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FUNNY MAN

Craig Ferguson
at WHBPAC**Craig Ferguson Brings the Laughs to WHBPAC**

BY KELLY LAFFEY

When Scottish-born comedian Craig Ferguson travelled to the United States for the very first time, his destination was Long Island.

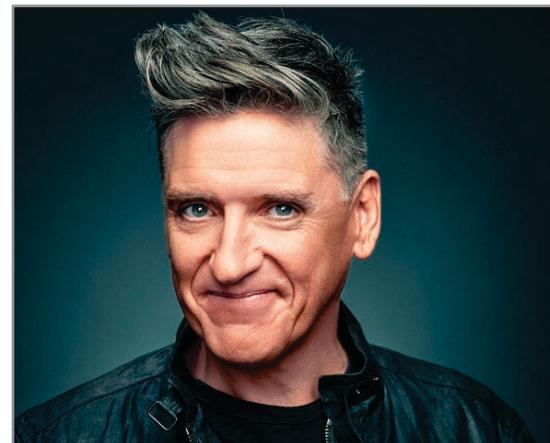
"You know the Blydenburgh Estate, now Blydenburgh [County] Park?" asks Ferguson, his penchant for history, which will soon be showcased in his all-new History Channel show, *Join or Die with Craig Ferguson*, coming through as he describes the Smithtown landmark. The property used to be a private estate, and Ferguson's Uncle James was

the groundskeeper. "So in the 1970s, I came out and visited," he says.

The Emmy-nominated, Peabody Award-winning television host, formerly of *The Late Late Show with Craig Ferguson*, will return to Long Island on Sept. 25, when he brings his New Deal standup tour to the Westhampton Beach Performing Arts Center.

"My standup is like a wise-ass Irish guy in a bar. It's the Celtic storytelling tradition," says Ferguson of his comedic style, which has been widely recognized and lauded for feeling conversational and off-the-cuff.

"The thing is, if you're talking to an audience



Courtesy WHBPAC

Craig Ferguson comes to WHBPAC on September 25.

for an hour and a half, it's that weird one-sided conversation. I'm not going to recite stuff at you...I think I would get bored if I did that."

Ferguson's ability to think on his feet and engage guests in honest conversation earned him a very successful stint on *The Late Late Show*, where he won a Peabody Award for his 2009 interview with South African social rights activist and staunch apartheid opponent, Archbishop Desmond Tutu. The show "went in a direction I didn't expect," says Ferguson, a testament to his ability to let conversational banter flow. "After we talked about what he had done in South Africa with Nelson Mandela, [Archbishop Tutu] steered the conversation toward how mad I was, and then him telling me how he approved of how mad I was...I felt like I was getting endorsed by a higher authority.

"I really felt engaged. When you meet someone like that, who is a world and historical figure and then you find yourself in a genuine conversation with someone who will be remembered for a very, very long time, it's fascinating."

The show exemplified what Ferguson has always known about comedy: That is doesn't have to be cruel. "If [comedy is] not cruel, if it's not trying to make someone look stupid...then you can talk about most things, and the conversation can have a lightness and a reality to it because most conversation have lightness and reality," he says. "With Desmond Tutu, we were talking about very serious and horrible things, but we were also talking to a man who has a great joy of life. It would be inaccurate of me not to report that, not to celebrate that."

Ferguson is currently the host of the syndicated *Celebrity Name Game*. And his new debate-style show on the History Channel will explore historic topics from an approachable perspective. "Sometimes in academia, pomposity is mistaken for knowledge and I wonder if that doesn't always have to be the case," Ferguson says. "I think the idea of doing the History Channel show probably was born right about the time I did the show with Father Tutu," he continues. *Join or Die with Craig Ferguson* will explore a number of historical topics, as Ferguson admits that he's interested in a large number of time periods.

"I think that ultimately history is the story of our species, it's the story of everyone," says Ferguson. "So I think that an understanding of history can't help but eventually breed tolerance, which wouldn't be a bad thing."

Will the show incorporate Long Island history?

"It's entirely possible," Ferguson says. 🇺🇸

Craig Ferguson at WHBPAC, 76 Main Street, Westhampton Beach, September 25 at 8 p.m. For more info, call 631-288-1500 or visit whbpac.org.

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