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**PREMIERING ON PBS THIS FALL, *THE HAYLOFT GANG******The Story of a Changing America Shown Through the Lens of the Popular Country Music Radio Show, The National Barn Dance***

(San Francisco - August 9, 2011)— Narrated by Garrison Keillor, [The Hayloft Gang: The Story of the National Barn Dance](#) tells the story of a changing America through the lens of one of the nation's most popular country music radio shows during the 1930s and '40s: *The National Barn Dance*. The one-hour documentary weaves rare performance footage, home movies, and candid photographs with firsthand accounts from fans and performers. Interviews with historians, folklorists, and media experts reveal historical and cultural perspectives of this unique period in America's history. Produced and directed by Stephen Parry with supervisory producer Bob Hercules, *The Hayloft Gang* will premiere on PBS nationwide beginning September 1, 2011 (check local listings).

For rural citizens unsure of the future, or homesick transplants confronting the city, *The National Barn Dance* served as a touchstone, from its first broadcast in 1924 to its last in 1960. Reaching a national audience, the radio program served as a marketing pioneer, making millions for network sponsors like Alka Seltzer. Moreover, it launched national superstars such as Gene Autry, Patsy Montana, Bradley Kincaid, George Gobel, Pat Buttram, Andy Williams, and Lulu Belle and Scotty.

While relating the stories of *The Hayloft Gang's* most compelling characters, the film is organized around the following key themes: the commercialization of local and regional culture; the conflict of an old agrarian America challenged by a new, heterogeneous, urban one; and, finally, what scholars call the "search for a usable past," in which *The National Barn Dance* drew on a rural heritage to give solace to its audience in the face of the Great Depression and World War II. Within this social, cultural, and historical context, viewers gain a greater understanding of the significance and impact of *The National Barn Dance*, and its role in shaping American music and popular culture.

**The Hayloft Gang Video Contest**

In addition to the national broadcast, *The Hayloft Gang* [Video Contest](#) allows participants and viewers to experience a fresh take on the popular music of the times. Audiences can watch performance videos, interpret the songs themselves, and upload their videos for prizes. Participants will urge friends and family to vote for them via email, Facebook, and Twitter. To coincide with the broadcast, the contest launches at <http://contest.hayloftgang.com/> on August 15th, 2011. Winners will be announced in October.

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*The Hayloft Gang: The Story of the National Barn Dance* is a co-production of Hayloft Gang Productions, LLC and the Independent Television Service (ITVS). It was produced in association with Kentucky Educational Television (KET), and is presented by WTTW National Productions, with funding provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB).

### **About the Filmmakers**

#### **Stephen Parry, Writer, Producer, Director**

Stephen Parry's passion for early country and bluegrass music led him to create *The Hayloft Gang: The Story of the National Barn Dance*. Parry has over 25 years of experience in broadcast and corporate media production. His documentary *Down on the Farm* followed two farm families in Indiana over a period of a year. *Old Friends* examined historical preservation efforts in Midwest communities. *Discover Bluegrass: Exploring American Roots Music* gives elementary school students a greater understanding and appreciation for bluegrass music and its contribution to American culture. Parry has been a presenter at the International Country Music Conference in Nashville and at Brown University.

#### **Bob Hercules, Supervisory Producer**

Bob Hercules is an award-winning producer/director of broadcast films and documentaries. He is also the co-owner of Media Process Group, a Chicago-based production company. His programs have appeared on PBS, The Discovery Channel, The Learning Channel, and IFC. His two most recent films both deal with the subject of dance: a film about famed choreographer Bill T. Jones entitled *A Good Man* (for the PBS series *American Masters*) and a film entitled *The Joffrey Ballet: Mavericks of American Dance*. *A Good Man* premiered this April at the Full Frame Film Festival and will be broadcast on PBS in November 2011. Other films by Bob Hercules include his 2009 documentary, *Radical Disciple: The Story of Father Pfleger*, the 2006 films *Senator Obama Goes to Africa* and *Forgiving Dr. Mengele*, and the 1999 documentary *The Democratic Promise: Saul Alinsky & His Legacy*.

### **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 a 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](http://itvs.org). ITVS is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people.

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