Eccentric Performance Artist Pries Open Even Weirder Neo-Stalinist Country
Of Belarus in P.O.V.’s “Belarusian Waltz,” Tuesday, Aug. 12 on PBS

Painter and Provocateur Alexander Pushkin Takes His Countrymen to Task for Submitting to
“Free Slavery” Under Dictator Alexander Lukashenko

MEDIA ALERT – FACT SHEET

National Air Date: Tuesday, Aug. 12, 2008 at 10 p.m. on PBS. (Check local listings.) The P.O.V. series (a cinema term for “point of view”), now in its 21st year on PBS, is broadcast June through October, with primetime specials in the fall and winter.

Summary: Belarus has been called “Europe’s last dictatorship.” Since 1994, Alexander Lukashenko has ruled the ex-Soviet republic with a despotic hand, jailing the opposition, shutting down the press and refusing to investigate the assassinations of dissidents. He has virtually silenced his critics — but not one lone performance artist who stages public stunts mocking the dictator’s pretensions. Belarusian Waltz is the story of Alexander Pushkin, whose audacious, comical exploits find him facing the hostility of the police and the consternation of his family. An offbeat tale of post-modern street theater meeting 1930s-style authoritarianism, the film offers a surprising window into the soul of the Belarusian people. A co-production of ITVS International.

Filmmaker’s Statement: (NOTE: The following comments are excerpts from an interview with Polish filmmaker Andrzej Fidyk which will be broadcast in conjunction with the film. The interview is also available on the P.O.V. website at www.pbs.org/pov/belarusianwaltz.)

“The hero of Belarusian Waltz is Alexander Pushkin, a Belarusian painter who lives in a small town…called Bobr. He is a painter…[and] natural born performer. And he makes performances against the totalitarian regime of President Lukashenko because Belarus is the last dictatorship in Europe. He is arrested every time, then they let him free. Alexander Pushkin …is a complicated guy because on the one hand he is a national hero fighting for freedom in Belarus. On the other hand, he is not as a good man as everybody wanted him to be [referring to his neglect of his former lover and their child together, shown in the film.]

The film is a Norwegian-Polish production. And there was… very, very strong, very powerful…anti-Polish propaganda on Belarusian TV, newspapers and so on….And the locals believed in the propaganda…. we felt this pressure on us that… we are surrounded by people who don’t like us, who don’t want us to be there.
I think the biggest tragedy of Belarus nowadays is a paradox that I cannot understand myself. They know everything about what's going on in the rest of the world. They have contacts with outside countries. So they have all the opportunities or possibilities to choose democracy during elections and they...with their own will, choose totalitarian [by] voting for Lukashenko."

Bio: Andrzej Fidyk
Director/Writer

Andrzej Fidyk has directed more than 40 documentaries for Polish and British television and has received numerous awards for his work. Many regard Fidyk as Poland's finest documentary director. His credits include "Battu's Bioscope" (aka "Mobile Cinema of Dreams," 1998) and "The Parade" (1989). Fidyk was originally educated as an economist, majoring in international trade from the University of Warsaw. He lives in Warsaw, Poland.

Torstein Grude
Producer

Torstein Grude is a painter, director, cinematographer and producer, and one of the initiators of the independent production company Piraya Film AS. He received a degree in media theory and film history from the University of Bergen in 1994, and enrolled at the London International Film School where he finished the last year of training in 1997. Grude's credits include the features "Yodok," "On a Tightrope" and "Welcome Home," as well as "Tin Soldiers," "Instant Happiness," "Heaven Inside Us," "The Con Kid" and "Satan Rides the Media." His films have been screened at more than 100 festivals and have received many awards. He lives in Stavanger, Norway.

P.O.V. Web: The Belarusian Waltz companion website (www.pbs.org/pov/belarusianwaltz) offers a streaming video trailer of the film, an interview with filmmaker Andrzej Fidyk; a list of related websites, organizations and books; a downloadable discussion guide and classroom activity; and the following special features:

Photo Gallery:
The Political Art of Alexander Pushkin
View a slideshow of images of Alexander Pushkin in action as he performs his political art in Belarus.

Background:
Dictatorship and Art in Belarus
Learn more about the political regime in Belarus and the circumstances that have inspired Alexander Pushkin's art. Find out how its close ties to Russia contribute to the former Soviet state's current totalitarian atmosphere, despite its official status as an independent democracy.

Outreach: P.O.V. is working with public television stations and national and community-based groups across the country to foster community dialogue around the issues presented in Belarusian Waltz. For a list of upcoming screening and discussion events, go to:
http://www.amdoc.org/outreach_news.php

P.O.V. also works with nationally recognized media educator Dr. Faith Rogow to develop a facilitation guide with discussion questions and background information to help event organizers carry out discussions around the film's content. Cari Ladd has created the lesson plan. P.O.V. and Susan Conlon and Martha Perry of the Princeton Public Library have created a multimedia resource list of related fiction and nonfiction books and videos
that further explore the issues. The materials are available free of charge at: www.amdoc.org/outreach.

Length: 56:46

Festivals: Norwegian Premiere: Bergen International Film Festival, November 2007
European Academy Awards – Prix Arte – Nominee, December 2007
Prix Europa Nominee, December 2007
One World Prague, March 2008

Credits: Director: Andrzej Fidyk
Producer: Torstein Grude
Cinematographer: Adam Fresko
Editor: Jan Mikotaj Mironowicz
Original Music: Krzesimir Debski

Belarusian Waltz is a co-production of Piraya Film AS, ITVS International, MG production, Rafto House Foundation and Telewizja Polska S.A.


P.O.V.: Produced by American Documentary, Inc. and celebrating its 21st season on PBS in 2008, 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 more than 250 award-winning documentaries to millions nationwide, and 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 at www.pbs.org/pov..

Major funding for P.O.V. is provided by PBS, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts, The Educational Foundation of America, The Fledgling Fund, New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, New York State Council on the Arts, Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, The September 11th Fund, and public television viewers. Funding for P.O.V.’s 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.

DVD 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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