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POV's 'Beats of the Antonov' Reveals the Power of Music to Bring Sudanese People Together in Time of War, Airing Monday, Aug. 3, 2015 on PBS

"[A] true standout. . . unequivocally demonstrates the essential role music plays in maintaining a sense of identity, not to mention hope for the future, among a people sorely worn down by the decades-long fighting." – Jay Weissberg, *Variety*



Sudan has been in an almost constant state of civil war since it achieved independence in 1956, and it split into a pair of sovereign states in 2011. Today, on the border between the two, Russian-made Antonov planes indiscriminately drop bombs on settlements in the Nuba Mountains below. Yet, incredibly, the people of the Blue Nile respond to adversity with music, singing and dancing to celebrate their survival. **Beats of the Antonov** explores how music binds a community together, offering hope and a common identity for refugees engaged in a fierce battle to protect cultural traditions and heritage from those trying to obliterate them.

Winner of the 2014 Toronto International Film Festival Grolsch People's Choice Award for Best Documentary, **Beats of the Antonov** has its national broadcast premiere on **Monday, Aug. 3, 2015** at 10 p.m. (check local listings) on PBS's **POV (Point of View)**. American television's longest-running independent documentary series, POV is the recipient of a 2013 MacArthur Foundation Award for Creative and Effective Institutions.

The war in Sudan today has its roots in the events of June 1989, when Col. Omar al-Bashir led a military coup, overthrowing the government and introducing Sharia law on a national level. He appointed himself president and remains so today. The Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), which began as a guerrilla movement in the southern part of Sudan, rose up against the government's oppression of marginalized Sudanese people, and a civil war erupted that lasted for decades. On Jan. 9, 2011, the people in the south voted for separation from Sudan, and the country was divided into Sudan, an Arab republic in the North, and South Sudan. But when the borders were drawn, many people living in Blue Nile and Nuba Mountains—who had fought for their freedom from Sudan—found themselves on the wrong side of the line. When they refused to disarm, the Sudanese government began waging a new war on the people in the border regions.

Since October 2012, Sudanese director **hajooj kuka** has been filming farmers, herders and rebels in their mountain hideouts and refugee camps, always on the lookout for air raids waged by the government of Sudan. His initial idea was to focus on the atrocities taking place against his people. But instead of the downtrodden victims he expected to find—and whose images are so prevalent in the media—he

discovered a resilient community joining together to celebrate their culture. “This film took shape as I was listening to music from the refugee camps,” he says. “The music was made by instruments created from found objects; a radio was used as an amplifier to create an electronic Sudanese sound that was unique. It was new and very hip and I loved it. The music moved me so much that I knew the story behind it was key.”

In the film, kuka captures the everyday life of his fellow Sudanese, who, although they have lost kin, homes and farms, improvise ways to continue harvesting their crops and raising cattle. He weaves together the voices of militants, social workers, intellectuals and everyday people to tell the story of refugees reclaiming their humanity in the midst of a complex conflict. “I named the film after the Antonov, a Russian airplane bombing the Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile,” he says. “‘Beats’ refers to the sound of the bombing—people are running and they are scared—but ‘beats’ also refers to the music that heals people.”

Kuka took recordings to his friend Sarah Mohamed (known as **Alsarah**), a Sudanese-American singer-songwriter, who went back to Sudan with him “to get a closer look at the music and its role in the story of the people’s displacement,” she says. “Along with finding answers about the Blue Nile and Nuba Mountains refugees, we found questions to be asked of all Sudanese, both north and south,” she adds. “What does it mean to be Sudanese? Why have we been in back-to-back civil wars since our independence? What is Sudanese music? Who gets to decide all these things?”

In **Beats of the Antonov**, a diverse assortment of people express their opinions, hopes and fears, sharing their struggle to keep the fragile thread of their identity from unraveling. Musician Jodah Bujud plays the rababa, a stringed instrument made from found objects. “When you play the rababa,” he says, “people forget their hardships for a moment. They enter a state of happiness.” Alsarah is fascinated by what she found when in Sudan, particularly “Girls’ Music,” which she encountered everywhere among young people. Mohamed attributes the widespread popularity of these songs, which tell stories of the women’s everyday lives, to the fact that “everyone is allowed to sing. Anyone has the right to drum. You can use a bucket to drum. In the end everyone sings together.”

Others provide insights into the complexity of the ongoing conflict. **Insaf Awad**, a Sudanese refugee, believes that war can actually attach people to their heritage. “People should protect their culture,” she says, “and pass it on to future generations.” **Albaqir Elafeef**, of the Sudanese Civil Society, believes that the war is caused by what he calls “the northerners’ identity crisis” as they fight to rid Sudan of its African elements.

Ultimately, many of the people in the film say that the war is about the soul of Sudan. The government “utilizes a ‘divide and rule’ policy,” says **Ibrahim Khatir**, an SPLA officer. “It categorizes Sudanese citizens along racial and ethnic lines, breaking them into Arabs and Blacks.” Arab identity is strongly promoted by the ruling National Congress Party, and African local languages and traditions are being lost in the process. “If we don’t answer the question of Sudanese identity the war will continue,” **Seif Alislam** says. Meanwhile, the people of the Blue Nile and Nuba Mountains continue singing and dancing, the beats in their music expressing their heritage both as Africans and as Sudanese.

“Watch this film with an open heart,” says kuka. “Despite years of adversity, the Sudanese people have retained—and even developed further—a signature strength and resilience and even joy. That is who we are, and that’s the main message of my film.”

Beats of the Antonov is a production of Refugee Club / Big World Cinema.

About the Filmmakers:

hajooj kuka, Director

hajooj kuka is a filmmaker from Sudan, and is currently based between the Nuba Mountains in Sudan and Nairobi, Kenya. He is the creative director of 3ayin.com, a website that works with local reporters to bring news of the war to the Sudanese people through short documentaries. He is a regular contributor to nubareports.org. His previous work includes the 2009 documentary *Darfur's Skeleton*, which explores the conflict in Sudan's troubled region since 2003.

Steven Markovitz, Producer

Steven Markovitz has been producing fictional features and documentaries for 20 years in Africa. His fiction films include *Viva Riva!* (Toronto, Berlinale), *Proteus* (Toronto, Berlinale), *African Metropolis* (Toronto, Rotterdam, Locarno) and *Love the One You Love* (Best South African Film, Durban 2014). His shorts have screened at Cannes, Sundance and Berlinale, and *Inja/Dog* was nominated for an Academy Award. His feature film *Stories of Our Lives* premiered at the 2014 Toronto International Film Festival, along with **Beats of the Antonov**. He has produced many documentaries including *Congo in Four Acts* (Berlinale, Hot Docs, IDFA) and *Project 10* (Sundance, Berlinale, Hot Docs, Tribeca). Markovitz is currently producing films in Nigeria, Libya, Liberia, Kenya, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, Japan and the United States.

Credits:

Directed by:	hajooj kuka
Producers:	Steven Markovitz, hajooj kuka
Director of Photography:	hajooj kuka
Editor:	hajooj kuka, Khalid Shamis
Music Producer:	Alsarah

Running Time: 56:46

Arabic with English subtitles

POV Series Credits:

Executive Producers:	Chris White, Simon Kilmurry
Associate Producer:	Nicole Tsien
Coordinating Producer:	Nikki Heyman

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Produced by American Documentary, Inc. and now in its 28th season on PBS, POV is public television's premier showcase for nonfiction films. The series airs Mondays at 10 p.m. from June to September, with primetime specials during the year. Since 1988, POV has been the home for the world's boldest contemporary filmmakers, celebrating intriguing personal stories that spark conversation and inspire action. Always an innovator, POV discovers fresh new voices and creates interactive experiences that shine a light on social issues and elevate the art of storytelling. With our documentary broadcasts, original online programming and dynamic community engagement campaigns, we are committed to supporting films that capture the imagination and present diverse perspectives.

POV films have won 32 Emmy® Awards, 18 George Foster Peabody Awards, 12 Alfred I. duPont-Columbia University Awards, three Academy Awards®, the first-ever George Polk Documentary Film Award and the Prix Italia. The POV series has been honored with a Special News & Documentary Emmy Award for Excellence in Television Documentary Filmmaking, two IDA Awards for Best Continuing Series and the National Association of Latino

Independent Producers (NALIP) Award for Corporate Commitment to Diversity. More information is available at www.pbs.org/pov.

POV Community Engagement and Education (www.pbs.org/pov/engage)

POV's Community Engagement and Education team works with educators, community organizations and PBS stations to present more than 650 free screenings every year. In addition, we distribute free discussion guides and standards-aligned lesson plans for each of our films. With our community partners, we inspire dialogue around the most important social issues of our time.

POV Digital (www.pbs.org/pov/)

Since 1994, POV Digital has driven new storytelling initiatives and interactive production for POV. The department created PBS's first program website and its first web-based documentary (*POV's Borders*) and has won major awards, including a Webby Award (and six nominations) and an Online News Association Award. POV Digital continues to explore the future of independent nonfiction media through its digital productions and the POV Hackathon lab, where media makers and technologists collaborate to reinvent storytelling forms. @povdocs on Twitter.

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.

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