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POV Kicks Off 24th Season With “Kings of Pastry,” an Exclusive Backstage Pass To the Greatest Pastry Competition in the World, Tuesday, June 21, 2011 on PBS

Passion, Tragedy and Triumph Are the Main Ingredients When Elite Pastry Chefs Vie To Earn a Coveted Best Craftsmen of France Award

“I never saw so many strong men sobbing at once.” — Nancy Banks-Smith, *The Guardian*

As an internationally celebrated pastry chef and co-founder of the highly regarded French Pastry School in Chicago, Jacquy Pfeiffer might be expected to feel supremely confident when it comes to all things French and sweet. But his self-assurance turns poignantly vulnerable as he contemplates entering the finals of the Meilleurs Ouvriers de France (Best Craftsmen of France) competition in pastry making. Pfeiffer is hardly alone. Other accomplished pastry chefs, such as Regis Lazard in Luxembourg and Philippe Rigolot of Maison Pic, France’s only three-star restaurant owned by a woman, appear daunted as they get ready to go for the prize — the right to wear the distinctive tri-color Meilleurs Ouvriers de France (M.O.F.) collar. Even the judges and coaches, all previous winners, turn unashamedly weepy as they reflect on the trials faced by the finalists — and recall their own struggles — in this Olympics of pastry making.

In **Kings of Pastry**, the new documentary from the award-winning filmmaking team of Chris Hegedus and D A Pennebaker (“Don’t Look Back,” “The War Room”), chefs Pfeiffer, Lazard and Rigolot serve as exclusive guides to a remarkable and never-before-filmed world, where sugar is the stuff of fantasy, high drama and joy. And because the men — who are among the 16 semifinalists in competition — also serve as the film’s protagonists, they reveal what it feels like to risk both pride and reputation in a grueling quest to be named one of the “kings of pastry.”

Kings of Pastry launches the 24th season of the **POV (Point of View)** series on **Tuesday, June 21, 2011**, at 10 p.m. on PBS. POV’s regular season continues on Tuesdays through Sept. 27 and concludes with special broadcasts in 2011 and 2012. American television’s longest-running independent documentary series, POV has won a Special Emmy for Excellence in Television Documentary Filmmaking, the IDA Award for Best Continuing Series and NALIP’S 2011 Award for Corporate Commitment to Diversity.

Filmmakers and married couple Hegedus and Pennebaker received unprecedented access from the M.O.F. organization to film the three-day contest in Lyons, France, including not only the event’s public presentations but also the behind-the-scenes cooking and judging. Chefs Pfeiffer, Lazard and Rigolot were eager to share their preparations — and private feelings — in the lead-up to the competition. **Kings of Pastry** follows Pfeiffer to his childhood home of Alsace, where he spends weeks creating and testing recipes in the bakery shop of an old friend. Lazard, who is competing for the second time — he tragically dropped his sugar sculpture the first time — and Rigolot, who emerges as a favorite among contestants and judges alike, undertake similar preparations.

During the competition's three days of mixing, piping and sculpting, the 16 chefs create an astounding array of colorful desserts, from tiered wedding cakes and precarious six-foot sugar sculptures to delicate cream puffs, tea pastries and jams. Each chef must also create a *bijou* — a small, museum-quality sugar sculpture specially designed for the M.O.F. and presented in a glass box. The final challenge is a nail-biting race against the clock in which each chef must hand carry his fragile creations — without shattering them — through a series of rooms to the final display area. To top it off, the contestants must work spotlessly and with amazing composure under the constant scrutiny of master judges.

The M.O.F. prizes were created nearly a century ago to affirm the importance of manual labor in a society famously in thrall of its intellectuals — or, as French President Nicolas Sarkozy puts it (with wonderful Gallic intellectualism), the idea that “there are two forms of intelligence” is “morally scandalous.” The M.O.F. is not really a competition, in the sense of the chefs competing against each other. The challenge is to meet the exacting standards of the judges; consequently, all or none of the finalists may win blue, white and red striped collar. Given how tough the standards are and how exhausting the regime, it's surprising anyone has the means and sheer nerve to try more than once.

In this environment, the relations among contestants and judges, plus coaches, families and concerned onlookers, is supportive and sympathetic — a far cry from the cutthroat ambitions usually on display at such events. Ultimately, after much struggle and many alarming setbacks, five of the 16 finalists take home the M.O.F. collar. When jury president Philippe Urraca (who required three attempts to win his own collar) chokes up at the announcements of the winners, it is because he is sincerely distressed for the losers. When the crowd spontaneously cheers all those who competed in the contest regardless of outcome, it is a heartfelt tribute.

“People often ask why we would make a film about a French pastry competition,” says co-director Hegedus, “but as soon as we met Chef Jacquy Pfeiffer, we knew that the Meilleurs Ouvriers de France competition was not your average ‘Top Chef’ cook-off. Those reality television shows seemed like mere wind sprints compared to the marathon three-day M.O.F. contest. Watching Jacquy work a huge ball of sugar and like an expert glass artist blow it into a Brancusi figurine, it became clear that there was more required for this contest than imaginative baking.

“Like most of the chefs in the film, my grandfather apprenticed at age 16 to a baker in Europe,” she continues. “He immigrated to New York City, and in the 1920s he opened two elegant confectionery tea rooms. My great-grandfather was chef at one of New York City's most famous German restaurants. On the other side of the family was my Hungarian grandmother, well-known in her community for her exquisite cooking and baking.”

“At first, **Kings of Pastry** seemed to be a buddy story, much like the story of James Carville and George Stephanopoulos in our film ‘The War Room,’ or even like our two young entrepreneurs from ‘Startup.com,’” says co-director Pennebaker. “But it became more than that. We believe that stories of individuals often remind us of our common humanity, so being dropped into someone else's world, someone passionate and totally consumed in what they are doing, whether it be pastry, politics or music, is the basis for a fascinating film.

“It seems that chefs are today's rock stars, so observing these first-class chefs in competition should be especially thrilling for audiences.”

Kings of Pastry is a production of Pennebaker Hegedus Films in association with the BBC and VPRO.

About the Filmmakers:

Chris Hegedus (Co-director, Cinematographer, Editor)

Chris Hegedus has been making films as a director, cinematographer and editor for more than 30 years. She received the 2001 Directors Guild of America Award for Outstanding Directorial Achievement for "Startup.com." With her husband and partner, D A Pennebaker, she directed "The War Room," which followed Bill Clinton's 1992 presidential campaign. The film received an Academy Award® nomination and won the National Board of Review's D.W. Griffith Award for Best Documentary. Hegedus has received the Golden Eagle CINE award and lifetime achievement awards from several organizations, including the International Documentary Association. In 2006, she directed "Al Franken: God Spoke."

Hegedus first collaborated with Pennebaker as editor of "Town Bloody Hall." Subsequent collaborations include "DeLorean," "Rockaby," the 1977 television series "The Energy War" and the acclaimed 1998 documentary "Moon Over Broadway" with Carol Burnett. Hegedus and Pennebaker have devoted much of their creative energies to films about music, including the features "Depeche Mode 101," "Down From the Mountain" (a companion concert film to the Coen Brothers' "O Brother, Where Art Thou?") and the soul musical tribute "Only the Strong Survive." Recently, they made several political films for the Sundance Channel, including 2008's "The Return of the War Room" and "National Anthem: Inside the Vote for Change Concert Tour." Also for Sundance, Hegedus directed "The First Amendment Project: Fox vs. Franken." Hegedus and Pennebaker live in New York City.

D A Pennebaker (Co-director, Cinematographer, Editor)

D A (Donn Alan) Pennebaker is widely regarded as one of the pioneers of cinéma vérité. In the early 1960s, he and colleague Richard Leacock developed one of the first fully portable 16 mm synchronized camera and sound recording systems, which revolutionized filmmaking and introduced the immediate style of shooting so popular today. Pennebaker's first film was the 1953 short "Daybreak Express." In 1959, he joined Drew Associates, which produced the celebrated Living Camera series for Time-Life in the early 1960s.

In 1967, he made the classic "Don't Look Back," a memorable account of Bob Dylan's last acoustic concert tour in England. Pennebaker continued to capture the musical moment in subsequent films, including "Monterey Pop," "Keep On Rockin'," "Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars" and "Company: Original Cast Album." He began his collaboration with his partner and future wife, Chris Hegedus, in 1976, co-directing such acclaimed films as "Moon Over Broadway" (1998) and "The War Room" (1993), which received an Academy Award® nomination and won the National Board of Review's D.W. Griffith Award for Best Documentary. Pennebaker was executive producer of "Startup.com" and "Al Franken: God Spoke," both directed by Hegedus. His many professional honors include the IFP's Gotham Award.

Credits:

Co-directors:	Chris Hegedus, D A Pennebaker
Executive Producers:	Frazer Pennebaker, Nick Fraser, Barbara Truyen
Co-producers:	Frazer Pennebaker, Flora Lazar
Cinematographers:	Chris Hegedus, D A Pennebaker, Nick Doob
Editors:	Chris Hegedus, D A Pennebaker
Running Time:	86:46

POV Series Credits:

Executive Producer:	Simon Kilmurry
Co-Executive Producer:	Cynthia López
Director of Production and Programming:	Chris White
Series Producer:	Yance Ford

Awards and Festivals:

- Official Selection, Los Angeles Film Festival 2010
- Official Selection, Provincetown International Film Festival 2010
- Official Selection, Hot Docs Canadian International Documentary Festival 2010
- Official Selection, Full Frame Documentary Film Festival 2010
- Official Selection, Berlinale 2010
- Official Selection, Sheffield Doc/Fest 2009
- Official Selection, International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam 2009

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Produced by American Documentary, Inc. and beginning in its 24th season on PBS in 2011, 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 300 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. Visit www.pbs.org/pov.

POV Interactive (www.pbs.org/pov)

POV's award-winning website extends the life of our films online with interactive features, interviews, updates, video and educational content, as well as listings for television broadcasts, community screenings and films available online. The *POV Blog* is a gathering place for documentary fans and filmmakers to discuss their favorite films and get the latest news.

POV Community Engagement and Education

POV films can be seen at more than 450 events across the country every year. Together with schools, organizations and local PBS stations, POV facilitates free community screenings and produces free resources to accompany our films, including discussion guides and curriculum-based lesson plans. With our community partners, we inspire dialogue around the most important social issues of our time.

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