

# Retailers' Choice Awards a hit at Expo

By Christine Allen

Eight book category awards and six music awards were **AWARDS** presented at the first Retailers' Choice Awards, held Jan. 31 at the Hyatt Regency in Louisville, Ky., during CBA Expo.

More than 400 retailers and suppliers enjoyed the music of Plus One, Trin-i-tee 5:7, ZOEgirl, Charles Billingsley and Avalon. Emcee Thurlow Spurr kept the program flowing as the winners, selected for the first time by retail-

ers, were announced throughout the evening.

"We wanted to present to the industry an awards show where the retailers took center stage in that it was their votes alone that determined the winners," said Dave Welday, vice president of product development for Strang Communications.

President and CEO of Strang Communications Stephen Strang, who initiated the concept of this awards program, was pleased

with the first-year response.

"I knew there was a need for awards that would focus on what the retailers' like rather than what the publishers or music people want to honor. We were very happy with the response for the first year," he said. "And, then for the awards' ceremony itself, we knew the standard for an industry event was pretty high, but I also knew Thurlow Spurr puts on a

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## Awards

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good show. I felt that those who attended left wanting more and I heard people saying they'd be back next year."

A highlight of the evening was the presentation of the Visionary Industry Pioneer award to Kenneth N. Taylor, founder of Tyndale House Publishers. Strang, who presented the award to Taylor, stated this award honors an individual in the industry who has changed lives in an effort to spread the name of Jesus Christ.

As well as being the first awards show of its kind, the night marked several other "firsts." Plus One won its first award for *The Promise*, the highest-selling debut release by a Christian artist; Avalon debuted "Undeniably You" from its upcoming *Oxygen* release; and Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins won their first award for best fiction with *The Indwelling*.

The winners in the eight book categories were: Best Spreading of the Gospel: *Payne Stewart: The Authorized Autobiography* by Tracey Stewart with Ken Abraham; Devotionals: *Power of a Praying Wife Study Guide* by Stormie Omartian; Best Series: *Stories for a Teen's Heart* by Alice Gray; Charismatic: *Reduce Me to Love* by Joyce Meyer; Bibles: *Zondervan NASB Study Bible* by Zondervan; Children's: *Jesus Wants All of Me* by Phil Smouse; Nonfiction: *The Prayer of Jabez* by Bruce Wilkinson; and Fiction: *The Indwelling* by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins.

The winners in the six music categories were: Praise and Worship: *I Could Sing of Your Love Forever* by Various artists; Gospel: *Alabaster Box* by CeCe Winans; Inspirational: *Windows* by The Martins; Southern Gospel: *Signed, Sealed, Delivered* by Gold City; Rock/Alternative: *Underdog* by Audio Adrenaline; and Adult Contemporary: *The Promise* by Plus One.



Plus One performs at the Retailers' Choice Awards program.

Multnomah Publishers and Sparrow Records shared top honors with two awards each. Multnomah published *Stories for a Teen's Heart* and *The Prayer of Jabez*. Sparrow released *Alabaster Box* and *I Could Sing of Your Love Forever*.

"The highlight of Expo was winning the Charismatic award (*Reduce Me to Love*)," said Susan Jacobs, associate publisher with Harrison House. "The program is new and exciting."

"This is better than the Oscars," said Steve Shepherd, advertising director for Multnomah, as he accepted their second award of the evening. Commenting on the publisher's role in the tremendous success of *The Prayer of Jabez*, Shepherd paused and light-heartedly said, "We put it in the catalog."

Retailers enjoyed mixing with the musicians and award winners as the evening closed with a dessert reception, hosted by the awards program's sponsor, *Christian Retailing* magazine. Attendees each received a complimentary mug.

"I thought the Retailers' Choice Awards was a huge success," commented Welday. "The retailers enjoyed it, the suppliers enjoyed it and I think the artists who ministered at the event enjoyed the show as well. I thought there was a very sweet spirit in the room, a nice blend of ministry, show-

manship and product presentation. I definitely look forward to building for next year. I suspect more retailers will participate in both the voting and attending the awards presentation and more suppliers will want to participate as well."

"I appreciate all the retailers who voted and who attended the event. It really wouldn't have been the 'Retailers' Choice Awards' without you," Strang said. "The next awards will be for the giftware industry next July (at CBA International). We hope for that event to meet or exceed the Retailers' Choice Awards. Next year we hope for another great show at Expo, and I hope that we have a few more "firsts" as we did this year with the 'Left Behind' series, Plus One and *The Prayer of Jabez*," he said.



Tim LaHaye accepts the Fiction award for *The Indwelling*.