

## Upper Dublin music teacher nominated for Grammy

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By Linda Finarelli

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Sean Kennedy recently found himself in the top 3 percent of music teachers nationwide.

A quarter-finalist for a Grammy Music Educator Award, the Sandy Run Middle School teacher, band director and professional musician is one of 222 music teachers chosen from 7,000 nominees throughout the United States. Glenn Cowen of Upper Moreland High School, Michael Hood from Wissahickon High School and Ralph Jackson, Bridle Path Elementary in Lansdale, also made the list

The award is for “what you’ve done for the school and the kids and how you have motivated them through music,” said Kennedy, who was nominated by a Sandy Run parent.

According to the Grammy Foundation website, the award, now in its second year, “was established to recognize current educators (kindergarten through college, public and private schools) who have made a significant and lasting contribution to the field of music education and who demonstrate a commitment to the broader cause of maintaining music education in the schools.”

Among his duties at Sandy Run, Kennedy teaches music classes, directs and instructs sixth-grade band and the jazz band and does group instrumental lessons for brass, woodwind and percussion. A professional percussionist and drummer, he also plays piano, woodwinds and brass.

“To get a music education degree” — he has bachelor’s degree and master’s in percussion performance from West Chester University — “you have to be able to teach it all,” he said. “I play piano a lot in the classroom.

“I try to do stuff [the students] won’t find on their own, to open their mind,” Kennedy said. “Some sixth-graders say they don’t like musicals,” but after Kennedy exposes them to it, “then all of a sudden it’s interesting. You can make future lovers of the arts.”

The author of three music books, working on a fourth, with four CDs of his own Sean J. Kennedy Band released, Kennedy teaches at music camps in the summer, including the World Peace Orchestra in New York City, attended by students from Africa and Asia and taught by “faculty from all over the world,” which he called “life-changing.”

With 18 years at Sandy Run under his belt, and 27 as a professional musician, Kennedy, 42, a father of four married



to a drummer, said it was his high school band director at Archbishop Wood who “really lit a fire under me. He allowed me to cross over to the professional world as a sophomore in high school, which fanned the flames.

“Playing with adults, I think the quality of the music was the real attraction,” he said. His first professional gig was playing tympani and other percussion instruments; “then I got into drum set ... it was baptism by fire.”

Kennedy said upon being notified that he was nominated for the Grammy, he filled out a questionnaire, but has no idea what got him to the quarter-finals. As such, he was asked to submit a video of himself teaching and conducting — “they wanted to see me interacting with kids and the kids’ response to a lesson,” a biography, and a video of students, former students, parents and colleagues on “how he impacted the community and school and is an advocate for music education.”

“One former student told how [Kennedy’s] classes helped her in college”; another, studying to be a pilot, told of Kennedy’s impact on him; two members of Conan O’Brien’s band — with whom Kennedy has performed — “did a video endorsing me.”

“All these people reaching out and doing stuff for me, it doesn’t even matter if I get to the next round ... it’s mind-blowing for me what they said. I will treasure those videos forever. It’s enough to see the impact I’m having around here.”

The finalists, to be announced in September, will be selected for their “remarkable impact on students’ lives,” **Grammy.com** says. The winner will receive \$10,000 and be flown to Los Angeles to accept the award at the Grammy Awards ceremony. The other nine will receive \$1,000, with matching grants going to the schools of all 10.

“I have no idea what I would do with the money,” Kennedy said. “I’m not planning for it.

“If I win or I don’t, it doesn’t matter. I already win because I love what I’m doing every day,” he said. “A trophy for me is a kid like Kevin Gift” — a former student who recently brought his professional band to Kennedy’s classroom for a demonstration and to critique his students — “or the kid who’s going back to be a pilot following his dream. If I help attain that dream, it’s the greatest award you can get.”

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