Music professor combines loves for teaching and passion for performing

Karina Ultreras, Staff Writer | Posted: Monday, June 1, 2015 8:35 pm

“Lectures, grades and rock ‘n’ roll” is what Arthur Winer, a Cal Poly Pomona music professor, is all about. He has managed to combine his passions for music and teaching in the halls of the music department.

When he was 9 years old, Winer took violin lessons and commenced his interest in music. In high school, punk rock music became more appealing. He ended up joining a band called the Red M&M’s.

“I’ve been a musician ever since I was a kid,” said Winer. “When I was a young teenager — around 12 or 13 — I switched to guitar, just because it seemed more relevant to my interests.”

Throughout college, he played in various bands and got involved with songwriting and studying classical guitar.

“It gave me a real background on how the guitar works and good technique,” said Winer. “I quickly became interested in rock ‘n’ roll, and my passion was to play with bands.”

While he was living in New York City in the late 1990s, Winer helped form the band MacArthur. His debut album was put together, and with his band, he played at many rock clubs.

Returning to graduate school at New York University, Winer had no choice but to put MacArthur aside due to a full-time job opportunity. Winer decided to revive MacArthur after moving across the country to become part of CPP’s faculty.

“I spent most of my time helping other people with their music, and I wasn’t really working on my own,” said Winer. “It was recently in the last couple of years that I dusted off some old recordings and started writing new songs.”

Professor Kelly Jones, who teaches songwriting at CPP, sang backup vocals on a couple tracks of MacArthur’s new album, “The Fall Guy.”

“Arthur has a very clear vision for what he wants and was able to communicate that to me,” said Jones.
“We recorded my vocals here at the studio on campus, and it was a lot of fun. The songs were very melodic and sing-able, so it made it very easy for me as a singer myself.”

According to Jones, Winer’s characteristics shine through in his songwriting.

“I think of Arthur as a very intelligent, clever, witty guy, and I think this part of his personality really shines through the lyric writing,” said Jones. “He’s a storyteller and fuses his lyrics with heart and soul but also some humor, and he does it in a creative way.”

Uniting a passion for teaching and a love for creating can be quite difficult, but Winer thinks it is a perfect blend.

“They’re both ways for me to have music be a part of my life in a way that it’s not just a hobby,” said Winer. “What I’m trying to do is to not have my job as a professor be at odds with MacArthur. I’m trying to integrate them. I use the recordings that I made for MacArthur in my recording class as examples.”

Jones got a closer look at the development and hard work Winer put into his current album.

“It is admirable,” said Jones. “He is working his butt off to make that happen, and he should be commended for that. I think it is essential for an artist’s well being, and he knows that. If you are a musician or a creative person then you become a teacher as well. You can’t abandon your creative side.”

One of Winer’s achievements at CPP is starting the annual Songwriter Showcase. Students have the opportunity to express themselves and share their talent at the event.

“I started the Songwriter Showcase Ensemble largely because of that I wanted to be working in music and not just recording,” said Winer. “The techniques and ideas I use for songwriting help with the Songwriter Showcase Ensemble.”

Third-year music industry studies student Sam Smiley has participated in the showcase three times and taken a recording class with Winer.

“Having the songwriter showcase is a fantastic opportunity,” said Smiley. “It allows room for a lot of free roaming, and you discovering how to do something best. He is not one for giving out giant masses of information. He will give you a task, and you do it. You’ll learn by that, and that’s reflective with Cal Poly’s motto.”

Winer intimidated Rhyan Riesgo, a first-year transfer music student, before she had him as a professor.

“He is so cool and intimidating in his corduroy jacket,” said Riesgo. “Once I started doing the Songwriter Showcase, I got to know him a little bit better. He approached me in a way where he respected me as a person.”
Winer has observed both of his students’ learning progress and talent. He asked Smiley and Riesgo to fill in the bass and drums for MacArthur’s Thursday show at Downtown Pomona’s Acerogami.

“It is interesting to play with your professor because I already spend so much time in class having him teach me,” said Smiley. “It is weird. He is very vocal and instructive in class but then when we get to performing — which you’d think would be his extroverted phase — he’s a lot more quiet and introverted.”

In his first time playing bass for a show, Smiley felt comfortable playing alongside his rock star professor.

“The kind of aura that Professor Winer puts out is not of judging,” said Smiley. “Never have I been performing or practicing on stage with Professor Winer or any of his friends and felt judged. That’s another good quality of [Winer]. Instead, [he] wants you to learn and expand yourself.”

Riesgo admires Winer’s ways of teaching and musical career.

“Playing with him is no different than playing with a few pals of mine,” said Riesgo. “If were to ever need someone for musical advice I’d always go to him. I’m very lucky to go to Cal Poly and met him. He is extremely talented and a mastermind.”

Danny Arbanas, a music industry alumnus who graduated in 2013, came out to support his former professor.

“He is probably one of my favorite professors,” said Arbanas. “I loved his recording classes.”

Arbanas appreciates the dedication Winer has for his students.

“We went on a ton of field trips to different studios, and he really opened up the music industry for me because he took me places I wouldn’t be able to go without him,” said Arbanas. “He related to us. I mean I just saw his band play, and we’re all in bands.”