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Rising star Gonzalez to headline concert for flood relief

By Daily News staff

The Winona State University Recreational Programming class and Melvincares.com will present "A Flood Relief Concert" with singer-songwriter and pianist Rob Gonzalez and his band at 7 p.m. Nov. 1 in WSU's Somsen Auditorium.

At the age of 5, Gonzalez began to display a gifted ear for music. By high school, Gonzalez was performing as a guest jazz pianist in nearby college faculty concerts.

With a voice similar to a young Jackson Browne, songs in the bluesy style of Van Morrison and piano playing reminiscent of vintage Elton John, Gonzalez has earned himself a reputation that is being spread grass-roots-style across the United States.

Gonzalez describes himself as Dave Matthews meets Elton John. The 37-year-old singer, songwriter and pianist sings and plays acoustic rock with jazz and blues influences. Over the past five years, Gonzalez has played the U.S. college circuit, performing more than 250 shows to audiences as large as 3,000, traveling more than 200,000 miles coast to coast, and steadily building a legion of devoted fans.

In January, the New York Times named him as one of its six emerging artists in America, and James Taylor presented him with the award in New York.

His fourth CD, "All Is Right With the World," features British arranger and Grammy winner Paul Buckmaster, and Dave Way, one of the top producers in Los Angeles.

Tickets for the concert are \$10 in advance and \$12 at the door. Proceeds will be donated to the WSU Foundation Account for Flood Relief.

For more information, call Lorene Olsen at (507) 457-5499.

Q&A WITH ROB GONZALEZ

When did you start playing the piano?

I took lessons when I was 6, and I was performing by 12 or 13. I knew at age 14 I wanted to be a songwriter. I was drawn to the piano and took to it very quickly.

How did your music career start?

When I was 19, I was asked to join a band to play at a fancy hotel in the Virgin Islands. I was there six months and then toured with a band for 18 months. I decided I had to get serious about music, so I went to Berklee school of music in Boston. That's where I learned my craft, performing, writing songs and singing. For 10 years, I performed in Boston. I then hit the college circuit for five years, and I was the No. 1 touring performer.

How did you end up in La Crosse, Wis.?

My sister, Ramona, introduced me to Don Weber (chairman and CEO of Logistics Health Inc.), and he

invested in one of my CDs and I played for the opening of his building. He liked my idea for a new venture, a music download Web site which would bring artists to their fans. Don is supporting the venture, and our cutting-edge music technology company is based in La Crosse.

Who is your favorite musical artist?

Ray Charles.

What's one thing most people don't know about you?

I do impressions of Sesame Street characters.

If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?

I'd be able to sing a high A more effortlessly.

Who are some of your influences?

My parents, Dr. Ramon and Rita Gonzalez; Ray Charles and Paul McCartney.

What is your biggest fear?

Never finding the love of my life.

— Terry Rindfleisch, Lee Newspapers

IF YOU GO

What: A Flood Relief Concert

When: 7 p.m. Nov. 1

Where: Somsen Auditorium, Winona State University

Cost: Tickets are \$10 in advance and \$12 at the door