



NAPT

NEWS RELEASE

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DOCUMENTARY ON NATIVE AMERICAN POLKA MUSIC TO AIR MAY 4 AFTER WE SHALL REMAIN SERIES

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LINCOLN, Neb.—March 30, 2009—Among the swaying giant arms of the saguaro cactus and clouds of dust that drift along isolated roads in southern Arizona is a soothing rhythm, a sound so distinct and stimulating that it arouses both the heart and soul.

Central European immigrants brought polka music to America in the mid-19th century but here among the O'odham nations Akimel and Tohono tribal members have made the mixture of accordions, saxophones and percussion all their own.

Taken from the word *baila*, which means *dance* in Spanish, Akimel and Tohono people have created *waila*, a form of music that embodies polka, waltz and Mexican music, tejano, cumbias and Norteno, creating a vibrant, whimsical tone.

The history of the music and its founding fathers are the subject of a new documentary for public television, ***Waila! Making the People Happy***, a co-production of **Daniel Golding** and the **Independent Television Service**. The film was produced in association with **Eight/KAET** and **Native American Public Telecommunications, Inc.** ***Waila!*** is being released to **PBS stations across the nation** starting in **April** and set to **air on some stations on May 4 after *Geronimo***, episode four of **American Experience's *We Shall Remain*** series. Check your local PBS station for air dates and times.

In the late 1700s and early 1800s, missionaries who brought violins and guitars on their journey taught the Akimel and Tohono O'odham to play instruments so there would be music during mass. Tribal members developed an ear for accordions after coming in contact with European immigrants who worked on the railroads.

After electricity came to the reservations in the 50s and 60s, the Joaquin Brothers picked up electric guitars and keyboards, and were one of the first to develop *waila*, which is also known among the tribes as "chicken scratch" after seeing people kick up their heels and scoot around. Four generations of Joaquins are playing *waila* now, including at the prestigious Carnegie Hall, and there's no stopping them, even at 2 in the morning.

"When everybody is just having a good time and dancing away, it's a fun feeling to know that what you are doing is helping people forget about their problems for awhile," said Ron Joaquin, who has been performing since he was 14.

"Some of the young kids are learning—they really like cumbias because that's freestyle and they can do their own thing," said Mary Lou Listo, Ron Joaquin's sister. It's "whatever your body wants to do. You know in the end when we take friends, they are at least doing the cumbia and they are having fun. It's just good, happy, lively music. It just makes people happy."

Although some may think that the sound of accordions and saxophones doesn't constitute as "Indian music," ***Waila!*** Producer/Director Daniel Golding (Quechan) said

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he made this film to show a slice of real Native America in the 21st century.

"I wanted people to see a side of Native America not normally portrayed—one that is a true representation of the Native spirit, fun; one that thrusts the viewer into the community so they can experience for themselves the true realistic beauty of the people, our communities and cultures that make up today's Native America," Golding said.

To see a trailer and more information about *Waila! Making the People Happy*, go to **NAPT's press kit page** at www.nativetelecom.org.

About ITVS:

The **Independent Television Service** brings local, national and international audiences high-quality, content-rich programs created by a diverse body of independent producers. Since its inception in 1991, *ITVS* seeks to expand cultural and global awareness, advance civic participation, and creatively engage audiences as it brings new and diverse voices into the public discourse through programming.



For more information about **ITVS**, go to: www.itvs.org.

About Eight/KAET:

Eight specializes in the education of children, in-depth news and public affairs, lifelong learning, and the celebration of arts and culture utilizing the power of noncommercial television, the Internet, educational outreach services, and community-based initiatives. The PBS station began broadcasting from the campus of Arizona State University on January 30, 1961. Now more than 80 percent of Arizonans receive the signal through a network of translators, cable and satellite systems. With more than 1.3 million viewers each week, Eight consistently ranks among the most-viewed public television stations per capita in the country.



For more information about **Eight/KAET**, go to: www.azpbs.org.

About NAPT:

Native American Public Telecommunications, Inc., shares Native stories with the world through support of the creation, promotion and distribution of Native media with offices in Lincoln, Neb., and Albuquerque, N.M. NAPT support makes it possible for public television audiences to view such quality programs as *March Point*, a coming of age story about three teens from the Swinomish Tribe who question the existence of two oil refineries on the reservation. Other NAPT products include **AIROS.org**, and **VisionMaker Video**, a distributor of *March Point* and other documentaries by and about Native Americans.

For more information on **NAPT**, go to www.nativetelecom.org.

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