



**For Immediate Release**

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**P.O.V. Presents Encore of the Legendary “Wattstax” 1973 Concert Film With  
Isaac Hayes,  
Staple Singers, Richard Pryor, Jesse Jackson, August 9 on PBS**

*A National Black Programming Consortium (NBPC) Co-presentation;  
A P.O.V. Classics Presentation*

The legendary “Black Woodstock” finally gets its due when a newly restored and digitally remixed **Wattstax**, Mel Stuart’s documentary of the epochal 1972 concert at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum, receives an encore national broadcast on public television’s P.O.V. series. Featuring incendiary performances by Isaac Hayes, Albert King, Rufus and Carla Thomas, the Staple Singers, the Emotions, the Bar-Kays, and other greats of soul, R&B, and gospel – plus biting humor from a then little-known Richard Pryor – **Wattstax** is more than a concert film. It also captures a heady moment in mid-1970s, “black-is-beautiful” African-American culture, when Los Angeles’s black community came together just seven years after the Watts riots to celebrate its survival and a renewed hope in its future.

**Wattstax**, from acclaimed director Mel Stuart (“Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory”), airs **Tuesday, August 9, 2005** at 10 p.m., part of the 18th season of PBS’s acclaimed P.O.V. series. (Check local listings.) American television’s longest-running independent documentary series, P.O.V. is public television’s premier showcase for point-of-view, nonfiction films.

P.O.V.’s broadcast of **Wattstax** includes performances cut for legal reasons from the film’s original 1973 release – Isaac Hayes’s show-closing renditions of “Theme from Shaft” and “Soulsville.” The broadcast is a P.O.V. Classics presentation.

Staged by Stax Records, a renowned Southern soul label founded in 1959 in Memphis, the Wattstax concert drew over 100,000 predominately African-American Los Angelenos, who themselves put on an exuberant display – memorably captured by **Wattstax** – of ’70s funk and soul culture.

From the first, the filmmakers wanted to document more than the performances on stage. Stuart and Stax colleagues Larry Shaw and Forest Hamilton believed that filming the event alone would yield “just another concert film.” So the mostly black film crews went through the Watts neighborhood to talk with people on street corners, in barbershops, restaurants, and churches, where they also recorded gospel performances. When Stuart felt that some overall perspective, “something like the ‘chorus’ in ‘Henry V,’” was still lacking, the Stax executives led him to a small club in Watts where he filmed the relatively unknown comic Richard Pryor for two hours as he riffed from the end of a bar on the tragic-comic absurdities of race relations in Watts and the nation.

**Wattstax** intersperses the candid, “man-on-the-street” interviews with concert and audience footage, creating an evocative tableau of a community in transition after the devastating riots. Actor Ted Lange is seen throughout the film, bantering with friends about race, religion, family and politics. Pryor’s trenchant musings are equal to their Shakespearean task, offering sharp insight into the

realities of life for black Americans, circa 1972. This time capsule of the great comedian, on the eve of crossing over into mainstream stardom, is one of the gems of **Wattstax**. Others include the Staple Singers celebrating black music's common roots in gospel, Hayes's hot and flashy performance of "Theme From Shaft," and, for a priceless comic snapshot, Rufus Thomas dancing the Funky Chicken in hot pants.

For Stax, the concert was a bold move to promote both the label and the idea of African-American economic empowerment. The show's MC was none other than the Rev. Jesse Jackson, whose Operation Breadbasket and People United to Save Humanity – early efforts to achieve social and civil equality through economic power – had received support from Stax. The label's VP of advertising and publicity, Larry Shaw, was considered a pioneer in creating positive ad campaigns while also providing advice to such civil-rights organizations as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

Anyone who was there would never forget it. Jackson's hosting style reveled in a fine balance between get-down entertainment, raised-fist political rally, and stand-up spiritual revival: a revealing expression of the powerful currents driving black American life and culture in the post-civil rights, Vietnam era. However, **Wattstax** was considered too racy, political, and black to receive wide theatrical release or a television broadcast. After a noted screening at the Cannes Film Festival and a Golden Globe nomination, **Wattstax** dropped into the status of a "seldom-seen" cult favorite.

Meanwhile, neither Stax's entrepreneurial boldness nor a roster of stellar performers saved the company from a fast-changing music industry, and Stax went bankrupt in 1977. Nearly all of Stax's assets, including the masters of all recordings, were acquired by Fantasy Records. The release of a restored, re-mixed and re-mastered **Wattstax** and the new DVD is a collaboration of Fantasy, Inc., and Sony Pictures Entertainment.

"**Wattstax** was originally conceived as a film of a concert commemorating the seventh anniversary of the Watts riots," recalls director Mel Stuart. "Early on, we knew we didn't want just a concert film; we wanted a deeper reflection of the black experience.

"This led to improvised interviews with dozens of men and women that touched on every facet of the African-American experience. Film crews went into the streets, churches, barber shops and diners to talk with people about the connection between music and their existence and what it was like to be black in a white America. "Richard Pryor called **Wattstax** 'a soulful expression of the living word' and I hope we captured the soul and essence of that moment in our culture."

### **About The Filmmaker:**

#### **Mel Stuart**

#### **Director**

Born in New York, Mel Stuart exchanged his musical aspirations for filmmaking after graduating from New York University. In 1954, he began doubling as assistant editor for an ad company and special assistant to avant-garde filmmaker Mary Ellen Bute. Stuart later served as main film researcher for Walter Cronkite's breakthrough series, **The 20th Century**. In 1960, he joined the David Wolper Organization where he produced and directed dozens of documentaries, including **The Making of the President**, **Rise and Fall of the Third Reich**, **Four Days in November** and **Wattstax** (which will be rebroadcast on P.O.V. on August 9, 2005). He also directed features including **Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory** and **If It's Tuesday, This Must Be Belgium**. Since 1977, Stuart has been an independent producer and director. His documentary credits include **Man Ray: Prophet of the Avant-Garde** and **Billy Wilder - The Human Comedy** for PBS. His television work includes the dramas **Bill**, **The Triangle Factory Fire**, **Ruby and Oswald**, and the 12-hour miniseries, **The Chisholms**. In 2002, St. Martin's Press published Stuart's "Pure Imagination: The Making of Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory."

Stuart has been the recipient of four Emmy Awards, a Peabody award, and an Oscar nomination for his work. He has served as President of the International Documentary Association (IDA). Stuart is currently producing a one-hour television special, **Still Perfect – 20 Memorable Photographs**, and a series on living American poets. P.O.V. presents his film **The Hobart Shakespeareans** on **Tuesday, September 6, 2005**. Over the years he has made over 180 films.

#### Credits:

Director: Mel Stuart  
Producers: Larry Shaw and Mel Stuart  
Executive Producers: Al Bell and David L. Wolper  
Associate Producer: Forest Hamilton  
Consultants: Rev. Jesse Jackson, Tommy Jacquette, Mafundi Institute, Rev. Jesse Boyd, Teddy Stewart, Richard Thomas, John W. Smith, Sylvester Williams and Carol Hall  
Cinematography: Roderick Young, Robert Marks, Jose Mignone and Larry Clark  
Director of Photography: John Alonzo  
Editor: Robert K. Lambert, David Newhouse and David Blewitt

#### Festivals:

- Cannes Film Festival (1973)
- Sundance Film Festival (2003)
- Turin Film Festival (2003)

**Wattstax** is licensed for broadcast by Warner Bros. Domestic Cable Distribution.

#### Co-Presenters:



NBPC is a non-profit media service organization devoted to the production, distribution, and promotion of diverse films and videos about African Americans and the experiences of the African Diaspora. NBPC funds, commissions, acquires and awards talented makers of quality African American film and video projects. Selected programs reflect a variety of subjects and production styles. Projects unlikely to appear on the big Hollywood screen are encouraged, especially those which offer a more realistic, historically accurate, diverse, and non-stereotypical picture of the Black World. NBPC funds every phase of the production process – i.e., research and development, production, post-production and outreach. Film and video projects that are selected present Black people in primary roles, in front of and/or behind the camera. Since 1979, NBPC has provided more than five million dollars in grants to both independent and station-based producers.



Produced by American Documentary, Inc. and now in its 18th season on PBS, the award-winning P.O.V. series is the longest-running series on television to feature the work of America's best contemporary- issue independent filmmakers. Airing Tuesdays at 10 p.m., June through September, with primetime specials during the year, P.O.V. has brought over 220 award-winning documentaries to millions nationwide, and now has a Webby Award-winning online series, *P.O.V.'s Borders*. Since 1988, P.O.V. has pioneered the art of presentation and outreach using independent nonfiction media to build new communities in conversation about today's most pressing social issues. More information about P.O.V is available online at [www.pbs.org/pov](http://www.pbs.org/pov)

**P.O.V. Interactive** ([www.pbs.org/pov](http://www.pbs.org/pov))

P.O.V.'s award-winning Web department produces our Web-only showcase for interactive storytelling, *P.O.V.'s Borders*. It also produces a Web site for every P.O.V. presentation, extending the life of P.O.V. films through community-based and educational applications, focusing on involving viewers in activities, information and feedback on the issues. In addition, [www.pbs.org/pov](http://www.pbs.org/pov) houses our unique *Talking Back* feature, filmmaker interviews and viewer resources, and information on the P.O.V. archives as well as myriad special sites for previous P.O.V. broadcasts.

### ***P.O.V. Community Engagement and Education***

P.O.V. provides Discussion Guides for all films as well as curriculum-based P.O.V. Lesson Plans for select films to promote the use of independent media among varied constituencies. Available free online, these originally produced materials ensure the ongoing use of P.O.V.'s documentaries with educators, community workers, opinion leaders and general audiences nationally. P.O.V. also works closely with local public television stations to partner with local museums, libraries, schools and community-based organizations to raise awareness of the issues in P.O.V.'s films. *Youth Views*, P.O.V.'s youth engagement program, expands these efforts by working directly with youth service organizations.

Major funding for P.O.V. is provided by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, the Educational Foundation of America, the Ford Foundation, PBS and public television viewers. P.O.V. is presented by a consortium of public television station including KCET/Los Angeles, WGBH/Boston, and WNET/New York. Cara Mertes is executive director of P.O.V./American Documentary, Inc.



Support for P.O.V. is provided by Starbucks Coffee Company. Starbucks has a rich tradition of supporting the arts and independent film and celebrates the fact that numerous points of view can be discussed over a good cup of coffee. Starbucks is committed to offering the highest quality coffee in grocery stores nationwide.

### ***American Documentary, Inc. ([www.americandocumentary.org](http://www.americandocumentary.org))***

American Documentary, Inc. (AmDoc) is a multimedia company dedicated to creating, identifying and presenting contemporary stories that express opinions and perspectives rarely featured in mainstream media outlets. AmDoc is a catalyst for public culture, developing collaborative strategic engagement activities around socially relevant content on television, on line and in community settings. These activities are designed to trigger action, from dialogue and feedback, to educational opportunities and community participation.

***TAPE REQUESTS: Please note that a broadcast version of this film is available upon request, as the film may be edited to comply with new FCC regulations.***



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