



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**MERLEFEST'S CHRIS AUSTIN SONGWRITING CONTEST
ANNOUNCES FINALISTS FOR 2013**

WILKESBORO, N.C. (April 2, 2013)—Finalists have been selected for the annual **Chris Austin Songwriting Contest**, hosted by **MerleFest 2013**. Now in its 21st year, the contest is an extraordinary opportunity for aspiring writers to have their original songs heard and judged by a panel of music industry professionals, under the direction of this year's volunteer contest chairperson, Grammy®-winning singer/songwriter **Jim Lauderdale**. MerleFest 2013 takes place from **April 25-28** on the campus of Wilkes Community College in Wilkesboro, North Carolina.

Writers of the following twelve songs, selected from over 700 entries, will compete on the Austin Stage in Alumni Hall at MerleFest on **Friday, April 26, at 2 p.m.:**

Bluegrass

Aaron Burdett (Saluda, N.C.) - "Magpie"
John Cloyd Miller (Asheville, N.C.) - "Cloud of Dust"
Todd Grebe (Nashville, Tenn.) - "Master of My Destiny"

Gospel/Inspirational

Melody Walker (San Francisco, Calif.) - "Black Grace"
Lorraine Jordan (Garner, N.C.) - "Judgment Day"
Kelsi Robertson Harrigill (Murfreesboro, Tenn.) - "Just Any Moment"

Country

Daniel Davis (Bristol, Va.) - "Homesick"
Eliot Bronson (Atlanta, Ga.) - "Sad Town"
Michaela Anne (Brooklyn, N.Y.) - "Lift Me Up"

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General

Ryan Tanner (Nashville, Tenn.) - "Days to Think of You"

Justin Wade Tam (Nashville, Tenn.) - "Cold Chicago"

Ben Roberts (Nashville, Tenn.)- "Gold "

Each of the twelve finalists will enjoy admission and lodging for three nights at MerleFest, and will receive a mentoring session with **Jim Lauderdale**. In addition, the first place winners will receive a performance slot on the Cabin Stage on Friday of the festival.

Distinguished songwriters **Matraca Berg**, **Lynda Dawson** and **Chris Smither** will be among the judges that determine this year's winners.

Judging is based on a song's originality, lyrics, melody and overall commercial potential.

Net proceeds from the Chris Austin Songwriting Contest help support the **Wilkes Community College Chris Austin Memorial Scholarship**. Since its inception the scholarship has awarded over \$36,000 to 75 deserving students.

For more details about the contest, visit www.merlefest.org/ChrisAustinSongwritingContest.

MerleFest, considered one of the premier music festivals in the country, is an annual homecoming of musicians and music fans held on the campus of Wilkes Community College in Wilkesboro, North Carolina. MerleFest was founded in 1988 in memory of the late Eddy Merle Watson, son of American music legend Doc Watson who passed away May 29, 2012. MerleFest is a celebration of "traditional plus" music, a unique mix of music based on the traditional, roots-oriented sounds of the Appalachian region, including bluegrass and old-time music, and expanded to include Americana, country, blues, rock and many other styles. The festival hosts over 90 artists, performing on 14 stages during the course of the four-day event. The annual event has become the primary fundraiser for the WCC Endowment Corporation, funding scholarships, capital projects and other educational needs.

About Chris Austin:

Chris Austin, from Boone, North Carolina, worked as a sideman for Ricky Skaggs for three years, singing and playing guitar, banjo, mandolin and fiddle. During that time he was discovered by executives at Warner Bros. Nashville, who offered him a recording contract. While releasing singles including "Blues Stay Away From Me," "I Know There's a Heart in There Somewhere" and "Out of Step," Austin also developed his songwriting skills, as evidenced in "Same Ol' Love," recorded by Skaggs in 1991. On March 16, 1991, Austin's life was cut tragically short when the private plane carrying him and six other members of Reba McEntire's band, as well as her tour manager, crashed in the mountains near San Diego. Pete Fisher, then of Warnersongs and currently general manager of the Grand Ole Opry, and Kari Estrin, then MerleFest consultant and *Pickin' for Merle* video associate producer, initiated the songwriting contest to honor Austin's memory.

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