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WHEN THE DRUM IS BEATING PREMIERES ON INDEPENDENT LENS ON THURSDAY, APRIL 12, 2012

Five Centuries of Haiti's Tangled History Comes Alive Through the Music of the Band that Has Provided Haiti's Soundtrack for Six Decades

"A beautifully synced wedding of music and history." -- Variety

(San Francisco, CA) — A film by award-winning filmmaker Whitney Dow (*Two Towns of Jasper*), ***When the Drum is Beating*** is an incisive and revealing portrait of the tumultuous history of Haiti, which went from being the first free black republic, with a huge wealth of natural resources, to the poorest country in the western hemisphere. In this beautifully constructed film, Haiti's rich history of triumph and tragedy is interwoven with the story and music of Haiti's most beloved orchestra, Septentrional, whose infectious spirit and amazing longevity reflect the spirit of the nation. *When the Drum is Beating* will premiere on the Emmy® Award-winning PBS series *Independent Lens*, hosted by Mary-Louise Parker, on Thursday, April 12, 2012 at 10 PM (check local listings).

In Haiti, there is one band that has seen it all: Septentrional. For six decades, this 20-piece orchestra has entertaining and inspiring the Haitian people with its infectious fusion of Cuban big band and Haitian vodou beats. At 64, "Septen" has already survived twelve years longer than the expected Haitian lifespan. Its trumpeters, drummers, sax players, and guitarists have been making music through dictatorships, natural disasters, coup d'états, and chaos, navigating the ups and downs, the glory and the tragedy that is Haiti's history. They embody a particular Haitian trait — the ability to find beauty in places of darkness — which has helped them survive in a



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place where nothing seems permanent except poverty and want. As they reel from the country's greatest tragedy, the 2010 earthquake that killed almost 300,000 people, they must find the strength to go on.

When the Drum is Beating interweaves the extraordinary story of Septentrional's six decades of creativity with Haiti's harsh history. The film moves back and forth between the past and present, and gives broad context to the current problems facing the country: from the brutality of French colonialism and the bloody revolution that brought Haitians their freedom to the crushing foreign debt and the 15-year American occupation that helped usher in the brutal dictatorship of François "Papa Doc" Duvalier. We see the hope that was created by the rise of Jean Bertrand Aristide, and the despair that followed the coup that drove him from power. Most importantly, we learn how all these events contributed to creating the conditions that made the horrific death toll of the earthquake inevitable.

"I thought this story was important to tell," says Dow, "because I think that, for many non-Haitians, Haiti is only defined by its problems. I wanted to show that these problems exist in a complicated historical context, and that many, in fact most, Haitians are not defined by the context in which they live. And the band's music is incredible and reflects this refusal to be defined only by tragedy. The story of Septentrional and its continued existence in a place where little survives — not governments, monuments, art works, cities, lives or even the very landscape — is uniquely Haitian."

Through its sweeping narrative, infectious music, tension-filled encounters, and the musicians' passionate dreams, the film goes to the core of what makes Haiti one of the most fascinating countries in the hemisphere. *When the Drum is Beating* allows the viewer to see, feel, and hear the passion, commitment and joy of Septentrional's musicians, and through them, the unwavering Haitian spirit.

To learn more about the film, and the issues involved, visit the companion website for *When the Drum is Beating* at www.pbs.org/independentlens/when-the-drum-is-beating/. Get detailed information on the film, watch preview clips, read an interview with the filmmaker, and explore the subject in depth with links and resources. The site also features a Talkback section where viewers can share their ideas and opinions.

About the Filmmaker

Whitney Dow (Producer & Director) is an award winning filmmaker whose directing credits include *Two Towns of Jasper*, *I Sit Where I Want: The Legacy of Brown v Board of Education* and *Unfinished Country*. His work has received numerous honors including the Peabody, a Columbia DuPont, Gotham, and Beacon Awards. Dow's producing credits include *Freedom Summer*, *Banished: How Whites Drove Blacks Out of Town in America*, and *The Undocumented*, all directed by Marco Williams, and *Toots*, directed by Kristi Jacobson.

About Independent Lens

Independent Lens is an Emmy® Award-winning weekly series airing on PBS. The acclaimed

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anthology series features documentaries and a limited number of fiction films united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement, and unflinching visions of their independent producers. *Independent Lens* features unforgettable stories about unique individuals, communities, and moments in history. Presented by the Independent Television Service (ITVS), the series is supported by interactive companion websites and national publicity and community engagement campaigns. *Independent Lens* is jointly curated by ITVS and PBS and is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding provided by PBS and the National Endowment for the Arts. The series producer is Lois Vossen.

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