

Merlefest's Chris Austin Songwriting Contest Announces Finalists

Written by Amber Herman
Saturday, 05 April 2014 14:44

Finalists have been selected for the annual Chris Austin Songwriting Contest, hosted by MerleFest 2014. Now in its 22nd 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 Award-winning singer/songwriter Jim Lauderdale. MerleFest 2014 takes place from April 24-27 on the campus of Wilkes Community College in Wilkesboro, North Carolina.

Writers of the following twelve songs, selected from over 567 entries, will compete on the Austin Stage at MerleFest on Friday, April 25:

Bluegrass

Josh Crews (Boone, N.C.) – "Crossties"

Paul Harrigill (Murfreesboro, Tenn.) and Amber Nugent (Ferriday, La.) – "I'm Blue"

Chelsea McBee of The Random Assortment & the Christian Lopez Band (Shepherdstown, W.Va.) – "Gone-A-Rye"

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Gospel/Inspirational

Gary Alan Ferguson (Alexandria, Va.) – "Time To Praise the Lord"

Frank Hurd (Raleigh, N.C.) – "Light"

Allen Smith and Corey Smith of Ash Breeze (Robbins, N.C.) – "Without Love"

Country

Dan Buehner (Salt Lake City, Utah) and Ben Childs (Oxford, Miss.), both of Hollering Pines – "Cadillac"

Kelsi Robertson-Harrigill (Murfreesboro, Tenn.) – "If You Never Let Me Go."

Becky Warren (Nashville, Tenn.) – "Call Me Sometime"

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General

Clint Alphin (Dunn, N.C.) - "Nobody Knows My Name"

Sarah Potenza and Ian Crossman (both of Nashville, Tenn.) – "My Turn"

Joseph Terrell of Mipso (Chapel Hill, N.C.) – "Angelina Jane is Long Gone"

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

The first-round judges were: Singer/songwriter/musician Tift Merritt, Claire Armbruster of Planning Stages, Ashlee-Jean Trott of Music City Roots, John Tumminello of Musicians Corner/Music City Unsigned, Judy McDonough of JEMMedia, Megan McNair of Sugar Hill Records and Whitney Holmes of the Americana Music Association. Tift Merritt won MerleFest's Chris Austin Songwriting Contest in 2000 and served as a second-round judge at MerleFest 2013.

Distinguished songwriters Darrell Scott, Charles Humphreys III (Steep Canyon Rangers) and Niall Toner will be among the second-round judges that determine this year's winners.

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Judging is based on a song's originality, lyrics, melody and overall commercial potential. The contest is open to those whose primary source of income (50 percent or more) is not derived from songwriting or publishing.

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 \$38,000 to 79 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 130 artists, performing on 13 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.

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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.