

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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PREMIERING ON PUBLIC TELEVISION IN JANUARY, *TO BE HEARD****Three Teens from the Bronx Tell Their Stories of Friendship, Love, and Struggle, Showing How a Radical Poetry Class Can Ignite Change***

“The film offers more substantive insights into pressing issues of public education and urban poverty than many political commentators muster in a career” – The New York Times

(San Francisco - December 14, 2011)— A verité film intimately shot over four years, *To Be Heard* is the story of three teens from the South Bronx whose struggle to change their lives begins with writing poetry. As writing and reciting become vehicles for their expressions of love, friendship, frustration, and hope, these three youngsters emerge as accomplished self-aware artists, who use their creativity to alter their circumstances. Produced and directed by Roland Legiardi-Laura, Edwin Martinez, Deborah Shaffer and Amy Sultan, [To Be Heard](#) will premiere on public television nationwide beginning January 1, 2012 (check local listings).

Focusing on three students at University Heights High School in the South Bronx, the poorest urban county in the United States, *To Be Heard* introduces viewers to Karina, Anthony, and Pearl who have all struggled since birth. Every day, they directly confront the suffering and oppression of poverty, broken families, and an indifferent, often hostile school system. Enmeshed in the story of the three teens is a look at the source of their inspiration – a nontraditional poetry class called Power Writing. Lead by two of the filmmakers, Roland Legiardi-Laura and Amy Sultan, Power Writing is an optional three-hour-a-week class open to all students, at-risk, academically gifted, or both. There are no grades and there is no set curriculum, but in the workshops students learn the elements of writing, vocabulary, and style and are encouraged to express themselves in a safe, non-judgmental setting that welcomes all kind of views and voices including the language of the streets. Designed to empower students, Power Writing has a simple motto, “If you don’t learn to write your own life story, someone else will write it for you.”

Power Poetry in Motion

Inspired by the documentary, *To Be Heard*, Power Poetry, <http://www.powerpoetry.org/>, is the world’s first mobile poetry community for youth. Employing the latest hand-held technology, it enables young poets to use text, audio, images, and video to express themselves and connect their voices with urgent social movements. (Text POEM to 41411) Young writers compose, compare, collaborate, and comment, as they share their poetry on a global scale. The transformative power of language is harnessed to convert social networking into social engagement. Phase one of Power Poetry connects to an interactive website, usable by all. Partners for the project include The Roots, The Hip-Hop Association, The Nuyorican Poets’ Café, Urban Word and Youth Speaks. Power Poetry is a project of To Be Heard Productions, developed at BAVC Producers Institute, funded and presented by ITVS and the Corporation for

Public Broadcasting with additional support from The Fledgling Fund. <http://www.powerpoetry.org/>

About the Filmmakers

Rolan Legiardi-Laura's first documentary, *Azul*, won nine international awards. He has received a host of fellowships and grants from the New York State Council on the Arts, The New York Foundation for the Arts, the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs, The Rockefeller Fund, and The Andy Warhol Foundation. Besides directing and producing films, Legiardi-Laura is a published poet and has taught in public schools, prisons, and senior citizens' homes for years.

He created from scratch the first traveling troupe of performance poets, Words To Go. He is one of the directors of the world-renowned arts institution, The Nuyorican Poets Café. At the Café he created a unique film-development program called The Fifth Night, in which he produced 213 weekly screenplay readings. Forty of those scripts were produced as feature films. He is currently developing a documentary about the secret history of American schooling, titled *Weapons of Mass Instruction*.

Edwin Martinez is a Bronx-born filmmaker who recently completed his first feature documentary *To be Heard*, award winner at the DOC NYC, San Diego Latino, and Sarasota film festivals. As a cinematographer he has worked on several feature-length fiction and documentary films including *Rachel Is*, *Leave No Soldier*, *Las Marthas* (in production), and *What Alice Found* (winner, Special Jury Prize, Sundance). After graduating from the SUNY Purchase Film Conservatory as a Gates Millennium Scholar, he earned a Master's in Education Policy from the Harvard Graduate School of Education and has worked as an instructor in various youth media programs in Boston and New York City. Martinez is currently developing a new feature-length project while producing shorts for educational, government, and non-profit organizations. He also likes to bake.

Academy Award®-winning filmmaker **Deborah Shaffer** began making social-issue documentaries as a member of the Newsreel Collective in the 1970s. She co-founded Pandora Films, a women's production company, which produced *How About You? And Chris and Bernie*. In 1979 she made the labor history documentary *The Wobblies* (New York Film Festival). During the 80's, Shaffer focused on war and human rights in Latin America directing *Nicaragua: Report from the Front; Witness to War* (Academy Award® winner, Best Documentary – Short Subjects); *Fire From the Mountain* (New York and Sundance Film Festivals; *POV*); and *Dance of Hope* (Prix d'Or, FIPA, Cannes and Sundance Film Festivals). Shaffer was one of the first filmmakers to work in post-September 11 New York City. *From the Ashes – 10 Artists* (Sundance and Tribeca Film Festivals; Cinemax) captures the impact of the attacks on 10 downtown New York artists, followed a year later by *From the Ashes – Epilogue* (Tribeca Film Festival). She is the Executive Producer of the short documentary *Asylum*, which played at the Sundance Film Festival and Human Rights Watch. It won Best Documentary at Aspen Shortsfest and was nominated for an Academy Award®.

In addition to her work as a director of independent documentaries, Shaffer has directed numerous programs for public television, including *Secrets Underground* (Christopher Award, Emma Award), *Art:21 – Art for the 21st Century* (Emmy nomination), and *Ladies First: The*

Women of Rwanda (Emmy Award, Sigma Delta Chi Award, Cine Golden Eagle). She has received a Guggenheim Fellowship and grants from NEH, NEA, and NYSCA. She was recently awarded the Irene Diamond Lifetime Achievement Award by the Human Rights Watch Film Festival.

Amy Sultan is the director of the Power Writers Program at Nuyorican Poets Café. Amy co-founded the Power Writers Program in 2001 with Roland-Legiardi-Laura and Joe Ubiles. From 1997 through 2008 Sultan was a co-executive director of the Early Stages Program, an arts education organization. In 1997, as executive producer of the Nantucket Film Festival, Sultan steered the fledging festival through its crucial second year. From 1990-1994, she was director for film in the New York City Mayor's Office of Film, Theatre, and Broadcasting. Sultan is a former business agent for theatrical unions in New York City, where she represented designers and performers in the entertainment industry. In 1987, in collaboration with Trident Technical College in Charleston, SC, she created a technical training program in film and theater arts for minority young adults. Over the past twenty-five years, Sultan has served as a community advocate for children's arts programs and as a lobbyist for the performing arts for various organizations.

About ITVS

The Independent Television Service funds and presents award-winning documentaries and dramas on public television, innovative new media projects on the Web, and the Emmy® Award-winning weekly series *Independent Lens* on Tuesday nights at 10 PM on PBS. ITVS is a miracle of public policy created by media activists, citizens, and politicians seeking to foster plurality and diversity in public television. ITVS was established by an historic mandate of Congress to champion independently produced programs that take creative risks, spark public dialogue, and serve underserved audiences. Since its inception in 1991, ITVS programs have revitalized the relationship between the public and public television, bringing television audiences face-to-face with the lives and concerns of their fellow Americans. For more information about ITVS, visit itvs.org. ITVS is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people.

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