss says, evokes the late-summer feeling of nostalgia that seeps into you while cruising a rural highway in the Midwest and reminiscing about the past.” And “Eyes in the Heat” and “Last Book” actually originated in scores Krauss composed for a pair of short films.

As for the vocal tunes, “When She’s Dancing” began as a bass line and grew into a bed of music in need of a melody, which Ben Taylor provided with his lyric. Krauss’ rendition of the Pink Floyd classic “Shine on You Crazy Diamond,” sung here by Shawn Colvin, features one of his favorite rock recording moments—a magical shift in meter from six to four. And Krauss had loved the Tracy Nelson song “(I Could Have Been Your) Best Friend” ever since he heard Bonnie Raitt’s definitive version in college. “I knew I wanted Lyle on the record before I had chosen the tune,” he says. “When I listened to lyrics of ‘Best Friend,’ I thought, ‘wouldn’t he sing the stuffing out of it?’ Lyle can do the nasty delivery really well.”

Throughout *II*, Krauss plays a variety of keyboards and acoustic and electric guitars, something he also did on the two albums he produced for rock singer-songwriter Jason White. His ensemble approach, however, is still shaped by what he’s learned on his primary instrument, the bass. Citing influences as diverse as Ray Brown, John Paul Jones, Leland Sklar, and AC/DC’s Cliff Williams, Krauss says, “It’s not necessarily *what* you play, it’s how the instrument sounds. It’s interesting to get into the space of others, see what you can add to it, and figure out what the good arrangement choices are.” To that end, *II* is a splendid second step in Viktor Krauss’ evermore illustrious solo career.

