



The Celtic Heritage Society

www.CelticFestMS.org

CelticFestMS@gmail.com | Ph. 601.376.9866

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – July 13, 2010

Contact: Kristen Matheny, 601.573.8642, or ruachbi@aol.com

Susan Dobbs, 601.359.6031, or sdobbs@arts.state.ms.us

MISSISSIPPI SUPPORTS IRISH ARTS IN THE STATE

(Jackson, MS) -- The Mississippi Arts Commission has awarded grants to some of Mississippi's finest Irish dancers and musicians. These grants are a portion of the \$1.64 million in grants the Commission will award in 2010-2011 and will be used by the individual artists to enhance and promote their craft. The grants are made possible by continued funding from the Mississippi State Legislature and the National Endowment for the Arts.

"The artists across Mississippi continue to use their talents to showcase the value of the arts to the state. Their creation of art and participation in local events and activities helps to ensure the economic success of their community and the state as a whole. The Mississippi Arts Commission is proud to support their efforts," said Malcom White, Executive Director of MAC.

"The recognition from the Arts Commission for Mississippi's Irish folk scene is a feather in the cap of each artist and for the Irish community collectively," says Rob Millette, president of the Celtic Heritage Society, the 501(c)3 charitable organization which sponsors CelticFest Mississippi and several concerts and workshops throughout the year in Mississippi. "It's also a feather in the cap of the state to have so many fine traditional artists within the Irish genre. Mississippi's cultural landscape is an awfully rich and vibrant one."

The Jackson Irish Dancers has been accepted as part of the Mississippi Arts Commission's Mississippi **Artists' Roster**. Membership on the Roster helps schools and nonprofit organizations by providing matching funds for JID for performances and workshops. The Jackson Irish Dancers are a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization dedicated to teaching Irish dance, and have a core group of volunteer performers who perform throughout the region.

Don Penzien of Jackson was recognized as a Master Artist on DADGAD guitar and was awarded a **Folk Arts Apprenticeship** for **Clark Lowery** of Petal. The grant will be used to support Lowery's learning Irish traditional music on the guitar and a history of Irish traditional music. Penzien is a founding member of the traditional Irish band, Legacy, and also performs around the U.S. and in Ireland with Captain Mackey's Goatskin & Stringband and the newly - formed Máirtín de Cógáin Project. Lowery is an accomplished Bluegrass guitarist and is a member of the Bluegrass-Celtic fusion, Emerald Accent.

Valerie Plested was awarded a **Folk Arts Fellowship** to support artistic professional development or the creation of new work. Plested intends to use the funding to produce a new recording of Irish traditional music with the traditional Irish band, Legacy. In 2001, Plested was recognized as a Master Artist in the Folk Arts Apprenticeship with student Pat O'Mire. Plested

performs with Legacy, Captain Mackey's Goatskin & Stringband, and the Máirtín de Cógáin Project.

Catherine Bishop was recognized as a Master Artist in Irish dance with the awarding of a **Folk Arts Apprenticeship** with Apprentice Tavia Ethredge, her student in Irish dance. Ethredge is a young member of the Jackson Irish Dancers and is studying competition-level Irish solo stepdancing. Bishop is a certified (TCRG) Irish dance instructor and serves as the guiding instructor for the Jackson Irish Dancers. Bishop received a second grant, a **Folk Arts Fellowship** for her work in Irish dance, which she will use to create set dance pieces to be performed locally and shared with Irish dancers worldwide.

Lastly, **CelticFest Mississippi** was awarded a **Project Grant** funding from the Mississippi Arts Commission. CelticFest is an annual celebration of traditional Celtic culture, taking place in Jackson the weekend after Labor Day (Sept. 10-12, 2010). The grant is to support the festival generally, with additional grants from other organizations for CelticFest expected soon.

The Mississippi Arts Commission is a state agency serving residents of the state by providing grants that support programs to enhance communities; assist artists and arts organizations' promote the arts in education and celebrate Mississippi's cultural heritage. Established in 1968, the Mississippi Arts Commission is funded by the Mississippi Legislature, the National Endowment for the Arts, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation, the Phil Hardin Foundation, Mississippi Endowment for the Arts at the Community Foundation of Greater Jackson, and other private sources. The agency serves as an active supporter and promoter of arts in community life and in arts education.

For information from the Mississippi Arts Commission, please contact Susan Dobbs, 601.359.6031 or sdobbs@arts.state.ms.us.

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