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**Missionaries Spread the Word with Ultra-Low Technology and Modern Marketing
In P.O.V.'s "The Tailenders," Tuesday, July 25 on PBS**

Evangelists Employ Extraordinary Translation and Recording Program
To Reach Indigenous People in Solomon Islands, Mexico, India and Worldwide

With a visual clarity equal to her intellectual discourse, Horne explores the myriad contrasts offered by her subject, alive to many epiphanies and ironies along the way. - Ronnie Scheib, Variety

Christian missionaries have always been in the forefront of European approaches to non-European societies, whether in the company of explorers, conquerors or commercial traders. Bringing the Christian faith to non-Christians has left a legacy as complex and mixed as that of European expansionism itself. As shown in **The Tailenders**, a new documentary premiering on public television's P.O.V. series, this missionary work has found new strength—while raising age-old questions about its moral complexities—through an ingenious melding of technology and marketing.

A portrait of Global Recordings Network (GRN), a grassroots organization founded by Joy Ridderhoff in 1939 in Los Angeles, **The Tailenders** explores the history, techniques and philosophy of a remarkable organization that has recorded Bible stories in over 5,500 of the world's 8,000-plus languages and dialects, and made those recordings available in the most remote regions through inventive, ultra-low technology. The company has reached out to the "tailenders"—those who are among the last to see missionaries and whose languages and ways of life are disappearing under globalization's sweep. But what becomes of stories when they cross from one culture to another?

Adele Horne's **The Tailenders** has its national broadcast premiere **Tuesday, July 25, 2006** at 10 p.m. on PBS, as part of the 19th season of public television's groundbreaking 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.

At a time when radio was king and the disembodied voices of people as different as Roosevelt, Hitler and early radio evangelists were creating a new impact in America's living rooms and on world opinion, Ridderhoff had the inspiration to use the technologies of recorded and broadcast sound for a single purpose. Much like the Gideon Society, which strove to place Bibles in every hotel room in America at a time when books were the primary means of mass communication, Ridderhoff and her collaborators at Gospel Recordings (as it was then called) wanted to bring the Bible's stories to every community in the world in its own spoken language, especially to the poor and illiterate.

This dedication to amplifying Christian proselytizing with technology has led to signal achievements, including an archive of over 5,400 spoken languages and dialects—the world's largest—many of them extinct or on the verge of extinction, and some of them perhaps preserved nowhere else. The inspired amateur "techs" of Global Recordings also tackled the problem of bringing the recorded voice to backward regions with delightful ingenuity and artistry, creating a museum's worth of cheap, durable, hand-powered record and tape players and transistor radios. Archival photos and footage

show GRN missionaries astounding native listeners with the boxes that tell stories in their own dialects.

Filmed in the Solomon Islands, Mexico, and India—three of the world’s most language-rich regions (295 distinct languages and dialects in Mexico alone)—as well as the United States, **The Tailenders** lets today’s GRN missionaries tell their story. They explain why they seek out people in poverty and crisis, and the happy marriage they feel they have made between not just Christianity and technology, but between Christianity and strategic marketing. (The GRN training program includes the “Five Steps of Selling” familiar to any retail marketer). They are delighted to show the truly wondrous collection of hand-wound players that enabled the group’s missionaries to take standardized Bible stories into the remotest regions, mesmerizing audiences with the magic of voices in boxes. These stories carried an evangelical Protestant message of personal salvation.

But how does that message actually play “south of the border?” **The Tailenders** considers the conundrum the missionaries wrestle with in every recording; they can standardize and control production of the message, but not its reception. How does the evangelical message of personal salvation sound, not in a developed country like the United States, but in a land of mass poverty like Mexico? For one thing, some evangelical missionaries in the developing world teach avoidance of political engagement, at least among the poor. Among the critics in **The Tailenders** are Mexican villagers who find that their evangelical neighbors no longer participate in community politics and organizing, or even in the villages’ traditional saints’ festivals, which the evangelicals consider idol worship. The money is better spent on things like cars, says one villager. This is a land of struggle, counters another. On a lighter note, one missionary recalls being greeted with howls of laughter when he played the records in a Native American language; he later learned that the story of the prodigal son had been translated as the story of the prodigal pig.

GRN missionaries are unapologetically single-minded about their goal of spreading their Bible stories. One ingenious cardboard record player was made to play only GRN’s Bible records—and those records made to play only on the evangelists’ player. Missionaries explain that recordings allow them to control the stories and their telling—avoiding inevitable variations, including the compromises with local sensibilities and culture that preachers left on their own are prone to. Paradoxically, GRN’s great recording project may be preserving indigenous languages while hastening the demise of the indigenous cultures they represent.

Some will question the arrival of GRN missionaries in poverty-stricken areas, often in the midst of natural disaster, with no more to offer than their recordings and ingenious players—and a message of inner peace. One GRN missionary admits to qualms about playing religious tapes where people needed food and medical attention. Are the people who listen to the recordings and promise to include Jesus in their prayers being sincere, or merely polite?

“I was raised in an Evangelical family,” says director Adele Horne, “and I still remember the cardboard record player from GRN that we received in the mail when I was eight years old; it made a huge impression on me. Years later, I found the record player and started to research the Global Recordings Network; there was a self-published book about the organization and even a short promotional film produced in the ‘70s, but I wanted to learn more.

“In **The Tailenders**, I want to tell the story of Global Recordings’ remarkable fusion of evangelism, technology and marketing, and also explore how meaning changes as it crosses language, culture, borders, and economic divides.”

The Tailenders was made with support from the Canada Council for the Arts, the California Council for the Humanities, and Film Arts Foundation.

About the filmmaker:

Adele Horne Director

The Tailenders is Adele Horne's first feature-length documentary. Her other credits include **The Point of True Beginning**, an experimental documentary about the early exploration of Carlsbad Caverns in New Mexico, and **At Home**, a documentary about lesbians and family in suburban Texas. Horne's film and video installations have been shown at Anthology Film Archive, Pacific Film Archive, the Mix Festival, Women in the Director's Chair, and Mad Cat Women's Film and Video Festival, among many other venues. She was born in Nova Scotia and grew up in Houston. Horne received an M.F.A. in film and video from the University of California, San Diego, and a B.A. from Williams College in Williamstown, Mass. She now resides in Los Angeles and teaches film and video production at UC San Diego and California State University at Northridge.

Credits:

Producer/Director/Writer: Adele Horne
Sound Recordists: Rebecca Baron, Beth Bird, James Uribe, Yolanda Cruz
Cinematography: Adele Horne, Shana Hagan, Leo Chiang
Editors: Catherine Hollander, Adele Horne

Running Time: 56:46

Awards & Festivals:

- U.S. Premiere, Museum of Modern Art, Documentary Fortnight, February and March 2006
- Nashville Film Festival, April 2006
- PDX Film Festival (Portland, Oregon), April 2006



Produced by American Documentary, Inc. and now in its 19th season on PBS, the award-winning P.O.V. series is the longest-running showcase on television to feature the work of America's best contemporary-issue independent filmmakers. Airing Tuesdays at 10 p.m., June through October, with primetime specials during the year, P.O.V. has brought nearly 250 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.

P.O.V. Interactive (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 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 initiative, 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 Ford Foundation, PBS and public television viewers. Funding for P.O.V.'s Community Engagement activities and the *Diverse Voices Project* is provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. P.O.V. is presented by a consortium of public television stations, including KCET Los Angeles, WGBH Boston, and Thirteen/WNET New York.

American Documentary, Inc. (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, online and in community settings. These activities are designed to trigger action, from dialogue and feedback, to educational opportunities and community participation. Cara Mertes is executive director of American Documentary | P.O.V.

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