

*Wilkes Community College's*



**MerleFest**®

**Music. Moments. Memories.**™

ON THE CAMPUS OF WILKES COMMUNITY COLLEGE, WILKESBORO, NC

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**DEADLINE FOR CHRIS AUSTIN SONGWRITING CONTEST NEARING**

**Let your Song Be Heard**

WILKESBORO, N.C. (January 24, 2012) —**MerleFest 25** will again host the **Chris Austin Songwriting Contest** (CASC), and the **February 18, 2012**, deadline to enter is fast approaching.

**MerleFest 25**, presented by Lowe's, is slated for **April 26 – 29, 2012**, and will once again take place on the campus of Wilkes Community College in Wilkesboro, North Carolina. MerleFest is an annual homecoming of musicians and music fans, gathering to celebrate the memory of musician Eddy Merle Watson, beloved son of American music icon Doc Watson.

“Hopeful songwriters wondering whether they have what it takes should not waste another minute,” says Laurie Brintle, coordinator of the CASC. “It’s time to let your song be heard.”

The Chris Austin Songwriting Contest is one of the premier songwriting contests in the United States. Previous winners have used the contest as a springboard to launch their career. Singer/songwriter Tift Merritt and previous first place winner of the contest noted that “winning the contest was the first time [she] was noticed outside of Chapel Hill. I had such a good time and made so many friends there.”

The deadline for MerleFest’s Chris Austin Songwriting Contest is February 18, 2012, via two methods: U.S. Mail (P.O. Box 121855, Nashville, TN 37212) and Sonicbids ([www.sonicbids.com/chrisaustinsongwritingcontest](http://www.sonicbids.com/chrisaustinsongwritingcontest)).

“People pay attention to songs that win the CASC, and it may be the one thing that gets your foot in the door to getting your songs heard,” says Brink Brinkman, two-time winner of the Chris Austin Songwriting Contest.

Lera Lynn, 2011 CASC winner, noted that “CASC is a highly-respected contest that not only allows songwriters a chance to network with other serious songwriters but also has the potential to help spread the music exponentially.”

Now in this 20th year, the Chris Austin Songwriting Contest gives aspiring songwriters, like the 1993 bluegrass category winner Gillian Welch, an extraordinary opportunity to have their original songs heard by a panel of Nashville music industry songwriters and professionals and is chaired by Grammy Award winning singer/songwriter Jim Lauderdale.

The contest recognizes winners in four categories: country, bluegrass, gospel/inspirational and general. To be eligible to enter, a songwriter must not derive more than 50 percent of his or her total income from

songwriting or music publishing. Details about entry fees, eligibility and other requirements are available at [www.chrisaustinsongwritingcontest.org](http://www.chrisaustinsongwritingcontest.org).

Once submitted, songs are judged by a volunteer panel of Nashville songwriters, publishers and other music industry professionals. Judging is based on a song's originality, lyrics, melody and overall commercial potential. Twelve finalists, three from each category, will be announced during the first week of April 2012. Each of the twelve finalists will enjoy admission and lodging for three nights at MerleFest, will receive a mentoring session with Jim Lauderdale, and will compete on the Austin Stage at MerleFest 25. In addition, the first place winners will receive a performance slot on the Cabin Stage on Friday of the festival.

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 73 deserving students. This year's recipients are Mary Regina Griffith and Nicole Hampton.

Ticket purchases for MerleFest 25 can be made on the web at [www.merlefest.org](http://www.merlefest.org) or by calling 1-800-343-7857. An **early bird ticket discount** is available through **March 12, 2012**.

With over 90 artists performing on 14 stages during the course of the event, MerleFest 25 is an excellent entertainment value. A complete list of confirmed performers is available at [www.merlefest.org](http://www.merlefest.org). Additionally, up-to-the-minute lineup additions for the festival can be obtained through the festival's e-newsletter and through Facebook and Twitter.

MerleFest, considered one of the premier music festivals in the country, is held on the campus of Wilkes Community College in Wilkesboro, North Carolina. MerleFest was founded in 1988 in memory of Eddy Merle Watson and is a celebration of what Doc Watson calls "traditional plus" music, meaning the traditional music of the Appalachian region plus whatever other styles we were in the mood to play." The annual festival has become the primary fundraiser for the WCC Endowment Corporation, funding scholarships, capital projects and other educational needs.

#### PHOTOS:



Caption: Tift Merritt - Photo by Jason Frank Rothenberg

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