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LEELAND'S JACK MOORING OF PIANOS AND PRAISE

“God just keeps showing up!” enthuses Leeland keyboardist Jack Mooring when asked about the exuberance and excitement of his band’s live shows. Leeland has recently been opening for Christian heavyweights Casting Crowns at massive venues like the Toyota Center in their native Houston.

Some 22-year-olds in a similar position might end up on a serious star trip, but Mooring and his born-for-the-pulpit bandmates have no illusions about who the star of their show is. “We don’t even consider our shows ‘concerts,’” says Mooring. “They’re about worshipping God and letting God minister to people.”

Raised by music ministers in Baytown, Texas, Jack and his brother Leeland—the quartet’s namesake and lead singer—had already spent years performing in revival meetings across the south when their 2006 debut album, *The Sound of Melodies*, was nominated for a GRAMMY® award in the Best Pop/Contemporary Gospel Album category. At the tender age of 17, Leeland Mooring had already co-written several tracks on Christian icon Michael W. Smith’s album *Stand*, marking himself as a precocious talent who combines robust melodies and artful lyrics with a highly ornamented vocal technique.

The group’s rapid rise to success has certainly been a baptism by fire. “What’s great about it is that we’re not only connecting with our age group,” says Mooring, “but we’re also getting moms coming up to our signing table. It’s cool to see young and older people all coming to the shows and connecting with it.” It’s not hard to see why: Leeland’s music combines the progressive balladry of bands like Coldplay, Muse, Travis, and Keane with the rocking pace of newer worship artists like Godfrey Birtl and Delirious.

“Worship music is really changing,” Mooring stresses. “Sure, it used to be mainly hymn-based, but now a lot of rock sounds are working their way in. I’d say Delirious was the first band to do that—as if U2 had become a worship band.”

Rocking the keys with religious fervor, Mooring relies on his Yamaha S90 ES in concert and in the studio. “The S90 ES’ three-layer grand is the absolute best,” he says.

“Our sound guy came up and hugged me after I bought my S90 ES. We’re eighteen dates into this tour, and we don’t have time for our equipment to mess up or get quirky on us. With the S90 ES, I know that the sound’s going to be there every night.” Mooring also applauds the S90’s range of tones. “The cool thing about the S90 ES isn’t just that there are so many sounds,” he says. “Other keyboards have tons of samples too, but they’re not meaningful if they’re all cheesy. With the S90 ES, the sound quality is totally there—the electric piano sounds and string pads are great. It just fits perfectly with what we’re trying to do.”

Happily, the S90 ES is also a perfect fit with Mooring’s active performance approach. “I used to use a semi-weighted controller,” he explains, “and it just wasn’t working for me. The action of a keyboard is so important for getting the right hand positioning, and having the S90 ES’ fully-weighted keys allows me to move around much more freely onstage and trust that the feel of the piano is going to be totally accurate.”

Mooring is equally thrilled by another recent acquisition: a white vintage Yamaha CP70. “I’ve never seen one like it before,” he says, “so I suppose someone must have altered it.” Mooring has made a few alterations of his own, inserting a MIDI strip under the CP70’s keys so he can trigger lush pads and other timbres beneath the classic CP70 sounds. For now, the CP70 stays at home while the sleeker S90 travels the country—a sensible choice for an opening-slot band. But with their recent GRAMMY® nomination—not to mention five Dove nominations—it’s a safe bet that Leeland will be taking that CP70 on the road sooner rather than later.

Still, the band’s focus seems to be not how many people they reach, but how they reach them. “We’re musicians and we love music,” says Mooring, “but if it was only about the music, we wouldn’t be doing this. We want to show people that God loves them and has a plan for them. Our responsibility as a band is to be a light to people and to fulfill the Great Commission. Secondly, our vision is to write songs that are vessels for the presence of God. We hope that people experience God in such a new way through our songs that they are inspired to draw closer to Him. We want to push ourselves musically, but it’s all about ministry to us.”

