

## Keith Richards Wins Mailer Award

By Allison Yarrow | Nov 4, 2011 4:21 PM EDT

**Keith Richards is most famous for his music and one-time drug use. Now his poetic side will be feted with a prestigious literary award.**



When Bill Clinton turned 60, The Rolling Stones played his birthday party and Martin Scorsese lit New York's Beacon Theater bright as day to immortalize the event in documentary form. Now, it's Clinton's turn to honor the Stones' guitarist, songwriter and sometime singer Keith Richards, and not for his peerless contributions to music.

On Nov. 8, The Norman Mailer Center will fete writers, both famous and not, at a gala at the Mandarin Oriental Hotel in New York. Richards and his co-author James Fox will receive the prize for Distinguished Biography for Richards's 2010 memoir, *Life*. The unorthodox nature of Fox's and Richards's collaboration has been documented—Richards insisted on blaring music during their interviews, and once a draft was finished, Fox read each page to Richards out loud. Fox recalled Richards's natural ear for prose and Richards unveiled the burdens of his difficult childhood.

A rock music bad boy turned poet may seem an oddball choice for a highbrow literary accolade, but to the selection committee, it's a pick that makes perfect sense. Not unlike the National Book Foundation's honoring punk godmother Patti Smith and her memoir *Just Kids* with one of its coveted yearly awards, the Mailer Center is banking that celebrating Richards will get attention.

"We want to make people aware that great literature and fine work exist not only in the Pulitzer Prize, but in pop culture," said Lawrence Schiller, who co-founded the center in 2008 with Mailer's widow, Norris Church Mailer, who died in November last year.

Other honorees at the Mailer gala include the formidable Elie Wiesel for lifetime achievement, new journalism titan Gay Talese, and activist and writer Arundhati Roy. Writing by a college student, a high school student, and a high school teacher will also be acknowledged with cash awards. "Stephen King started as a teacher," Schiller said.

The Mailer Center also funds scholarships and fellowships designed to funnel writers to the bungalow in Provincetown, Mass., where Mailer retreated to write. He published at least 30 books in many genres, but is perhaps best famous for his first novel, *The Naked and the Dead*, which was inspired by his World War II experience, and for his nonfiction narratives such as *The Armies of the Night* and *The Executioner's Song*.

Richards is among a group of rock musicians, including Gregg Allman, Steven Tyler, and Neil Young, who are planning or have recently published memoirs.

<http://www.thedailybeast.com/content/dailybeast/articles/2011/11/04/keith-richards-to-be-honored-by-bill-clinton-at-mailer-awards.html>