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R.B. Morris, Maggie Longmire Among Musicians Joining Scientists for Songwriting Event

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. – Todd Steed, R.B. Morris and other local singer-songwriters will hear University of Tennessee, Knoxville scientists talk about their research at an all-day songwriting workshop on Wednesday, Oct. 14 at the National Institute for Mathematical and Biological Synthesis (NIMBioS) on the UT Knoxville campus.

The NIMBioS BioSongs Project brings together singer-songwriters and UT biologists and mathematicians to share stories about research and about the people who do it with the goal of sparking ideas for songs about modern biology.

Participating songwriters include Jay Clark, Van Eaton, Maggie Longmire, Sean McCullough, R.B. Morris, and Rhonda and Sparky Rucker. Some of the musicians also have science backgrounds; Clark has a Ph.D. in Wildlife Ecology, and Rhonda Rucker has a degree in medicine.

“The goal of this initial gathering is to spark songwriters’ interest and hopefully lead to a collection of songs that can be used to educate general audiences about modern biology and the scientists who do it,” said Louis Gross, NIMBioS Director and UT Professor of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology and Mathematics.

The event is being organized under the auspices of NIMBioS using support through UT's James R. Cox Endowment Fund. Cox was interested in environmental issues and music.

NIMBioS hopes to eventually establish formal NIMBioS Songwriting Fellows with whom NIMBioS would commission songs.

UT faculty, post-doctoral researchers, and students attending the event will provide brief summaries of their personal history in science and what drew them to the field. They will talk about both the joys and challenges of their work. The scientists are discouraged from using power-point presentations and, instead, have been asked to bring any objects, images, or even creatures to help tell their stories.

“We wish to encourage several of our finest songwriters from the region to become knowledgeable about the fascinating biological questions being investigated using quantitative methods, meet some of the researchers involved, learn from you about why you are so passionate about your work, and possibly get some ideas for songs that they might add to their repertoire,” Gross added.

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The National Institute for Mathematical and Biological Synthesis (NIMBioS) brings together researchers from around the world to collaborate across disciplinary boundaries to investigate solutions to basic and applied problems in the life sciences. NIMBioS is sponsored by the National Science Foundation, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture with additional support from The University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

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