



For Release March 5, 2013

Contacts:

- Dale Bartlett, Blue Ridge Music Trails Coordinator, BRNHA.dale@gmail.com, 828-708-7907
- Angie Chandler, Blue Ridge National Heritage Area Partnership Executive Director, angie@blueridgeheritage.com, 828-298-5330, ext. 307
- Rebecca Moore, NC Arts Council Senior Program Director of Marketing, Rebecca.Moore@ncdcr.gov, 919-807-6530

Subject: Blue Ridge National Heritage Area Partnership and NC Arts Council Partner to Promote WNC Music Traditions

Who: The Blue Ridge National Heritage Area Partnership and North Carolina Arts Council

What: Launch of the new Blue Ridge Music Trails of North Carolina initiative and the upcoming release of the revised *Blue Ridge Music Trails of North Carolina* Guidebook.

When: Launch news conference, March 5, 2013, 1 pm, Zuma Coffee, Marshall, NC

The Blue Ridge National Heritage Area Partnership and North Carolina Arts Council have partnered to launch a new initiative, the Blue Ridge Music Trails of North Carolina, to promote the rich traditional music heritage in 29 counties in Western North Carolina. The springboard for the initiative is the upcoming release of the new *Blue Ridge Music Trails of North Carolina* Guidebook, published by UNC Press and available in late April.

The traditional mountain music that has evolved over two centuries in the mountains and foothills of Western North Carolina has influenced many other American music styles, and it remains a living tradition in the region today. A fertile meeting ground for European and African music traditions, the North Carolina mountains and foothills still ring with the sounds of the fiddle, banjo, string bands, and cloggers, which can be heard everywhere from front porches to festival stages and town squares. Traditional mountain music includes lively strains of old-time, bluegrass, ballad singing, blues, and sacred music.

A recent study reflecting interviews at a limited number of music venues in the region showed that traditional music packs a powerful economic punch: an economic impact of \$20.7 million from only 26 traditional music events surveyed. With more than 160 established music venues—including festivals—in the region, the extrapolated economic impact is significant. According to the survey, communities with music events can anticipate a return of more than \$4,000 for every 100 visitors. This new initiative is expected to enhance and strengthen the economic impact of traditional music in the region.

-more-

“In these challenging economic times, this is a great example of partners coming together to focus on something positive about our region,” said Angie Chandler, Executive Director, Blue Ridge National Heritage Area Partnership. “The music project also has the potential to grow tourism, increase opportunities for our musicians, and give us all a forum to share our music and take pride in its significance and contributions to our nation.”

Background

Recognizing the value of both preserving an important heritage and increasing its economic value to the region, in 2003 the NC Arts Council spearheaded the production of a guidebook and website to direct visitors to venues, festivals and events within 25 miles of the Blue Ridge Parkway, including sites in Virginia. The purpose was to showcase practitioners of bluegrass and string band music, ballad singing, fiddling, shape-note singing, gospel music, clogging, and other traditional forms of music and dance unique to the region.

The New Initiative

Ten years later, the N.C. Arts Council and Blue Ridge National Heritage Area Partnership have combined their expertise and resources to launch the Blue Ridge Music Trails of North Carolina initiative. This place-based, creative economies development project recognizes that these music traditions are key critical contributors to North Carolina’s economy and have the potential to bring greater benefits—they can create jobs, strengthen the tax base, and attract and retain people to live and work in North Carolina. Research shows that the development of arts and cultural resources builds community identity and pride of place, influences business development and expansion decisions, inspires downtown revitalization and historic preservation, promotes diversity and stimulates the growth of creative enterprises.

“Our state’s rich arts and cultural traditions create a distinctive sense of place,” said Wayne Martin, Executive Director of the N.C. Arts Council. “I am pleased that our agency is collaborating with the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area Partnership to position Western North Carolina as a top cultural tourism destination. In addition, local arts councils and tourism agencies are key partners that allow us to develop and market arts assets in order to improve the economic health of the region as well as brand North Carolina as the Music State.”

The foundation for the Blue Ridge Music Trails of North Carolina is the publication of the new 2013 edition of the *Blue Ridge Music Trails of North Carolina* Guidebook, which along with an accompanying CD, and a forthcoming map, have been developed by the N.C. Arts Council and funded by a Federal Transportation Enhancement Grant through the N.C. Department of Transportation.

The book highlights six geographical districts within a 29-county area of the NC mountains and foothills. The guidebook will help visitors find artists and major venues, explore the region, listen to live performances and extend public recognition of the state’s distinctive contributions to traditional music. Pre-orders for the book are already available though the UNC Press website at www.uncpress.unc.edu.

To supplement the printed materials, the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area Partnership is organizing grassroots “listening sessions” in each district in April to determine other opportunities for promoting the music and providing workshops in May to support the marketing efforts of local musicians, venues and their communities. Additionally, the BRNHA Partnership has hired a project coordinator.

“The Parkway is excited to have this important cultural heritage asset packaged and promoted in such a way that visitors on and off the Parkway can learn about, experience, and perhaps even decide to play the traditional music of these old mountains,” said Phil Francis, Superintendent, Blue Ridge Parkway.

In summer and fall 2013, the Blue Ridge Music Trails initiative will have a presence at many established music festivals and events, beginning with Merlefest, the region's largest festival, to be held this year April 25-28. The new guidebook will premiere at this festival as well.

During the news conference on March 5, organizers unveiled the logo and book cover, detailed the research project determining the economic value of traditional music in Western North Carolina, and released the dates for upcoming community meetings and other key activities with the BRMT in 2013.

A digital image of the new logo and other relevant information concerning the content of the book, venues and events, contacts, and more is available in the Press section of the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area's website: www.blueridgeheritage.com.

-30-

*Blue Ridge Music Trails of North Carolina is a project of the NC Arts Council
and the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area.*

