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Daughter of African Immigrants Defies and Rediscovered Her Royal Roots In “Bronx Princess,” Tuesday, Sept. 22, 2009, on PBS’ POV Series

A Co-production of ITVS

Documentary Presented with Short Films “So the Wind Won’t Blow It All Away,” a Revelatory Look at Teen Orphans of Hurricane Katrina, and “Jennifer,” a Touching Maternal Tribute

MEDIA ALERT – FACT SHEET

National Air
Date:

Bronx Princess and two short films have their national broadcast premieres on **Tuesday, Sept. 22, 2009**, at 10:00 p.m. on PBS during the 22nd season of the **POV (Point of View)** documentary series. American television’s longest-running independent documentary series, POV is the recipient of a Special Emmy for Excellence in Television Documentary Filmmaking. The series returns with two specials on Nov. 11 and Dec. 30. (Check local listings.)

Viewers may also see the films in their entirety on POV’s website, www.pbs.org/pov/bronxprincess from **Sept. 23 – Oct. 23, 2009**.

Summary:

Rocky Otoo is the Bronx-bred teenage daughter of Ghanaian parents, and she’s no pushover. She is a sassy high-achiever bound for college. With freedom in sight, Rocky rebels against her mother’s rules. When their relationship reaches a breaking point, Rocky flees to her father, a chief in Ghana. What follows is captured in Yoni Brook and Musa Syeed’s **Bronx Princess**, a tumultuous coming-of-age story set in a homeland both familiar and strange. Her precocious — and very American — ideas of a successful, independent life conflict with her father’s traditional African values. Reconciling her dual legacies becomes an unexpected chapter in this unforgettable young woman’s education. *A co-production of ITVS.*

Buoyed by an infectious West African “high-life” score by Ghanaian-American hip-hop artist Blitz the Ambassador and a protagonist who is irresistibly charming — even in her most teenage moments — **Bronx Princess** is a coming-of-age story for the 21st century.

Bronx Princess will be shown with two short films about family and education. Annie P. Waldman’s **So the Wind Won’t Blow It All Away** reveals how the tragedy of Hurricane Katrina continues to have impact on the lives of its victims — and how entire families are among the casualties. The film tells the story of a determined group of teenagers who, more than two years after Hurricane Katrina devastated their homes and scattered their families, return to New Orleans alone and struggle to graduate from high school with their more fortunate friends. **So the Wind Won’t Blow It All Away** is a touching and shocking exposé of the abandoned children of Louisiana, but it is also a bracing portrait of teens who won’t be defeated.

In Stewart Copeland's **Jennifer**, the filmmaker explores his feelings about his mother by focusing on a key moment in her life — when she led her eighth-grade students in their project contacting astronauts aboard the International Space Station. The project was successful, and the students' conversation with the astronauts was recorded. It survives as documentation of Copeland's mother, and the moment is remembered as a great one in her life. In rediscovering this personal footnote in history, Copeland expresses his love and admiration for his late mother.

Filmmakers'
Statement:

“From the moment we stumbled upon the corner shop in the Bronx, Auntie Yaa treated us like we were her own children,” say **Bronx Princess** co-directors Yoni Brook and Musa Syeed. “When the self-assured 17-year-old Rocky walked in, we saw a family conflict brewing: the teenage search for independence butting against her parent's stern guidance.

“We have deep connections to this story. As the children of Jewish and Muslim immigrants who have made journeys back to our parents' respective homelands — Israel for Yoni and Kashmir for Musa — we understood Rocky's journey. Like Rocky, we have parents who had high expectations when it came to our education. Just like Rocky's family members, our parents came to America to ensure better futures for their families.”

“Bronx Princess”

Music:

Blitz the Ambassador, Composer/Arranger, "Bronx Princess"

Blitz the Ambassador, from Ghana with a touch of Trenchtown, Jamaica, lives in Brooklyn. Drawn to a coming-of-age narrative with a new perspective, he composed and arranged all the music for **Bronx Princess**. He melds the tradition of Ghanaian “high-life” with the jazzy nuances of an upright bass, hints of reggae, orchestra strings, and a horn section that lifts live hip hop to new heights. Blitz's new album *Stereotype* is available on iTunes and his videos are in rotation on MTV2.

About the
Filmmakers:

Yoni Brook, Co-Director/Producer/Cinematographer, Bronx Princess

Yoni Brook is a film director and photographer. His first collaboration with Syeed, “A Son's Sacrifice” (PBS *Independent Lens* 2008), won Best Documentary Short at the Tribeca Film Festival and Best Documentary Short at the International Documentary Association (IDA) Awards. Brook and Syeed are currently making “The Calling,” which is about young religious leaders.

Brook has worked as a photojournalist for *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Seattle Times* and the Memphis *Commercial Appeal*. Brook's photography has been honored at the Pictures of the Year International and Best of Photojournalism competitions. He was earlier named the national College Photographer of the Year by the Missouri School of Journalism and was the youngest person ever to be selected for *Photo District News*' “30 Photographers to Watch.” He speaks regularly about photojournalism and has instructed students at Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism. Brook is a graduate of New York University's Tisch School of the Arts and was selected to attend the CPB/PBS Producers Academy and the Berlinale Talent Campus Doc Station program.

Musa Syeed, Co-Director/Producer/Sound Recordist, Bronx Princess

Musa Syeed is an independent filmmaker and writer. He partnered with Brook to produce “A Son's Sacrifice,” which explored a father-son relationship at a *halal* slaughterhouse in Queens, and is currently co-directing “The Calling” with Brook. Syeed was a Fulbright Fellow in Cairo, Egypt, where he focused on experimental filmmaking and Muslim identity. As a writer, he has produced original theatrical

work for the Children's Museum of Manhattan, and is the recipient of the 2008 Sloan Feature Film award for his screenplay on environmental issues in Kashmir.

Syed has worked as an educator in schools, community centers and prisons, and was an adjunct professor of cross-cultural documentary production at Williams College in 2008. He has served as an advisor for film and television companies, including Thirteen/WNET New York. Syeed is a graduate of New York University's Tisch School of the Arts in the Middle Eastern and Islamic studies department.

Stewart Copeland, Director/Producer, **Jennifer**

Stewart Copeland was born in Tullahoma, Tenn., and moved to St. Louis, where he majored in film production at Webster University. While a student at Webster, he took an interest in documentary film. His first short documentary was "In the Glow." During his final year of college, his mother, Jennifer Copeland, passed away. After taking a semester off to be with his family, Copeland worked for nine months on **Jennifer**. The film has played many festivals in America and won the Best Mini-Doc Award at the Big Sky Documentary Film Festival. Copeland now lives in Tennessee where he is working on his first feature length-documentary.

Annie P. Waldman, Director/Co-producer, **So the Wind Won't Blow It All Away**

Annie P. Waldman received her bachelor of fine arts degree from New York University, Tisch School of the Arts in Film Production. She worked under several documentary filmmakers in the New York area before directing and producing her short documentary **So the Wind Won't Blow It All Away**. Celebrated as a "lyrical, expressive mise-en-scène" by *New York* magazine, the film has been showcased at numerous festivals, including Sundance Film Festival, St. Louis International Film Festival, San Francisco Doc Festival, and CMJ, as well as screening at the Yerba Buena Center in San Francisco. A native of San Francisco, Waldman concentrates her work on adolescence and the ebb and flow of American identity.

"Despite the surge of images in the media of the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, there was little focus on one of the disaster's most vulnerable populations: the youth of New Orleans," says Waldman. "A year and a half after the storm, my cousin Daniel, a New Orleans high school teacher, told me that about 20 percent of his students were on their own, without parents. Some lived with extended family, some with other kids and some alone. It is my hope that once today's politicians and citizens understand the role that the school plays for the youth of post-Katrina New Orleans, they will push for equal standards of education as they did in the not-too-distant past."

POV Website: The **Bronx Princess** companion website, www.pbs.org/pov/bronxprincess, offers a streaming video trailer of the film, an interview with the filmmakers, a list of related websites, organizations and books, lesson plans, discussion guides and special features:

- Film Update: Catch up with the Bronx Princess, Rocky Otoo, and find out what has happened since filming ended.
- Rocky answers viewer questions by video: Viewers may submit questions on the website, or as a video on YouTube.
- Music from the film featuring Blitz the Ambassador, the Brooklyn-based hip-hop artist who composed the film's soundtrack.
- Q&A: Practical advice for students and parents about planning for college: What do families thinking about college need to know, and how can they prepare? Kathleen Cushman, author of the *First in the Family* books offers helpful tips for both students and parents as they begin to think about applying to colleges.
- Preparing for College: Taking Care of Business: In this excerpt from *First in the Family: Your High School Years*, students who are the first in their families

to attend college give frank advice about preparing for college. This chapter guides students towards completing the application process with confidence.

Outreach: POV works with public television stations and national and community-based groups across the country to foster community dialogue around the issues presented in the film. For a list of upcoming screening and discussion events for **Bronx Princess**, go to: http://www.amdoc.org/outreach_news.php.

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

"Bronx Princess"

Credits: Co-directors/Co-producers: Yoni Brook, Musa Syeed
Executive Producer: Marco Williams
Cinematographer: Yoni Brook
Sound Recordist: Musa Syeed
Editor: Mary Manhardt
Original Music: Blitz the Ambassador

Running Time: 37:47
Total Time with Shorts: 56:46

Bronx Princess is a co-production of Highbridge Pictures LLC and ITVS, with funding provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB).

"Bronx Princess"

Awards/Fests: 2009: Big Sky Film Festival – *Best Documentary Short*; SILVERDOCS Film Festival; Berlinale Film Festival; International Documentary Festival Amsterdam; Real Life Documentary Festival, Accra, Ghana; Connecticut Film Festival; New York African Film Festival at Lincoln Center; Dokufest – Prizren, Kosovo; Encounters South African Documentary Festival, Capetown, South Africa; ViewFinders International Film Festival for Youth, Nova Scotia, Canada

Pressroom: Visit POV's pressroom, www.pbs.org/pov/pressroom, for press releases, downloadable art, filmmaker biographies, transcripts and special features.

POV: Produced by American Documentary, Inc. and now in its 22nd season on PBS, the award-winning POV series is the longest-running showcase on American television to feature the work of today's best independent documentary filmmakers. Airing June through September with primetime specials during the year, POV has brought more than 275 acclaimed documentaries to millions nationwide, and has a Webby Award-winning online series, *POV's Borders*. Since 1988, POV 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 is available at www.pbs.org/pov.

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stations, including KCET Los Angeles, WGBH Boston and THIRTEEN in association with WNET.ORG.

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.