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PRESS RELEASE

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***VSA arts of Alabama proudly announces the winners of its annual
Young Soloists Award Competition***

Birmingham, AL – VSA arts of Alabama hosted its 2010 Young Soloists Award Competition on December 12, 2009 at the Bradley Lecture Center in the Children’s Hospital of Alabama. This year’s Young Soloists Winner is Joseph Dumas of Talladega, and this year’s Young Soloists Runner-Up is Tyler Spann of Opp. Both musicians will represent Alabama in the national VSA arts Young Soloists Award Competition. If selected, either musician will have the opportunity to perform at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C. this spring.

Dumas is a 19-year-old student at the Alabama School for the Blind in Talladega, and his father is a pastor. Dumas feels that if he was not raised in the church, he would not be a musician today. He loves music with all his heart and besides singing, he plays the keyboard, drums, guitar, and saxophone. However, his main focus is singing and playing the keyboard. Currently, he plays the keyboard for his church and helps other churches with their music in his spare time. Dumas plays music by ear and is learning to read Braille music. On the keyboard, his favorite key is D minor. At VSA arts of Alabama’s Young Soloists Award Competition, he performed high energy renditions of “Stay With You” by John Legend and Dave Tozer and “I Need You Now” by Smokie Norful.

Spann is a 14-year-old boy who began playing the piano at the early age of two. He learned to play incredibly well by ear and began composing his own songs about four years ago. He began taking piano lessons with Mrs. Kaye Brannon two years ago and is learning to read and write music. Spann is also a self-taught violinist and accompanies his choir and Youth Praise Team. His personal pieces have become increasingly complex and are often inspired by things in nature such as thunderstorms or by the styles of great composers. At the VSA arts of Alabama Young Soloists Award Competition, he performed two of his own songs, “Atmospheric Changes,” inspired by weather patterns, and “River Sonata,” which interprets the journey of a little leaf down a flowing river.

Since 1984, the VSA arts International Young Soloists Program has sought to identify talented musicians who have a disability. The VSA arts International Young Soloists Award is given annually to four outstanding musicians, two from the United States and two from the international arena. The award provides an opportunity for these emerging musicians to each earn a \$5,000 scholarship and a performance in Washington, D.C. Any individual musician (instrumental or vocal) from the United States who has a disability, age 25 and under, is eligible to apply, and all types of music are encouraged. The national winners will be announced in March 2010.

VSA arts of Alabama is one of very few states who implements its Young Soloists Award Competition in front of a live audience and a judging panel. This year's distinguished judges included Angela Howard, music therapist; Dr. Jacqueline Leary-Warsaw, Associate Professor of Music and the Director of the Vocal Studies program at Birmingham-Southern College; Preston Lovinggood, singer and songwriter for Wild Sweet Orange; and Kate Taylor, singer and songwriter. The 2010 competition featured eleven top-notch musicians from across the state: seven vocalists, three musicians, and one vocalist/musician.

VSA arts of Alabama is a statewide, nonprofit organization dedicated to serving children and adults with disabilities and chronic illnesses through the arts. VSA arts of Alabama offers arts programming in educational, community and healthcare settings. The state office is located at 1915 4th Avenue South in downtown Birmingham. The organization is an affiliate of *VSA arts*, an international nonprofit organization serving nearly five million people with disabilities every year through a network of state affiliates and in 55 countries worldwide. *VSA arts* was founded in 1974 by Ambassador Jean Kennedy Smith as an affiliate of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. For additional information about VSA arts of Alabama, please visit www.vsartsalabama.org or contact Erin Wederbrook Yuskaitis, Program Manager, at 205.307.6300 ext. 15 or erin@vsartsalabama.org.