Brett Williams
Achieves His Dreams as He Tours with Jazz Bassist Marcus Miller

Brett Williams, a senior piano performance major, crafted his talent through hours of lessons, rehearsals and performances. He sharpened his skills performing as a young member of the Pittsburgh jazz community.

Today, Williams sees all of that hard work pay off as he performs with world-renowned bass player Marcus Miller’s band on its European tour.

Williams started with Miller’s tour in early June 2013. He spent five and a half weeks in Europe, and then traveled to Japan to perform for an additional week and a half. The band finished up the first leg of its tour in September and, after a short break, Williams joined them again in October to begin the second set of European shows.

Williams began playing piano at the tender age of four, making his debut performance at a wedding reception at age nine. At 13, his interest in jazz propelled him to begin playing in Pittsburgh’s jazz clubs, and it was in these clubs and at jazz “hangs” that Williams forged strong relationships with others in the community. These connections, combined with hard work, dedication and time spent performing and learning from the masters of the Pittsburgh jazz community, have helped pave Williams’ path to the European tour.

“I’m meeting new people, learning about different...
“Pittsburgh has a rich history in jazz,” Williams said, “and building strong relationships with other jazz musicians has been a key to my success in Pittsburgh. The jazz community here is one big family. Everyone looks out for everyone else. There are so many musicians from this city who gig across the country and around the world and bring great opportunities for young, up-and-coming musicians in the area.

“I got this gig because of my playing ability and my character as a person,” Williams continued. “Because of those things, I was able to meet high-caliber musicians of influence who recommended me to Marcus. I also believe that none of these opportunities would have been possible without my faith in God and support from my family. I am truly blessed.”

With the help and flexibility of the School of Music’s faculty, Williams is finishing up his final year of college while on the tour. He is working with them to fulfill his educational obligations here at Duquesne, while living his dream of performing abroad. In fact, Sean Jones, associate professor of jazz studies, is also playing on the tour and offers his insight and experience to Williams.

“Coming to Duquesne has been an awesome experience,” Williams said. “The truly great thing about Duquesne is the faculty. I met Mike Tomaro during a summer jazz workshop when I was in eighth grade. I played in his jazz ensemble for my four years here at Duquesne, and I took his arranging classes, which taught me a lot. I also get to work with Sean Jones both on the tour and at Duquesne. His combo class was invaluable to me, but as an emerging artist, the added benefit of working with him in a real-world touring situation has been of even greater significance.”

Williams also credits faculty members Ronald Bickel (whom Williams studied with beginning in high school); David Allen Wehr, Jack W. Geltz distinguished Piano Chair; and former faculty member Anthony DiVittorio for their dedicated teaching and insight.

Williams has set lofty goals for his future career and believes he will attain them through hard work and determination. “Eventually,” he said, “I’d like to be Brett Williams, a headlining artist. I’d like to have my own name. I also want to travel the world and play. I feel like I was born to do this—to travel, to perform and to make people happy. During the tour, I saw how playing music made so many people happy. Thousands of people came to our concerts and I was able to see the joy in their faces.

“I’m having so much fun being able to play music abroad,” Williams said. “I am meeting new people, learning about different cultures and seeing so many new things. It’s going to be so exciting to see where this chapter in my life takes me. I’m meeting all kinds of people—people who I listen to on my iPod. It’s been utterly amazing, and this gig is setting the bar for me professionally. I’m starting at such a high level.”

Williams also has goals that include one of the music industry’s highest achievements, a GRAMMY Award. “As a kid, I set a goal for myself to win a GRAMMY. Although it is a lofty goal, winning just one would reflect all of my hard work and commitment to becoming the best that I can be. Then I can say, ‘I did it’.”

Brett Williams, senior piano performance major

“...cultures and seeing so many new things.”