2011 Ellen Browning Scripps Distinguished Alumni Award  
Gary ‘Jules’ Aguirre ’87

“I started UCLA in fall 1987 and set a school record for how fast one can get kicked out. I went back to UCLA in 1999, and did the bulk of my undergraduate work in two years, over 30, having already had a record deal, and feeling like I had already lived several lifetimes. I graduated from UCLA in 2001 as an English major, and feel like that work was the most important thing I’ve done in my adult life except for my family.”

From earning the title, “Most Talented” at Bishop’s to becoming a critically acclaimed independent musician compared to the likes of Paul Simon and Cat Stevens, Gary ‘Jules’ Aguirre ’87 (professionally shortened to Gary Jules in honor of his Texan grandfather) was influenced by his mother’s love of singer-songwriters such as Joni Mitchell and James Taylor as well as his father’s preference for the rock of the Rolling Stones and the Beatles. His interest in the electric guitar began in the fifth grade and led him to form numerous bands including the now infamous Bishop’s “Ivory Knights.”

Gary’s fondest memories of Bishop’s are of the people, his close friends and his teachers. “Gary always had the Midas touch.... he’s good at just about everything. The guy started on the (Bishop’s) soccer and baseball teams, surfed La Jolla’s reefs like he owned them, and wrote endless songs that defined our time at Bishop’s...,” says classmate, Steve Blank ’87.

Gary, who played varsity soccer for Coach Manneh and sang in Mrs. Campbell’s chorus, recognized the important role his teachers had in his development. “Mrs. Bowles taught me how to organize my thoughts and write an effective fivepoint essay. It’s the single most important thing I ever learned in school. Period . . . and what could any of us say about Dr. Otto Mower? He took us to Europe, Amsterdam even! I got a five on the AP Art History Exam. That was a miracle.” In the end, it was his music that led to his being voted “Most Talented” for the Class of 1987. In 2001, Gary self released his second album, Trading Snakeoil for Wolftickets, which soon became a hit in Europe and Australia. At the same time, other opportunities began to surface. With childhood friend, Mike Andrews, Gary recorded a haunting remake of the 1982 hit song by Tears for Fears, “Mad World.” The song, recorded in a basement for less than $100, ended up being featured in peak scenes of the indie noir film, Donnie Darko. It subsequently went gold, then platinum in fewer than eight weeks, soaring in both the European and Scandinavian charts. As of September 2011 the song had 39,044,972 hits on YouTube. Gary’s music has been featured in many of the world’s most popular television dramas, video games, and reality TV competitions including CSI, ER, Without A Trace, Grey’s Anatomy, X Factor, So You Think You Can Dance, Pop Idol, Australian Idol, and American Idol.
After years of touring worldwide both as a headlining act and sharing the stage with musical icons such as Bob Dylan, Jack Johnson, Sheryl Crow, Beck, Jewel, Jason Mraz, Liz Phair, Tears for Fears, and Todd Rundgren among others, Gary Jules went home to California. In August 2004, Gary and his wife Greta welcomed their first child, Gus. He left the traditional music scene, companies and management behind; downsizing to the rural mountains of North Carolina in 2006 to enjoy a more sustainable life that allowed him time to be with his family that now includes Eddie, born in December 2010.

For his work as a musician and singer-songwriter, we are pleased to bestow Gary ‘Jules’ Aguirre ’87 with the Ellen Browning Scripps Distinguished Alumni Award.