

# Arts & Entertainment

## The Little Drummer Girl Found Unexpected Joy, Mastery in Banjo

By IAN FEDERGREEN  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

**SCOTCH PLAINS** — "My banjo has brought me to the weirdest places." So says internationally acclaimed jazz musician Cynthia Sayer, who grew up in Scotch Plains. She happily recounts playing everywhere from Yankee Stadium ("We actually got fired by (George) Steinbrenner," she said.) and the White House ("I had a whole big tussle with the Secret Service people") to the New York Philharmonic ("an experience of a lifetime") and the major concert halls of Europe ("where the pianos themselves were famous").

And it all began when her parents wouldn't buy her drums. Sayer had played the piano (among other instruments) since she was six, but thought she had found her true calling after seeing the dance band at Terrill Junior High.

"I saw the guy playing drums and I thought, 'Man that's really cool,'" Sayer told *The Westfield Leader* and *The Times of Scotch Plains-Fanwood*. Faced with the prospect of a little drummer girl, her parents found an interesting way to diffuse the situation.

"One day I came home and there was this banjo on my bed," she said. "I only vaguely knew what it was — but I knew it meant I would never get my drums."

Her parents chose that instrument only because a popular banjo teacher happened to live nearby. The instructor, Patty Fischer, became a major force in Sayer's life.

"She validated being the kind of person I imagined for myself. She traveled the world; she was a painter, a philosopher, a musician. I was really very taken by her," she revealed.

At 18, Sayer nabbed a summer gig at a Greenwich Village nightclub called "Your Father's Mustache," which featured banjo parlor-style playing. This, despite the fact that "I couldn't play my way out of a paper bag," Sayer laughed. "I was hired because I was female, I think, because I sure couldn't play well!"

Luckily, the professionals she worked alongside were willing to teach her, and Sayer continued to learn by doing.

"That's where sexism was in my favor," she said. "Most people learn first, then go out and get jobs. I kind of did it all backwards."

Barbara Sayer proudly calls her daughter "a very determined lady," and saw that resolve in Cynthia even as a child.

"Oh God! Between her and my

son, everybody used to ask me how I got them to practice," she laughed, "and I used to ask how I get them to shut up?! It was a noisy household with four kids!"

A jazz album called "Harlem Nights" focused Sayer in a new di-



Cynthia Sayer

rection. "I heard a recording by a man named Elmer Snowden, who played this hot, swinging, unbelievable jazz banjo," she said. It was an epiphany, of sorts.

"Growing up in New Jersey, I just heard banjo playing this really corny stuff," she said. "I didn't understand that an instrument was corny if you played it corny. I didn't understand that it was up to the person." Snowden gave her a style to emulate.

Sayer said, "When I got connected to jazz, then I became a real musician."

In developing her style, Sayer has blended early jazz and more modern music. "I've learned the genre from the 20s and 30s, and added to it the person I am today, which includes influences of today," she said.

Frank Rossi, who edits the international banjo newsletter, *The Resonator*, agreed, Cynthia's "not only very good at what she does, she's able to put on a program that appeals to the audience," he said.

"She plays songs that people are able to recognize and relate to — she puts on a heck of a show," he said.

After substituting for Eddie Davis, the banjo player in Woody Allen's jazz band, Sayer eventually became their pianist. Though she protested that she was not really a piano player, Davis said a cruder style was appropriate to the sound they were re-creating.

"I told her to play second banjo to me on the piano," Davis said.

"You have no idea," she laughed. "I'm a banjo player mostly — we did a tour in Europe and here I was playing on the finest pianos in the world — in the world. It was almost embarrassing to be the one to play

*Continued on Page 19*

## The Suspense Is Thrilling Westfield Scribe, Former Teacher Chris Gavalier

By MARYLOU MORANO  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

**WESTFIELD** — Although he has been writing since he was in elementary school, former Westfield High School teacher, Chris Gavalier, credits his years teaching high school English in Westfield as giving him the skills that enabled him to write his first published book, a romantic suspense novel titled "Pretend I'm Not Here."

"Teaching Westfield students made me stop and reflect on the works I was teaching, which changed the way I looked at creative writing," he explained.

"This translated into the unexpected benefit of improving my writing, which I didn't realize until several years later," he said.

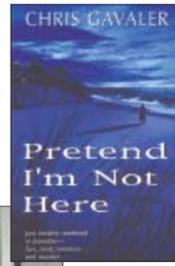
Gavalier wrote mostly poetry through his 20s, then switched to writing short stories.

"When my story became several hundred pages, I realized I was no longer writing a short story," he related.

The suspense in "Pretend I'm Not Here" re-

moon.

"I always thought the Virgin Islands would be a wonderful setting for a plot," he said.



Written initially as a thriller/mystery, it was Gavalier's editor who labeled "Pretend I'm Not Here" a romantic suspense. In fact, the editor had Gavalier pegged as a female writer and was quite surprised at his success at telling the story from a woman's point of view.

Many of the author's reviewers and fans also assume he is a woman, and he

receives much correspondence and many e-mails addressed to "Ms. Gavalier."

"It's no problem at all," he said of the misunderstanding which he amusingly calls "pointless to correct."

After moving to Lexington, Va., in 1994, Gavalier taught high school English for seven years. Now, he divides his day by writing in the mornings and caring for his daughter, Madeleine, 5, and his son, Cameron, 2, in the afternoons.

Gavalier's wife, Lesley Wheeler, holds a doctoral degree in English from Princeton University and currently teaches at Washington and Lee University.

"She's my first critic," Gavalier said of his wife.

While Gavalier's personal reading preferences include "practically everything," he admitted that his writing is influenced by Herman Melville and F. Scott Fitzgerald.

Currently, Gavalier is at work writing a series of proposals, which he hopes will become future books. He also writes articles of interest to new writers breaking into the writing field.

"Pretend I'm Not Here" is published by HarperCollins.



Chris Gavalier

volves around Ashley Farrell, a chaperone for contestants who win a television "dating game" type of contest. The story, told in first person, tells how the character finds herself on St. Thomas with a bachelor, a bachelorette, the wife of a mob boss and a dead bodyguard.

"After learning there is actually such a position as chaperone for dating game winners, I was so intrigued by it that I created a character with the job," Gavalier explained. The setting of the book, the Virgin Islands, is where Gavalier and his wife honey-

## The Boss Rises to Top At Meadowlands, Omitting Jaded References to 9/11

By FRED ROSSI  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

**MEADOWLANDS** — It's been Bruce, Bruce, Bruce all over the place for the past few weeks as Bruce Springsteen blitzed the media to promote the July 30 release of his album, "The Rising," the first he's recorded with his great E Street Band in 18 years.

One couldn't open a newspaper (except this one, until now) without coming across a Springsteen interview. *Time* magazine put him on its cover for the first time since 1975. Springsteen even popped up in places you'd never expect to find him — the "Today" show live from Asbury Park and Ted Koppel's "Nightline" program — as well as David Letterman's show, where he appeared several years back.

And last Wednesday night, he popped up in a spot he truly does belong — The Continental Airlines Arena in the Meadowlands for a one-night stand to open a world tour that will extend well into next year.

On the same day that "The Rising" was named the No. 1 selling album of the week, Springsteen and his 9-member band exploded onto the stage shortly after 8 p.m. with two rousing numbers from the new album — the title track followed by "Lonesome Day."

"The Rising" is one of the first real musical efforts to address, in some way, the events and aftermath of last 9/11. The album succeeds in many ways, and without resorting to nauseatingly jingoistic lyrics like those put forth by others who believe that if a song mentions the red, white and blue enough, it's a hit when, in reality, the tune sounds more like it won first prize in a VFW patriotic songwriting contest.

Rather, many of Springsteen's new songs are poetic, and mostly hard-charging, remembrances of those who died and those who perished trying to save people. Those who the dead left behind are also included, especially in the haunting "You're Missing."

Standing on the floor next to me was a woman in her late 30s holding a handmade poster tying together the new album and the 9/11 horrors that included photographs of two New York City firefighters. She told me they were her cousins who had died in the Trade Center

collapse 11 months ago, and I could only imagine what she was thinking during some of Springsteen's more hard-hitting numbers.

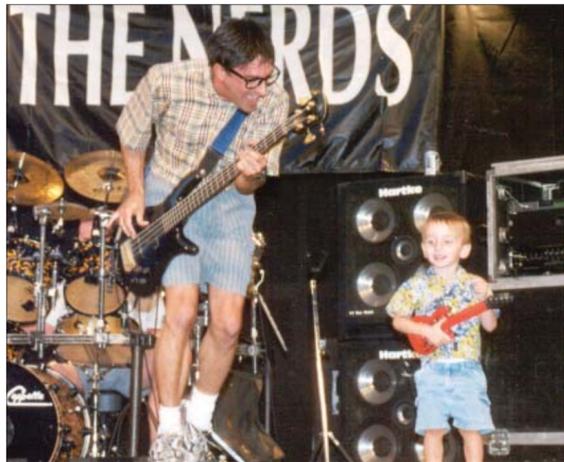
The E Street Band's first studio effort in 18 years is an A-plus effort and, with it, Springsteen has truly made himself a viable spokesman for the country's soul.

For the first time, fans could buy general admission concert tickets entitling them to stand on the floor (there were no seats). As a result, I stood about 25 feet in front of The Boss, bowled over by the sound and the sheer thrill of seeing my hero up close.

Springsteen's 1999-2000 tour was a reunion tour with the E Street Band after more than a decade apart, and it was made great simply because they were all together again, playing many of the old favorites we fans clamored for.

Springsteen's 1996 tour was a solo acoustic effort, while his 1992-1993 tour featured non-E Street Band members. Even his 1988 tour in support of his under-appreciated "Tunnel of Love" album had a different quality to it, coming as it did in the aftermath of the worldwide orgy of Bruce-mania of the

*Continued on Page 19*



MY DAD ROCKS...Jim "Spaz" Garcia rocked out with his three-year-old son, Jesse Garcia, as part of the Village Green concert series last Thursday. Mr. Garcia performs as lead vocalist of "The Nerds," a rock group that was well received by the Scotch Plains audience.

### Clubhouse

**ANTIQUES & FURNISHINGS**

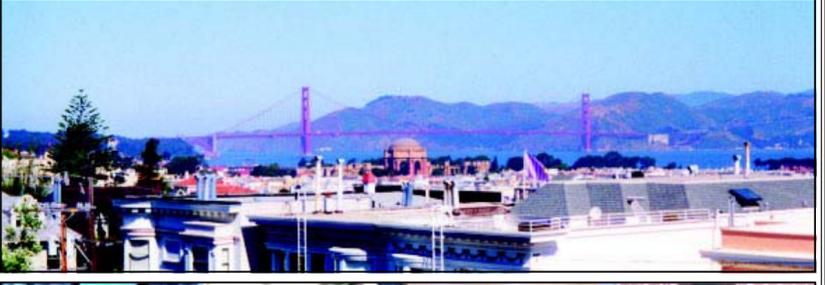
## New Arrivals!

Come see our "new" antiques and furnishings arriving in August. Chandeliers from the 1920's, American handmade wool needlepoint carpets and pillows, end tables, lamps, dining room sets and much more. We are purveyors of Crabtree & Evelyn bath and body products. We proudly offer a complete selection of Root Candles. Every day of the year, Clubhouse Antiques & Furnishings offers top quality merchandise at great values.

865 MOUNTAIN AVE. • MOUNTAINSIDE, NJ 07092  
(Between Maxwell's & Fleet Bank)  
Telephone 908-789-7600 • Fax 908 789-3322  
email clubhousefurnish@aol.com

### Turn of Last Century Estate For Sale by Executor

## Simply Elegant, City of San Francisco




**\$7MM**

Inquiries: [sf@goleader.com](mailto:sf@goleader.com) • Portfolio: [goleader.com/sf](http://goleader.com/sf)

## Falling Into Fall Basics: This Season's Must Haves

By JENNIFER PINTO  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

Its now mid-August and unfortunately the summer season is coming to an end. But on the brighter side, women now have a valid excuse to shop again — the fall season.



**FALL INTO THE GAP...**Get a fitted denim jacket at *The Gap*. Jackets are currently priced anywhere from \$19.99 to \$88.

Look for essential pieces that will carry you through numerous seasons. Key items will be the heart of your fall wardrobe. Most importantly, when shopping for fall key items, remember to concentrate and don't stray to a summer clearance rack. I realize this is difficult, but just try to focus!

But seriously, if you buy your key pieces early on in the season you will find that you really don't need to shop for much more. Look for basic colors that will blend with almost

anything and remember to shop for your lifestyle not someone else's.



**WHITE BUTTON DOWN AND A BLACK TURTLENECK:** These two pieces are essential to any fall wardrobe. You will wear them over and over again.



**KEEPING WARM...**This camel-colored, two-way-zip cardigan can keep you warm through the fall. The 100 percent cotton cardigan can be purchased at *Abercrombie* for \$49.50.

If you do not own these two tops, purchase them immediately. These pieces are the core of any fall wardrobe. Look for a crisp-cotton-white-button down shirt. Try to get a shirt that has stretch; look for a shirt that is made of about 15 percent Lycra.

But if stretch is not your thing, look for a white shirt with distinct tailoring around the waist or sleeves, the tailoring will give you a professional look. A white shirt is so wonderful because you can pair it up with a suit, jeans or just about anything. It's the perfect layering piece.

A black turtleneck is also a key



**CRAZY ABOUT CORDS...**This great flared corduroy pant comes in six colors and can be purchased at *Delia's* for \$34.

item. Look for a lightweight black merino-wool turtleneck or just a basic black cotton-ribbed turtleneck. Pair it up with some jeans or a skirt and you are ready to go.

*Continued on Page 19*