FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MERLEFEST CONGRATULATES 2011 CASC WINNERS

WILKESBORO, N.C. (May 6, 2011)—**MerleFest 2011** congratulates the winners of the **Chris Austin Songwriting Contest**. Writers of the following twelve songs were selected from over 1,053 entries and competed on the Austin Stage at MerleFest on **Friday, April 29.**
The winners are:

Bluegrass
1st Place – David Grindstaff, Benjamin Poteat and David Snider - "The Working Man" (Marion, N.C.)
2nd Place – Ashleigh Caudill - "Row By Row" (Asheville, N.C.)
3rd Place – Tonya Lowman - "Heartwrenching Lovesick Memories" (Lenoir, N.C.)

Gospel/Inspirational
1st Place – Johnny Tanner - "Wake Up John" (Florence, S.C.)
2nd Place – Rachel Harrington - "He Started Building My Mansion In Heaven Today" (Seattle, Wash.)
3rd Place – Tony Feathers - "On The Rock Where Moses Stood" (Gray, Tenn.)

Country
1st Place – Lera Lynn - "Bobby, Baby" (Athens, Ga.)
2nd Place – Thom Case - "The Smart Thing" (Brentwood, Tenn.)
3rd Place – Mickey Clark and Rusty Bladen - "Bakersfield Wine" (Louisville, Ky. and Madison, Ind.)

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General
1st Place – Driftwood Fire (Charlotte D. Formichella and Lynn Scharf) - "The Salty Sea" (Ft. Collins, Colo.)
2nd Place – The Honeycutters (Amanda Anne Platt) - "Little Bird" (Asheville, N.C.)
3rd Place – Joseph LeMay - "River In My Heart" (Dyersburg, Tenn.)

Each of the first place winners received a performance slot on the Cabin Stage at MerleFest, a Big Baby Taylor guitar, a check for $300, and a $75 gift card from Jackson's Music. Second place winners received a check for $250 and a $50 gift card from Jackson's Music. Third place winners received a check for $50 and a $25 gift card from Jackson's Music. Both second and third place winners received a slot at the Friday Songwriter Coffeehouse. All finalists received mentoring session with Grammy®-winning singer/songwriter **Jim Lauderdale**, a box of D'Addarrio strings and a one-year subscription to Acoustic Guitar Magazine.

This year's on-site judges were **Wyatt Durrett**, **Corb Lund** and **Molly Nagel.** Durrette is a respected songwriter whose credits include "Chicken Fried," the wildly successful number one hit by Grammy Award winning Zac Brown Band. Lund, Alberta's acclaimed alternative country star, has been named Roots Artist of the Year by the Canadian Country Music Association for the last five years running and was again nominated this year. Nagel is the newly-appointed general manager of the Asheville-based innovative marketing company Music Allies; previously she spent 12 years in publicity and artist development for venerated roots indie Sugar Hill Records.

The Chris Austin Songwriting Contest is a unique opportunity for aspiring writers to have their original songs heard and judged by a panel of Nashville music industry professionals, under the direction of this year's volunteer contest chairperson Jim Lauderdale. Judging is based on a song's originality, lyrics, melody and overall commercial potential.

Net proceeds from the Chris Austin Songwriting Contest support the **Wilkes Community College Chris Austin Memorial Scholarship**. Since its inception the scholarship has awarded over $35,000 to 71 deserving students. The 2010-2011 Chris Austin Memorial Scholarship recipients are Mary R. Griffith and Thomas Noah Russell. Previous winners of the Chris Austin Songwriting Contest include Gillian Welch, Tift Merritt, Michael Reno Harrell, Adrienne Young, Martha Scanlan, David Via and Johnny Williams.

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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