

# From Center Field to Center Stage at WHBPAC

BY KELLY LAFFEY

For a baseball enthusiast, there is a certain melody and rhythm to playing ball. The game is a symphony conducted by each team, as it is punctuated by the roar of the crowd, the crack of the bat, the sound of leather hitting leather and the relentless shriek of the umpire. There is a certain poetic nature to the game that mimics the art of playing music, a concept well understood by former Yankee center fielder Bernie Williams.

With four World Series rings, four Golden Glove awards, the 1996 American League Championship Series MVP award and the 1998 American League batting title, few players have mastered the orchestra of the game like Williams.

Signed by the Yankees when he was 17 years old, Williams spent 16 years with the Bronx Bombers, as he worked his way into the hearts of the Yankee faithful. He built his reputation on the diamond and is constantly named amongst legends like Babe Ruth,



Bernie Williams comes to Westhampton on July 14

Mickey Mantle, Lou Gehrig and Joe DiMaggio.

Williams discovered baseball while growing up in Puerto Rico at around the same time as he discovered playing the guitar, and he brought both passions to New York with him. Once mostly a source of entertainment to his Yankee brethren – “I would play in the clubhouse, on the bus, on planes,” reveals Williams – Williams has punctuated an illustrious career as a ball player with a burgeoning career as a jazz guitarist.

“To me, music was something that I’ve always been able to do,” says Williams. When he stopped playing baseball – his last game with the Yankees was on October 1, 2006 – it seemed natural to gravitate to the music scene on a professional level.

“Music and baseball require similar work ethic and discipline,” says Williams. “You need to put in a lot of effort in order to get results.”

Williams’ rhythms combine jazz, rock and indigenous Puerto Rican sounds. He released his first album, *The Journey Within*, while still with the Yankees in 2003 to critical acclaim, as it reached No. 3 on Billboard’s Contemporary Jazz Chart. Williams’ second album, *Moving Forward*, debuted as Billboard’s No. 2 Contemporary Jazz album in the country, and it was nominated for a 2009 Latin Grammy Award for Best Instrumental Album. In addition to Williams’ soothing guitar sounds, *Moving Forward* featured such renowned artists as Bruce Springsteen, Jon Secada and Dave Koz.

“Sometimes an idea pops into my head, and I try to develop it,” says Williams of his original songs, which are often inspired by places he had been and events in his life. “There’s also a certain amount of improvisation to a song.”

Williams is currently in the process of recording his third album. But even a former member of the Yankee dynasty was unaware of the success that his music could bring.

“It’s something that I always knew I would do after my (baseball) playing days were over, but I didn’t realize how much it would take off,” says Williams.

“Music has opened so many doors for me.”

One such door is the opportunity to play on the East End, as Williams will come to the Westhampton Beach Performing Arts Center on July 14 at 8:30 p.m. Despite taking a yearly trek to Flushing, Queens for the Subway Series with the New York Mets, Williams has yet to venture to the eastern points of Long Island.

“I’ve never been out here, and I’m very much looking forward to coming,” says Williams.

Prior to coming to the East End, Williams spent the earlier part of the week at the 83rd annual All Star Game in Kansas City in what was a tangible fusion of

his two passions, as he performed at pre-game shows and took in the baseball atmosphere.

As a lifelong Yankee, Williams ultimately hopes that the American League wins – home-field advantage is on the line, after all – but he has friends on both sides and is mostly hoping to have a good time. A five-time All Star, Williams is certainly no stranger to the Midsummer Classic.

“There were so many memories, playing championship teams,” Williams says of his days with the Bronx Bombers. “The whole Yankee experience was amazing.”

After signing with the (Continued on next page)

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Photos: Maysles Films

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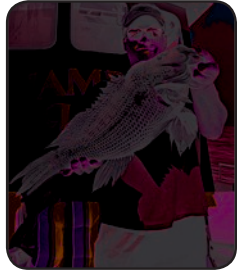


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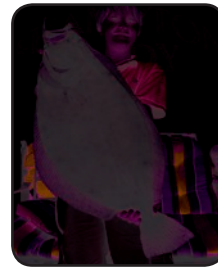
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## WHBPAC (Cont'd. from previous page)



The Associated Press

Bernie Williams on stage

Yankees, Williams was sent to the team's AA affiliate in Albany. He worked his way into the House that Ruth Built in 1991, and he eventually earned the starting spot in center field. He quickly became known for his speed, agility, power at the plate and, perhaps most important to those who were groomed to cheer against the Evil Empire – class.

With four World Series rings (1996, 1998, 1999, 2000), Williams, in his signature reserved demeanor reveals that he doesn't flaunt his accolades on a regular basis.

"I wear (my rings) as a badge of honor (at select events) – it's something that we accomplished as a team," says Williams.

Williams talks about his experiences on and off the field in his book *Rhythms of the Game: The Link Between Music and Athletic Performance*, which explores the relationship between musical dexterity and athletic prowess.

Love or hate the Yanks, there's something to be said for the work that goes into achieving what Williams has on two separate-but-related career paths. Classic ballpark tunes like Take Me Out to the Ballgame ensure that baseball and music will always be married, but Williams has managed to harness the mental energy required of the sport to craft compelling jazz tunes.

And, unlike most professional sports, music is an art that values age.

"I've gotten a lot more practice (since leaving the baseball diamond)," says Williams. "My playing has definitely continued to improve."

Most agree, as Williams looks forward to sharing his music with East End fans.

Opening for Williams will be The Pitchforks, Duke University's Award-winning, all male a cappella group. Coming off of their most recent hit album, *All In*, which was released last August, The Pitchforks are a nationally recognized a cappella name who have performed for the Queen of Jordan, at Chicago Bulls games and opened for Ben Folds.

They received the CARA (Contemporary A Cappella Recording Awards) Award for Best Male Collegiate Album in the nation with the 2006 album *Bring It Back* and the 2008 release, *Disconcert*. Their rendition of Owl City's "Fireflies" was awarded Best Male Collegiate Song and Best Male Collegiate Arrangement.

As The Pitchforks add 'opening for Bernie Williams' to their accomplished resume, it's ironic to note that Saturday's performance will bring together icons of two of the most polarizing entities in sports – the Yankees and Duke University Athletics. But music has always been heralded for its ability to unite, as East Enders will be able to head to Westhampton Beach to enjoy unique a cappella arrangements and the soothing notes of Williams' jazz guitar.

*Bernie Williams and the Duke University Pitchforks will be at the Westhampton Beach Performing Arts Center on Saturday, July 14 at 8:30 p.m. Tickets are \$70, \$85 or \$100, and they can be purchased at www.whbpac.org, by calling 631-288-1500 or by visiting the theater at 76 Main Street, Westhampton Beach.*



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