

Carol Hausner-Colin McCaffrey song wins major award

By ART EDELSTEIN / Arts Correspondent - Published: May 8, 2009

Singer and songwriter Carol Hausner of Montpelier and multi-instrumentalist, performer and producer Colin McCaffrey of East Montpelier won first prize in the bluegrass songwriting category at the popular MerleFest held in Wilkesboro, N.C., April 23. The pair won for the song they co-wrote "Love Gone By." That song appears on Hausner's recent CD "Still Hear Your Voice" which The Times Argus reviewed earlier this year.



MerleFest honors the memory of instrumental virtuoso Eddy Merle Watson, the son of famed guitarist Doc Watson. It was created in 1988 and draws more than 30,000 for a weekend of traditional music. This year, headliners included Emmy Lou Harris and Linda Ronstadt.

"Love Gone By" as it appears on the album is a medium-tempo bluegrass love song with banjo intro, lead vocal by Hausner, double-track fiddles, guitar and bass and harmony vocals by McCaffrey. She categorized the song as "a traditional bluegrass song in the style of older performers like Bill Monroe or Flatt and Scruggs."

Hausner's song was one of 840 submitted to the Chris Austin Songwriting Contest, which is part of MerleFest. She said she had heard about the contest earlier this year and having recently released her CD; she thought "why not?"

"I thought, you never know," said Hausner, who admitted that she didn't expect to win.

Hausner originally wrote the song but had not performed it. While in production for the CD she mentioned the song to McCaffrey. "I had it in my head still and thought it would be fun to put on the album."

McCaffrey received co-writer credits because it was his idea to better differentiate between the melody of the verse and the melody of the chorus from what Hausner had originally written.

"That was a great suggestion and gave the song more clarity," she said. "He suggested where some of the feeling might go."

Hausner was contacted by the festival committee and told she was a finalist. Final performances of the 12 songs in four categories were held Friday April 23, and according to her, finalists had to appear. McCaffrey was unable to attend so Hausner enlisted a friend, Eleanor Ellis, a singer/guitarist from Tacoma Park, Md., whom she had performed with in the past. "We performed the song in front of three judges, and the public was there as well," she related.

Hausner's reaction to winning was reasonable: "I was a little in shock."

As a winner Hausner got to perform on the festival Cabin Stage, located near the main stage on Friday evening. Because she was a winner she was able to enlist three accompanists and her song was performed again with her impromptu band.

"People came up to me, and congratulated me. It was a good feeling," she said.

As winners, Hausner and McCaffrey won an acoustic guitar, a check for \$300, two boxes of guitar strings and a one-year subscription to Acoustic Guitar magazine. "Colin and I have to figure out how to split up the prize – it will be hard to split up the guitar," she quipped.

What effect winning the contest will have on her career is uncertain. "I do appreciate the recognition of this organization. I noticed how much they value songwriting," she said.