

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

July 6, 2006

### **W.C. HANDY MUSIC FESTIVAL CELEBRATES SILVER ANNIVERSARY**

“The Hit Recording Capital of the World” in the Muscle Shoals region of Northwest Alabama is approaching its fiftieth year of making modern recording history. Over the past half century the Shoals area has seen more than its share of musical talent, will and determination, and that tradition lives on in today’s generation of artists and musical craftsmen.

According to Native American legends that describe the Tennessee River as the “Singing River,” the story of music in the Shoals began in pre-history. For some, the story begins with the birth of W.C. Handy in Florence, Alabama, in 1873. To commemorate this musical legend, the Music Preservation Society of the Shoals established the annual W.C. Handy Music Festival in 1982. The celebration marks its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary July 21-30 with rhythm-and-blues singer Bonnie Bramlett and the Capricorn Rhythm Section and blues pianist Henry Butler booked as this year’s dual headliner acts.

The first W.C. Handy Music Festival was a long weekend of music featuring jazz legend Dizzy Gillespie as the headlining artist. The W.C. Handy Music Festival has evolved from a long weekend into a ten-day celebration of more than 250 events at locations throughout the region. The festival presents musical performances, art exhibits, theatre, educational programs including a Music Camp, and recreational and sports activities. Past headlining acts have included Muscle Shoals recording artists Percy Sledge, Clarence Carter, Little Milton and Bobby “Blue” Bland, plus Diane Schuur, Nancy Wilson, Ramsey Lewis, the Manhattan Transfer, the Phil Woods Quintet, the Billy Taylor Trio, The Great Guitars and Ellis Marsalis.

In keeping with the Music Preservation Society’s mission, the W.C. Handy Music Festival offers a mix of local, regional and nationally recognized musicians. The Muscle Shoals Music Association and the entertainment industry partner to produce “Songfest” to bring together professional musicians, artists, publishers, writers, producers, engineers and management related to the industry. Events at the Alabama Music Hall of Fame in Tuscumbia tell the musical stories of W.C. Handy (the “Father of the Blues”), fellow Florence native Sam Phillips (the “Father of Rock ’n’ Roll”) and the extraordinary Muscle Shoals music legacy.

Music isn’t the only entertainment to be found at the festival. The schedule is a mosaic of diverse events that offers something for everyone. As a multi-disciplinary arts event, the festival also includes *Determined*, a play about the life of W.C. Handy, as well as various art exhibits and educational programs. The festival also sponsors mini-concerts in a dozen area nursing homes, in libraries, theatres, restaurants and parks.

Athletic events during the festival include the Century Bike Ride along the historic Natchez Trace Parkway, the 5K DaDooRunRun and Walk and a one-mile run and walk.

## HANDY FESTIVAL HONORS

In its 25-year history, the W.C. Handy Music Festival has become a major music festival in the Southeast and has been recognized as a:

- Top 20 Event in the Southeast by the Southeast Tourism Society (consecutively since 1986).
- Top Ten Event in Alabama by the Alabama Bureau of Tourism and Travel.
- Three-time Cultural Olympiad Event, Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games.
- Featured Site, National Geographic / Appalachian Regional Commission *Geotourism* Map.
- 2004 Local Secret! Big Find! By Travelocity.com.
- Winner of numerous Addy Awards from the Shoals Advertising Federation for the festival campaign.

## ABOUT THE MUSIC PRESERVATION SOCIETY

The Music Preservation Society (MPS), a non-profit organization, was established in 1982 to “preserve, present and promote the musical heritage of Northwest Alabama.”

MPS has a strong educational mission, and educational programs are a big part of the schedule during the W.C. Handy Music Festival. MPS hosts an annual music camp, jointly sponsored by the Department of Music at the University of North Alabama in Florence. With the W.C. Handy Festival Music Camp, MPS provides scholarships for students to learn from professionals who provide musical expertise to those who would otherwise have no access to that level of teaching.

Other MPS and Handy Festival related educational and outreach programs include a design competition, art exhibits, a poetry competition, research projects, GeoBlues, Literally Music, Industry and Songwriting Panels, ABCs of Blues and Jazz and Beyond, as well as programs in several public libraries.

The non-profit organization is led by a board of directors and is maintained primarily through the efforts of community volunteers. Funding for the Music Preservation Society comes from a variety of sources including grants, corporate contributions, event sponsorships, donations from Friends of the Festival, and the sale of festival memorabilia.

The Music Preservation Society and the W.C. Handy Music Festival Committee extend their heartfelt appreciation to the family of William Christopher Handy for its support of the W.C. Handy Music Festival.