



For Immediate Release

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P.O.V. Revives Classic 1969 Portrait of “Johnny Cash: The Man, His World, His Music,” Tuesday, Aug. 5 on PBS

Film Captures Cash on the Road, on Stage and Behind the Scenes Fresh on the Heels of His Breakthrough “Folsom Prison” Album; June Carter Cash, Bob Dylan, Carl Perkins Featured

“...a rousing masterpiece.” – Rolling Stone Magazine

When the Man in Black died in September 2003, he closed an original and captivating chapter in the great American songbook. Even as death approached, Johnny Cash displayed the hardscrabble grit, authentic individualism and knack for doing the unexpected that had made him an American icon — his powerful video cover of Trent Reznor’s “Hurt,” showing him visibly ailing but resolute, was nominated for six MTV Video Music Awards that year. It had been a long, maybe improbable, certainly American journey for a sharecropper’s son from Kingsland, Ark., and it had more ups and downs and surprising turns than a country road.

In 1968, Robert Elfstrom (who went on to an award-winning career as a cinematographer and director) had the insight to make a documentary on Cash — and the luck to strike up a warm and candid rapport with the temperamental singer. By then, Cash, who had begun his career in the late '50s, had won over country music audiences with his uniquely intense “underdog” ballads, and was experiencing the first of several crossover successes with *Johnny Cash at Folsom Prison*. He had also been through early bouts of “fast living” — alcohol and drugs — and recently married the great love and stabilizing force in his life, June Carter (of the Carter Family singers). Elfstrom’s **Johnny Cash: The Man, His World, His Music**, made *vérité*-style over several months in late '68 and early '69, both on and off the road, remains the definitive portrait of a great American troubadour at the peak of his powers.

Johnny Cash: The Man, His World, His Music has its national broadcast premiere on **Tuesday, Aug. 5, 2008** at 10 p.m. on PBS (check local listings), as part of the 21st season of public television’s award-winning **P.O.V.** series. 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. received a 2007 Special News & Documentary Emmy Award for Excellence in Television Documentary Filmmaking.

Johnny Cash includes concert performances of some of Cash’s best-loved songs, including “Ring of Fire,” “Jackson” (with June Carter Cash) and “Folsom Prison Blues,” in the kind of venues — prisons, Indian reservations — that marked the man as something more than an entertainer. The film also captures Cash recording “One Too Many Mornings” with a young, gum-chewing Bob Dylan (in his *Nashville Skyline* period), and trading reminiscences with one of his closest friends, rockabilly legend Carl Perkins, who shared Cash’s sharecropper’s upbringing and musical beginnings at the

fabled Sun Records (which also launched Elvis Presley and Jerry Lee Lewis). The two men also shared substance abuse problems that nearly killed them (when a car crash ended Perkins solo career, Cash took him into his touring band).

We see Cash bantering tenderly onstage and off with wife, June. The film follows Cash as he returns to the town and cotton fields where he grew up, and to the Arkansas town, Dyess Colony, where his parents then lived, genuinely enjoying his success but with the warm irony of a man who knows where he comes from. Cash is also shown, despite his prickly reputation, giving generous and thoughtful attention to the aspiring songwriters and singers who seek him out.

Other songs included in this music-rich documentary include concert performances of such lesser classics as “The Ballad of Ira Hayes” and “Cisco Clifton’s Fillin’ Station.” But perhaps some of the film’s most affecting musical moments come when Cash plays and sings informally, backstage, on the bus or at home, with a casual intensity that reveals his work to be far less entertainment product than the genuine poetry of ordinary people struggling with hard times. **Johnny Cash** catches the man working out an early version of “You’re All I Need” (destined to be a hit) and delivering a quietly powerful version of “Great Speckled Bird.”

Throughout the film, Cash, edgy and laconic at the best of times, clearly feels at ease with Elfstrom and his hand-held camera. He opens up and relaxes, sometimes teasing the cameraman, and even clowning with a mule on his farm. Elfstrom’s filming manages an intimate connection with the man, without ever seeming intrusive or losing the objective eye of the “direct cinema” documentary style that emerged in the 1960s. (The trust and friendship the two men formed during the making of **Johnny Cash** was strong enough that Cash later asked Elfstrom to shoot, direct and act in his film “The Gospel Road,” which Cash co-wrote and narrated.)

Born in 1932 in Arkansas, Cash grew up working in the fields alongside his parents and five siblings. The family’s poverty was relieved by a rich musical life in the household that included folk, country and gospel music. After a stint in the Air Force, Cash made his first recording for Sun Records in 1954. The record attracted little attention but was the first in a string of recordings that began breaking into the charts and eventually got him invited to the Grand Old Opry. In 1958, Cash switched to Columbia Records and his career began to go mainstream with songs like “Ring of Fire” and “The Ballad of Ira Hayes” and appearances on “The Ed Sullivan Show” and “The Tonight Show.”

But Cash also began taking pills to deal with the stress of recording and performing, eventually becoming addicted. By the mid-1960s, Cash’s marriage had ended in divorce and the pills were sending his career downhill. But, with the help and love of June Carter of the Carter Family Singers, he overcame his addiction and his life turned around. He married June in 1968, his *Folsom Prison* recording went gold and he was named the Country Music Association’s Entertainer of the Year. The passion and joy shared by Cash and June Carter Cash, wonderfully captured by Elfstrom, is one of the joys of this film. No wonder Cash once called 1968 “the happiest year of our lives.”

Johnny Cash: The Man, His World, His Music comes closer than any film has — or likely ever will — to getting inside the troubled and faithful man who “walked the line” in music and life. As such, the film has also become one of a handful of powerful documentaries chronicling the rousing and turbulent singer/songwriter who changed the face of popular American music in the late 20th century.

Remembers director Elfstrom: “My camera, my sound recordist Alan Dater and I were having a wonderful relationship with Cash. It was like a dance. In a way, he was directing the film, drawing us to concert to concert, from stage to backstage, from backstage to a van driving around the country. It was like the kid is having a comeback and he knew his music was crossing over and taking off.”

Johnny Cash: The Man, His World, His Music is a Verité Production in association with Hyrkin-Wiland.

About the filmmaker:

Robert Elfstrom Producer/Director

Considered one of the best documentary cinematographers working today, Robert Elfstrom's other feature documentary credits include directing the Oscar-nominated "Other Voices," and cinematography for such landmark Maysles brothers' films as "Gimme Shelter" and "The Running Fence." He has worked extensively for such flagship PBS series as *NOVA*, *American Masters*, *National Geographic Specials* and *Frontline*. Elfstrom, who lives in San Francisco, has also worked on documentary projects for HBO, the Discovery Channel, TBS, CBS and NBC. Elfstrom's full list of credits can be found at www.bobelfstrom.com.

Credits:

Director/cinematographer: Robert Elfstrom
Producers: Arthur Barron, Evelyn Barron, Roy Herkin
Editor: Lawrence Silk
Sound Production: Alan Dater

Running Time: 86:46

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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 online at www.pbs.org/pov.

P.O.V. Interactive (www.pbs.org/pov)

P.O.V.'s award-winning Web department produces special features for every P.O.V. presentation, extending the life of our films through filmmaker interviews, story updates, podcasts, streaming video, and community-based and educational content that involves viewers in activities and feedback. P.O.V. Interactive also produces our Web-only showcase for interactive storytelling, *P.O.V.'s Borders*. In addition, www.pbs.org/pov has launched the *P.O.V. Blog*, a gathering place for documentary fans and filmmakers to discuss and debate their favorite films, get the latest news and link to further resources. The P.O.V. Web site, blog and film archives form a unique and extensive online resource for documentary storytelling.

P.O.V. Community Engagement and Education

American Documentary | P.O.V. works with local PBS stations, educators and community organizations to present free screenings and discussion events to inspire and engage communities in vital conversations about our world. As a leading provider of quality nonfiction programming for use in public life, P.O.V. offers an extensive menu of resources, including free discussion guides and curriculum-based lesson plans. In addition, P.O.V.'s *Youth Views* works with youth organizers and students to provide them with resources and training in order to use independent documentaries as a catalyst for social change.

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American Documentary, Inc. (www.amdoc.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. Simon Kilmurry is executive director of American Documentary | P.O.V.

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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