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Sac State Professor Richard Savino nominated for a Grammy

Music Professor Richard Savino will be mingling with the likes of Katy Perry and Cee Lo Green in February. The Sacramento State guitar instructor will be attending the Feb. 12 Grammy Awards in Los Angeles, where he’ll compete in the Best Small Ensemble Performance category.

Savino’s group, El Mundo, has been nominated for its CD “Kingdoms of Castile.” El Mundo performs music written by Spanish, Latin American and Italian composers of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries.

“Is there any way to describe being nominated other than ‘fantastic’?” he asks.

The group tries to keep its work authentic. Savino researches a piece, sometimes reconstructing it from fragments. Instruments from the appropriate period in history are played using techniques that are as close as possible to the original. “This also includes a significant amount of improvisation, so there is definitely a stamp of uniqueness to our work,” he says.

The Small Ensemble Performance award is presented earlier in the day than the televised musical extravaganza. But, if awarded, Savino will get to walk up to the podium to accept the small statue. And he will attend the evening celebration, sitting among the “inner circle” at the Staples Center. “Look for me in my tux,” he says.

As a child, Savino began his musical journey with his voice and a trumpet. Inspired by his father, he listened to the likes of Al Jolson, Al Hirt and Dizzy Gillespie. But when Savino saw The Beatles on The Ed Sullivan Show, he put down the trumpet and picked up a guitar. He started out playing rock guitar, moved over to jazz and then fell in love with the classical guitar.
His idea for El Mundo began gestating in the 1980s and early '90s. "I noticed that there were very few ensembles pursuing this very rich and varied repertoire with the conviction I felt it deserved," Savino says. After working with various ensembles over the years, Savino formed El Mundo in 1999 and has obviously found success with the group.

Savino came to Sacramento State in 1985 from East Stroudsburg State University in Pennsylvania. He currently teaches applied guitar, coaches chamber music and, in a nod to his earliest guitar work, teaches a general education class on the History of Rock Music.

Don’t expect the professor to leave the classroom anytime soon just because he’s realized success with El Mundo. While Savino has more recording projects in various stages of completion, plus a couple of publications in the works, he still loves teaching.

“I love watching students ‘get it,’ ” he says. “Sometimes it takes awhile, but when it occurs, it’s an incredible feeling knowing that you have somehow impacted this person’s life forever.”

Listen to an excerpt from “Kingdoms of Castile” here. For media assistance, call Sacramento State’s Public Affairs office at (916) 278-6156.

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