

Feb. 10, 2005 12:37 EDT

## Polka player do-si-dos his way to L.A.

Graham Rockingham  
The Hamilton Spectator

When the world's musical glitterati swish down the red carpet into the Grammy Awards Sunday night, keep your eyes peeled for John and Diane Gora of Burlington.

You may know them. John's band may have played your wedding. That's his specialty. Diane may have cleaned your teeth. She's a restorative dental hygienist. John will be wearing a tuxedo he keeps in the closet for such occasions. Diane will be in a burgundy dress from Maplevue Mall.

John's latest CD, Pangora's Box, is nominated for a Grammy in the polka category. It features a decent cover of Billy Joel's She's Always a Woman, a big crowd pleaser at weddings. John sings and plays sax. It's the instrument he played in the Scott Park high school band during the '70s.

It's John's third Grammy nomination since he started making records 15 years ago. His biggest hit was a polka version of Yellow Polka Dot Bikini. It did well in all the polka hot spots in America.

He's never won, but this year he feels he has a chance. In previous years, he was overshadowed by the giants of the genre like Jimmy Sturr (14 wins) and St. Catharines' Walter Ostanek (three wins, 10 nominations).

Sturr isn't in the running this year. He recorded a big album with people such as Willie Nelson and Alison Krauss backing him up, but the judges didn't buy it. Ostanek is nominated again. But even Walter is picking Gora as the favourite, says John.

"This is our biggest chance ever because the big gun (Sturr) isn't there," Gora says. "Walter's there. But his personal feeling is that we're going to get it."

John and Diane are flying to L.A. tomorrow for some of the pre-Grammy parties. Since they don't have a big record label behind them, they have to pay their own way. The nomination, however, gets them into the parties free and that's a huge saving. Tickets for the public are more than \$1,000.

In previous years, the Goras have rubbed elbows with such stars as Phil Collins and Alanis Morissette. But the red carpet is always the biggest thrill.

"To walk down the red carpet, that's the big thing," says Diane. "Everyone's wondering who you are. It makes you feel important."

Come Monday, they'll be home in Burlington with their three children.

"We're down-to-earth people, there to enjoy the moment, get some free media and then back to reality," adds John.



Burlington's John Gora, left, will be up against Walter Ostanek at this year's Grammy Awards.