## Wilkes Community College's



ON THE CAMPUS OF WILKES COMMUNITY COLLEGE, WILKESBORO, NC

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# MERLEFEST 2013, PRESENTED BY LOWE'S, ANNOUNCES WINNERS OF INSTRUMENT CONTESTS

WILKESBORO, N.C. (April 29, 2013)—MerleFest 2013, presented by Lowe's, held the Doc Watson Guitar Championship and the Merle Watson Bluegrass Banjo Contest on Friday, April 26.

### Maiden, N.C., Picker Wins Doc Watson Guitar Championship

"I think MerleFest is the best festival in the United States," Michael Ballard told crowd at the Austin Stage – and that was before he won MerleFest's annual Doc Watson Guitar Championship.

Ballard, who hails from Maiden, N.C., placed first among six competitors in the event, which drew a large crowd to the Austin Stage in Alumni Hall on the Wilkes Community College campus.

Each picker played three numbers in the one-round competition, then it was up to the judges, who were bluegrass legend Peter Rowan, Uwe Kruger of the Kruger Brothers, and last year's winner, Ben Cockman of the Cockman Family.

As first place winner, Ballard received the opportunity to perform on the Cabin Stage on Friday evening and took home a Red Spruce/Rosewood 14-Fret Slope Shoulder Dreadnought Acoustic Guitar from Guild Custom Shop, a \$300 gift certificate to Jackson's Music, a gift certificate from John Pearse Strings redeemable for one dozen strings, and capos from G7th, The Capo Company (\$193 value).

Second place went to Matthew Taylor of Maryville, Tenn., who won a \$200 gift certificate to Jackson's Music, a gift certificate from John Pearse Strings redeemable for one dozen strings, and capos from G7th, The Capo Company (\$173 value).

The third finalist was Nick DiSebastian of Nashville, who won a \$100 gift certificate to Jackson's Music, a gift certificate from John Pearse Strings redeemable for one dozen strings, and capos from G7th, The Capo Company (\$133 value).



Caption: Michael Ballard, 1<sup>st</sup> place winner of the 2013 Doc Watson Guitar Championship. Photo by Jim Thompson, MerleFest Photographer

#### Ohio Picker Wins Merle Watson Bluegrass Banjo Contest

Before Steven Moore of Bethesda, Ohio, could claim first prize in the annual Merle Watson Bluegrass Banjo Contest at MerleFest, he had to do something no other competitor ever had to attempt: play a fifth and final number, accompanied by a masked guitarist, and a singer whose face was hidden from him and the audience! It was a unique conclusion to an exciting competition that featured banjo pickers from several states.

The initial round of the competition attracted 12 performers. By the rules of the competition, the judges, who are in a separate room from the Austin Stage where the contest takes places, cannot see the participants, or hear their names. At the end of the first round, the five judges picked three competitors for the finals: in addition to Moore, there were 15-year-old Brandy Miller of West Jefferson, N.C., and Alex Edwards, 20, of Salisbury, N.C.

Those three then competed in a second round, performing an instrumental duet to accompany famed singer Laura Boosinger, and then a solo performance. When this round was down, there was a delay before it was announced the judges had discovered there was an inadvertent error made in Moore's performance. Judge Pete "Dr. Banjo" Wernick explained to the crowd that, "By the rules, the performances with Laura are to be in one key for each competitor." But Moore had done his performance, through no fault of his own, in an easier key. So the judges decided it was fair to have him perform again, this time on a piece in the key of D — "an 'uncomfort zone' for banjo players," Wernick said. The only problem was that Laura Boosinger had already left.

The solution was unique and brought laughter from the crowd. Wernick agreed to provide the singing to accompany Moore's performance, while another judge, former National Banjo and Guitar Champion Steve Lewis, would play guitar. But to keep it all fair, Lewis borrowed a bandana and tied it around his face, while Wernick turned his back to the audience and had a seat cushion up as a blinder to prevent him from seeing Moore. With that unusual arrangement set, Moore appeared, grinning at the sight, and went through a crowd-pleasing rendition of

"Lonesome Road Blues." After that, the judges met again and awarded Moore the first prize, Edwards the second, and Miller, third.

Steven Moore, 21, is a member of two bands: Almost famous and Steven Moore & Friends.

As the winner of the contest, Moore received the opportunity to perform on the Cabin Stage on Friday evening of the festival. In addition, Moore received a Deering Eagle banjo (valued at \$2,400), a \$300 gift certificate to Jackson's Music, a gift certificate from John Pearse Strings redeemable for one dozen strings, and capos and gift certificate from G7th, The Capo Company (\$160). Moore was honored to play the Raffle grand prize, which was a banjo donated by Stelling (valued at \$5,000), while performing on the Cabin Stage.

Alex Edwards won a banjo case from Separk Music (valued at \$250), \$200 gift certificate to Jackson's Music, a gift certificate from John Pearse Strings redeemable for one dozen strings and capos and gift certificate from G7th, The Capo Company (\$100 value).

Brandy Miller won a \$100 gift certificate to Jackson's Music, a gift certificate from John Pearse Strings redeemable for one dozen strings, and capos and gift certificate from G7th, The Capo Company (\$60).

In addition to Wernick and Lewis, the judges for the competition were Tony Joines of the band Backporch Bluegrass, Adrian Trbovich (spelling correct-Ed.), Lindy Brown, a musician from Raleigh, and last year's contest winner, Brandon Greene.



Caption: Steven Moore, 1<sup>st</sup> place winner of the 2013 Merle Watson Bluegrass Banjo Contest. Photo by Jim Thompson, MerleFest Photographer

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, 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 annual festival has become the primary fundraiser for the WCC Endowment Corporation, funding scholarships, capital projects and other educational needs.

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