

MacGillivray Freeman's

# AMERICA'S MUSICAL JOURNEY

**Narrated by Morgan Freeman**

## INTRO

Embark on an expedition that follows the beat of America's trailblazing spirit into inspired creative territory. In MacGillivray Freeman's *America's Musical Journey*—narrated by legendary Academy Award®-winning actor Morgan Freeman and produced in association with Brand USA and global presenting sponsors Expedia, Inc. and Air Canada -- chart-topping artist Aloe Blacc ("I Need a Dollar," "Wake Me Up") invites audiences to join him on a joyful, tune-filled, giant-screen tour of the nation's most iconic music cities, diving into the special places and unique cultural diversity that gave birth to America's celebrated musical heritage. In these cities every chord, every riff, every bang of a drum tells a story. Reflecting the nation at every turn, these can be stories of survival or celebration, of love or heartache, of protest or coming together. Academy Award®-nominated director Greg MacGillivray twines all these to create a flash immersion into the soundtrack of the American experience – a soundtrack that showcases the national passion for cultural invention in its purest emotional form.

Blacc's cross-country trek is a search for the answer to a persistent question: why did America, in a short span of time, become the cradle of such electrifying global art forms as jazz, blues, soul, country and rock and roll? He traces the roots by following the astonishing life of jazz great Louis Armstrong and the path of the Great Migration—the movement of millions of African Americans from the South to the North, East, and West in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. It's a trail that takes him from one glittering cityscape to another. He roams from the squares of New Orleans to the streets of Chicago; from Detroit's Hitsville to Nashville's country music mecca; from Manhattan's romance with jazz to Miami's salsa fever. Along his route, he explores legacies and legends. He also meets one dynamic artist after another – from bandleader Jon Batiste to jazz pianist Ramsey Lewis to hip-hop dancer Pause Eddie to Latin singer Gloria Estefan to teenage banjo-playing sensation Willow Osborne – all of whom are pushing creative boundaries today.

The result is a giant-screen experience driven as much by sound and spirit as the expected breathtaking imagery. At its heart is the idea that music can express what it means to be American – to be part of a constant, wildly inventive cultural exchange; to be bold and outspoken, yet to seek greater harmony. As director Greg MacGillivray puts it: "Our film is a physical journey but it's equally a journey of the imagination."

MacGillivray continues: "What I love about the movie it starts with a simple idea: that Americans like to take risks because we're a nation of immigrants. We all come from different places, bringing our different pasts and cultures – and in America, we have had to learn how to throw all of that together and create new communities willing to try new things. Out of that collision of cultures comes new ideas and art forms that can be embraced by everyone. From the time I was a young surfer, I have seen that there can be so much joy in going against the norm – turning traditions upside down to see what happens -- and in freedom of expression. Whether it's in sports, art or music, it's in our American nature to challenge the status quo, not knowing if it will work, but knowing that the thrill of experimentation and uncertainty will keep you striving for success."

Adds producer Shaun MacGillivray: "Music has always been incredibly important in our movies and we've long loved combining music with majestic visuals to make our films as emotional as possible.

But with this film we had the chance to turn the lens around on the creation of music itself and explore the importance of American music to all of us. We hope the film serves as an entrée, creating curiosity and providing a starting point for exploring the birth of these genres and all they've influenced. We're excited to transport audiences into the nation's most iconic cities but also back in time to how America's different musical cultures first formed and where they have taken us together."

*America's Musical Journey* is the second collaboration for MacGillivray Freeman Films, Brand USA and Expedia, following the highly successful *National Parks Adventure*, voted Best Film of the Year by the Giant Screen Cinema Association and the highest grossing documentary film of 2016.

## **LIFTING EVERY VOICE: TRACING THE ROOTS OF AMERICA'S MUSIC**

The filmmakers at MacGillivray Freeman Films are accustomed to chasing epic visuals across the globe's most unforgiving and unspoiled terrain, with films such as *Everest*, *To The Arctic* and *National Parks Adventure* to their credit. But *America's Musical Journey* is something different for the peripatetic film company. Their new film is definitely a breathtaking adventure, but this is a city-bound adventure, a historical adventure and an adventure that travels beyond words and images to peer into how the heartbeat of music unites the nation, city by city, at a deeper level. As the film traces the history of American music it becomes equally a story about some of America's greatest ideas: ideas of community, innovation, amalgamation and redemption.

Driven by their own passion for music, the filmmakers were excited to take a storytelling medium reliant on the most majestic photography to new places to tell a story about the power of sound. The transition was seamless. "I've always loved combining music and film," says Greg MacGillivray. "I love the way music allows you to tell a story with expressions of humanity, joy, humor and excitement that go beyond language. Early in my career, when I was making surfing films, we were often putting together sequences without a single word spoken – and I've found I like that kind of filmmaking best. I love telling a story that is emotional and joyous on the purest level, and music allows you to do that. I like giving the audience not only joy, beauty and poetry of motion but also the sense of participating in what they're seeing, allowing them to soak in a new experience because all your senses are engaged."

Still, the filmmakers acknowledge they faced a metaphorical mountain. After all, few topics could be more sprawling than American music. Entire scholarly libraries exist on how jazz, blues, country and rock emerged, why they touched such a universal chord and how each changed the world. So, for screenwriter, editor and longtime MacGillivray Freeman veteran Stephen Judson, the search was on for how to hone in on the core essence of American music. Diving into research, Judson uncovered four major themes:

- The idea that the collision of immigrant cultures in America produced fertile creative ground
- New appreciation for how the West African musical traditions brought over in the memories of the early enslaved have influenced all of America's musical genres.
- That improvisation and innovation lie at the core of America's musical dynamism;
- And that forging community – something music does organically – is at the very heart of the American project.

"A movie about American music is really a movie about the human experience," comments Judson. "There's something exciting that happens when different cultures come together as they have through the last couple hundred years of American history and one of the things that happens is incredible creativity. There is also something about the openness of America that has always encouraged people to take risks – to not feel hemmed in by rules. That spirit of freedom underlies a lot of the development of America's art forms and is also reflected in the spontaneity of jazz and rock and roll."

He continues: "In America, we have always experienced how music brings us together. You have a nation where people can have many differences of opinion and lifestyle but then you can go to a concert and everybody's there sharing equally in that joy."

Early on, the MacGillivray Freeman filmmakers identified jazz legend Louis Armstrong as epitomizing the American musical journey. Born at the turn of the century into deep poverty, a grandson of slaves, Armstrong grew up in the Storyville district of New Orleans where he had exposure to a wide span of musical styles, but especially the gospel music in the churches that his grandmother, a former slave, took him to. As a boy, he sang on street corners to earn money and learned to play the cornet in The Colored Waif's Home for Boys. It soon became clear he was a creative prodigy, one who would be instrumental in developing the new form of jazz and making it a household word. In 1922, at the age of 21, Armstrong joined the emigration wave to Chicago. There, his unbounded imagination would revolutionize jazz with adventurous solos and bluesy phrasing, and transform Armstrong into one of the most influential musical icons of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. In the 40s he headed for New York, where he influenced the swinging spirit of the big band era that bolstered America in wartime.

Armstrong's musical gifts were remarkable – it's been said that he played the trumpet like it was singing and sang like his voice was a musical instrument. But he also became known as "Ambassador Satchmo," equally beloved for his infectious optimism and for speaking out for justice, tolerance and humanity – presaging an era in which artists could not separate themselves from the world around them.

Judson and MacGillivray agreed that Armstrong was the perfect focal point for the film. MacGillivray explains: "Armstrong was the Jackie Robinson of music, someone who opened doors. At the turn of the century, much of the U.S. was still segregated and Louis, because he was such a great entertainer, opened up this whole other world of jazz to Americans of all colors. It wasn't easy for him. He had to fight and he had to push but he was the right person at the right time to advance things."

Next, the filmmakers took a deep dive into Armstrong's life. The film's researcher Barbara MacGillivray engaged renowned Duke University musicologist Thomas Brothers, who wrote both *Louis Armstrong's New Orleans* about his early years and *Louis Armstrong: Master of Modernism*, focusing on Louis' seminal years in Chicago. She and Judson consulted with not only Brothers but also with Ricky Riccardi, jazz scholar and musical curator of the Louis Armstrong House Museum, who authored *What A Wonderful World: The Magic of Louis Armstrong's Later Years*, which follows Armstrong's vital last 25 years. They also engaged Dwandalyn Reece, Curator of Music and Performing Arts at the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture to help finetune the film's focus on the African American contribution to America's unique musical genres and Armstrong's extraordinary influence.

For Judson it was important to start Armstrong's story with the slave trade, which involuntarily swept Armstrong's ancestors to Louisiana, and which entwined with his musical roots. When slavery uprooted lives, ripped apart families and unraveled community cultures, it was music that kept ties intact. Through songs, slaves improvised ways to defy their oppressors, to spread messages and express forbidden emotions, ideas and hopes and accomplish their tortuous work in the cotton fields. Paradoxically, the music that arose out of this most ugly of stains on the nation would come to profoundly enrich, transform and redefine the nation's musical culture, in all its creative genres. The blue or "bent" notes – microtonal notes not on natural scales -- that characterized the music of the slaves became central to blues, jazz, rock and the entire soundscape of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and beyond.

Somehow, all the social frisson of a country struggling to find its way and its conscience transfigured itself into infectious rhythms and striking melodies. This was especially true as jazz ignited in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, emerging as a searching, daring mode of musical expression that both commented on and defied the past. "Jazz was just so creative and freeform and even with the same musicians it was different every night," notes Greg MacGillivray. "Everything about jazz flew in the face of classical, refined music. Instead of being precise and restrained it was full of expression and spontaneity. For me, jazz just grabs you at the most primal level and it paints a picture in your brain. Jazz can take you away and transport somewhere new in the most unique way."

From Armstrong and jazz, the filmmakers' exploration of American music went further and further – extending to the science of music. Music has long been of interest to physicists, engineers, and neuroscientists. Contemporary science has increasingly looked at such questions as why our brains respond to music– and just how rhythm and melody spark ineffable feelings and deep memories. Judson

was especially struck by recent studies revealing brainwaves oscillate with the note-rate of music – a phenomenon named as “cortical entrainment to music.” Our brains literally move to the beat, which helps explain that haunting feeling of unity during group musical experiences, notes Judson, “We truly are hard-wired to get up and dance.”

The importance of music as a socializing influence is seen in one of the film’s most moving sequences about how music therapy can help young autistic children communicate with others. In the scene Aloe Blacc plays music with a young autistic boy who has learned to positively interact with others through music therapy and who now performs for other young autistic children, helping them join the social world.

Music has the physiological ability to unite, but also to provide spiritual solace in times of extreme hardship. Perhaps, most powerfully, it has the ability to spark new ideas. Says Greg MacGillivray: “When you come together with a group dancing and singing and making music it’s an incredible unifying force. That sharing can itself produce new ideas, new feelings and new explorations.”

## **MEET YOUR GUIDE: ALOE BLACC**

Greg MacGillivray always knew the guide for *America’s Musical Journey* needed to be a compelling American musician, someone who reflects the ongoing tradition of lifting every voice that yearns to be heard. That’s why he chose rapidly rising star Aloe Blacc whose unique story shares many personal connections with the film’s themes. Blacc’s experience as the son of Panamanian immigrants, his life-long adoration of Louis Armstrong and his own path as a young trumpet player turned jazz-sampling hip-hop artist behind some of the most-streamed hit songs of recent years seemed a perfect match.

MacGillivray pared down the candidates to a list of 25, including Blacc. “Aloe truly rose to the top,” recalls Steve Judson. “Part of what drew us to him is that his personality is so inclusive. He has a real gift for making everybody feel comfortable and inviting everybody to be part of the conversation. He’s not just a musician but someone who puts a lot of thought into how to communicate with people.”

For MacGillivray, Blacc stood out as “a terrific role model – a guy who took his dream and found success.” He loved that Blacc’s life experience was so vast: Blacc got his start in music selling hip-hop cassettes but is a graduate of USC; he is both the son of immigrants and someone who proudly represents American music around the globe. “He’s a super-smart guy with a wonderful voice and musically, he is open to everything,” says the director. “Aloe is willing to try any genre – he loves to study music and to explore every style. All of this was so perfect and he’s also a great family man, with two young children with his wife, Maya Jupiter, also a musician, hip-hop star and immigrant.”

Once Blacc came aboard, Judson got to know him better, which further inspired the script. “Early on I had a phone call with Aloe, trying to see what made him tick. I asked him: ‘why do you have interest in so many different forms of music: jazz, blues, pop, Latin?’ And he had a very interesting answer, which was that it all came from hip-hop, because of all the sampling he did, which led him to be interested in a broad range of musical forms. It was exciting to tell this story with a musician who goes out of his way to incorporate so many different types of music in what he does. I was also very moved by his immigrant background and how clearly he talks about how that shaped his whole life.”

Producer Shaun MacGillivray has been following Blacc as a fan since his earliest days, when he was still performing in small Orange County clubs. “I think what makes Aloe so special is that his music isn’t just from one genre – it draws from so many influences, which is what this story is about,” he notes. “Aloe is also incredible on camera, he’s eloquent and dynamic and that was huge for us. He was always there when we needed him to be and he reached out to his musician community as well. It was a truly collaborative process with Aloe, which is what we love most.”

Blacc had never before appeared on screen – beyond music videos – when he committed to *America’s Musical Journey*. But typical of his approach to life, he was thrilled to step into fresh territory. To have the chance to do so in a way that would share his greatest passion was irresistible. “The idea of

being in a film directly about music, telling the story of America and its cities through the lens of how all these different sounds have traveled across the country ... that was exciting,” he says.

He especially loved that Greg MacGillivray wanted to highlight the creative potency of cultures perpetually recombining in new ways, something Blacc has always championed. “I have long recognized that as sounds and styles travel across borders they can influence culture and ideas,” Blacc comments. “Taking part in this film has allowed me to see even deeper into the way I personally make music -- and to think about how much my music has been informed by my own family’s history and by the deep influences of Latin America and the Caribbean on the U.S.”

Another big draw for Blacc was the chance to bring one of his musical idols, Louis Armstrong, to film audiences. “I first encountered Louis at very young age – I was very aware of his voice and his legend. But it was when I started playing the trumpet as a kid that I developed a much deeper appreciation of him,” he recalls. Later, when Blacc began exploring the sweeping range of sounds and styles that combine into modern hip-hop, jazz came back into his life. “I didn’t imagine then I’d ever be a jazz player but I would sample songs in the genre of jazz as well as R&B and soul. And it was when I started listening back to early jazz music that I started getting further inspired to sing,” he recalls. “Similarly, Louis went from being a trumpet player to the vocalist we all know him to be.”

Most of all it was Armstrong’s impact on the social fabric of the nation and the world that inspired and still fires up Blacc. “The most important legacy Armstrong leaves is his ambassadorship through music – and especially the way he helped to integrate our society. A lot of my biggest heroes in entertainment and sports are those who have been able to help transform the concept of what it means to be a person of color in the U.S. and that was very true of Armstrong,” Blacc observes. “He had a profound effect and brought changes that can’t even be quantified. His records were in homes where he himself might not have been accepted and that was incredibly important to changing the future.”

The future was on Blacc’s mind as he set out on the cross-country trek seen in the film. He was looking forward to seeing some awe-inspiring sights, jamming with fellow musicians, learning more about local musical history and performing across the nation. But most of all, he was thinking about what audiences, especially young people, might take from the experience.

“I hope this movie inspires people to want to get more involved in playing music, appreciating music and exploring the history of music,” he says. “Music is ubiquitous in the world today – it’s on our phones, on the radio and in stores, but I don’t want music to just be in the ether for people. By watching this film, I hope people will see that music isn’t just there. There are people who create it and here you get to meet some of the people who are creating it and some of the people who have inspired and influenced what we’re listening to today. And I hope people see that anyone can get involved in our musical legacy and help push it forward for tomorrow.”

## **ALL THAT JAZZ: NEW ORLEANS**

Few cities are as synonymous with music as New Orleans, home to a perpetual jubilee and to original musical forms ranging from brass bands and ragtime to Dixieland jazz, Cajun music, zydeco and bounce rap. Since its earliest days the bustling port city has swirled with an array of cultures, customs and ethnicities, each of which added its own flavor to the local atmosphere. Here, Africans, both slaves and free, intermingled with Native Americans and European settlers producing a culture as distinctive as any on earth. Musical instruments from around the world, from Congo drums to European horns, also merged and melded to conjure sounds that could only come from this city’s history. The pulsating sounds have always been accompanied by a party atmosphere, rich food, lush bayous, close-knit community and a mood redolent with history and mystery. No matter where you look -- from high-end galleries and world-famous jazz clubs to street artists and spontaneous blue-grass bands – art and artists are everywhere.

“New Orleans is the root source of our American music,” says Steve Judson. “If you had to pick one city where our music comes from, New Orleans would be it. It’s not just jazz and Cajun music. The city developed from a wide mix of cultures each with its own kind of music – French, Spanish, Caribbean

and especially African -- which is what has given it such an incredibly rich texture, one that is unique in America and in the world.”

The geographical heart of New Orleans music remains Congo Square, located in the famed Treme neighborhood, and now part of Louis Armstrong Park. Congo Square started out in the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century as the one place enslaved Africans were allowed to gather to hold markets, play music, dance, pray and socialize. The communal magic that happened there infused the birth of jazz with that spirit.

“New Orleans had to be the starting point for our story because it’s not only where Louis Armstrong and jazz were born, it’s also a way to talk about the slave experience and how it influenced American music,” explains Judson. “We really wanted to touch on the reality that Congo Square was a dynamic community. We sometimes think of African music as being one monolithic thing, but slaves were coming from all parts of Africa and in Congo Square music was the universal language of sharing. Later, the Great Migration of freed slaves brought this new music to industrial cities across America.”

To get a deeper taste of all the flavors of New Orleans, Aloe Blacc joined up there with one of his good friends and cherished musical collaborators, Jon Batiste.

Best known as the exuberantly soulful bandleader and musical director for the top-rated late-night talk show “The Late Show with Stephen Colbert,” Batiste is an innovative musician, multi-instrumentalist, student of musical history and impassioned educator. His journey from a New Orleans family filled with generations of musicians to garnering undergraduate and master’s degrees at the Juilliard School to developing his own approach to jazz and his signature “love riot” street parades to being named Artistic Director At Large of the National Jazz Museum is another modern-day story of American achievement.

Batiste was thrilled to show off his home state for *America’s Musical Journey*. Though he now lives in New York, he was customarily hyper-enthusiastic to fly out for a fast but rich musical rendezvous with Blacc. He arrived with his trademark instrument in tow – the part-keyboard-part-harmonica known as the melodica or harmonaboard – which adds more musical fun to his segment.

“It was one of those things I didn’t have to think about very hard,” Batiste says of his rapid commitment to the film. “Coming back to my home town and representing the culture is something I’ve been doing since I became a musician and a bandleader. That’s kind of been my whole objective: to spread the culture and to spread things in the culture that teach us lessons about life.”

Born into a lineage of musical talents in Kenner, Louisiana, Batiste first started playing percussion in his family’s band when he wasn’t much taller than a drum kit. But he didn’t start learning his primary instrument, the piano, until he was 11 – and it was only later that Batiste made the personal choice to devote his whole being to writing and performing music. “Up until 14 or 15 it was more of a hobby – or not even a hobby, but just a part of life. Music has always been part of the fabric of everyday life in New Orleans culture,” he explains. “I think I took it for granted that everywhere in the world was like that. But when I was 17 and I moved to New York to start studying at Juilliard, that’s when I realized I truly wanted music to be a career. Before that it was just a way of life -- the way eating or sleeping is.”

At Juilliard and to this day, Batiste began excavating all that has made Louisiana’s history so creatively explosive. He explains in the film that he sees New Orleans as the northern tip of the Caribbean as much as the Southern United States – a city, and a state of mind, poised to cross over borders not just physical but emotional, cultural and spiritual.

“In America there were always many cultural influences but there was rarely that opportunity for all these cultures to mingle with one another and congeal in a way that gave birth to something new – and that’s what happened in New Orleans,” he points out. “You had this brave new world with all this culture coming in and out of the port. It’s amazing to think now about how much of a global situation was happening then in New Orleans. It was not something typical of that day at all. Now everything is connected by the internet and airplanes, but it wasn’t like that back then at all. So to have all these different cultures coming together was something unusual -- and you had to find unity.”

Finding unity was part of what emerged from Congo Square. “I think there’s a powerful effect in social gatherings,” Batiste observes. “That was an inspiration for how a lot of jazz and early folk music was born.”

Batiste sees music as operating the same way in today’s world and it’s one reason he chose the melodica as a signature instrument. It allows him to travel around like a piper, even in places music doesn’t typically go. “I like being mobile and I like how averse to pomposity the instrument is. It’s something you can turn into art while still keeping a childlike curiosity,” he notes. “The melodica is a way for me to leave the piano and engage with people and bring a certain spirit anywhere I happen to go. One of the things I know for is what we call a ‘love riot.’ It’s a kind of parade where we take thousands of people into the streets or into deserts or into parts of the world where this type of expression isn’t typical. So that’s my vehicle to spread some infectious energy – it’s an instrument that is the perfect icebreaker.”

As a jazz leader and jazz champion, Batiste welcomed a film that brings Louis Armstrong to the fore. He notes that it’s hard to overstate Armstrong’s importance. “Louis reinvented how we approach popular music ... and that goes all the way to the pop music of today, so you have music before Louis and after Louis,” Batiste explains. “He set the template for how we improvise as jazz musicians – our syncopation, the way we play melodies and harmonies. He was a musical voice so ahead of his time, he almost created time. As if that wasn’t enough, he was an ambassador and humanitarian who spread love wherever he went. He represented the best ideals of America even at a time when people who looked like him were being persecuted. He was so many different things. You could see him as a civil rights leader, a human rights leader, a re-inventor of American music or the inventor of modern jazz. His influence is endless.”

As for why jazz music remains so relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Batiste says: “Jazz is important not just because it’s one of the most highly intellectual, spiritual and visceral art forms of all time but also because we created it based on the highest ideals of what it means to be an American. Jazz was integrated much earlier than the country was integrated. Jazz was always about what you brought to the table -- your own experiences and culture -- and you weren’t judged for that, you were celebrated. America at its best is about that. You can come together even if you don’t always agree ... and a big part of jazz is this art of compromise.”

Batiste concludes: “The celebration of everyone’s unique contribution is a special lesson that we can learn from jazz in all times.”

For *Aloe Blacc*, any film about New Orleans could only feel more authentic by including Batiste. “Jon’s spirit **is** New Orleans, always so energetic, so friendly, so musical. Jon’s a very unique individual and he is very representative of the city he comes from,” sums up Blacc.

Recalls Greg MacGillivray of working with Batiste: “Even though Jon took a red-eye to arrive on time for the morning shoot, showing up in a pink suit and brand new tennis shoes, he was a ball of energy just like he is on TV. Jon is super smart and knows more about music and its history than just about anyone I’ve met. You just instantly love the guy and he was high energy all day, singing and playing and sharing with Aloe, and then just as quickly he jumped on a plane back to New York.”

Also seen in the film is a typical New Orleans wedding parade down Royal Street in the French Quarter, another example of how music is intricately woven into the city’s everyday life. Nearly every event worth remembering is celebrated in New Orleans with a street parade – from a store opening to a funeral --- often turning a personal rite into a shared moment of solace, celebration or joy. “New Orleans parades are such spontaneous, emotional events and of course, they’re centered around music,” explains MacGillivray. “That’s the atmosphere in which Louis Armstrong grew up so we wanted to give audiences a taste of that experience.”

Rounding out the trip in New Orleans is a pit stop to a convivial roof-top party, where Blacc and Batiste commune with one of the most revered living legends of New Orleans: Dr. John, a 6 time Grammy winner and member of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame noted for his free-ranging, funky and

original combinations of blues, jazz, pop, boogie-woogie and rock, not to mention his lavish stage persona. “Spending time with Dr. John was incredible,” Blacc says. “He may be a bit more advanced in age than Jon but there’s this incredible spark of New Orleans excitement in him. There’s just something in the water there!”

For Greg MacGillivray, it was a chance to encounter an artist whose music has long inspired him – indeed, MacGillivray tapped the Dr. John song “What a Night” for the soundtrack of the Louisiana-set MFF film *Hurricane on the Bayou*. “Dr. John was such a joy to work with. He is so very genuine and the whole scene at the party was a lot of fun,” he summarizes.

Capturing the party on film also posed a fresh challenge for long-time MFF cinematographer Brad Ohlund, who is more accustomed to navigating steep mountainsides and roaring rivers than partygoers and stage performances. “One difference in *America’s Musical Journey* is that we seldom have to do much lighting in our outdoor films, but from the start this film was a lot of interiors,” Ohlund points out. “The party scene in New Orleans was a huge lighting job. But we brought in a lot of the same crew we had worked with on *Hurricane on the Bayou* and it was like old-home week, as we reunited with some great old friends, and that set the tone. The party itself was so compelling, because it was *really* a party – and that was the joyful mood we tried to capture. For me personally, it was just a hoot to be in New Orleans in the presence of legends like Jon Batiste and Dr. John.”

## **“MUSIC CITY, USA”: INTO THE HEART OF COUNTRY**

No film about American music could be complete without touching down in Tennessee, home to Nashville – aka “Music City, U.S.A.” Early settlers in rural Tennessee brought their Scottish and Irish folk songs with them and by the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the city was already attracting musicians from around the world. Here too, cultures combined, with traditional folk songs and fiddles merging with British ballads, cowboy songs, banjos that had evolved from the traditions of enslaved West Africans brought to America with memories of the African “banjar”, and the everyday stories of farmers, cowboys and working people. Originally called “hillbilly music,” country music was largely a community affair until the rise of radio, which brought the music, and its themes of ordinary life – of love, work, struggle and family -- to much larger audiences. In 1925, the Grand Ole Opry opened, igniting the careers of one country star after another, and influencing every other form of American music. To this day, Nashville remains a mecca for songwriters of all kinds, who arrive into a diverse community of artists who share in common the same dream of joining the roster of musical influencers.

Says Steve Judson: “In Nashville, we had the opportunity to bring to audiences both some of the flavor of early American music and the idea of the city of Nashville as a place where music has in the last half century become a major economic enterprise. There’s nowhere quite like Nashville anywhere else in the world.”

In Nashville, Aloe Blacc takes an eye-opening trek to Fisk University, which played a vital, early role in turning the city into the global musical hotspot it is today. The historically black college was founded in 1866, six months after the Civil War, intending to educate those held as slaves and other young African-Americans. In 1873, the Fisk Jubilee Singers, the university’s *a capella* choir, toured Europe, bringing the stirring beauty of American spirituals for the first time across the ocean and playing for Queen Victoria, who is reputed to have then proclaimed Nashville “Music City.”

“The Fisk Jubilee Singers were the start of Nashville becoming a music capitol of the world,” notes Greg MacGillivray. “It was especially exciting for Aloe to be able to sing his song ‘My Story’ with the famed Jubilee Singers, giving it a whole new layer of meaning.”

The MFF team was especially exhilarated to be able to shoot at the Grand Ole Opry’s storied Ryman Auditorium, a sacred site for music lovers. Named for steamboat captain and Nashville businessman Thomas G. Ryman, it is here where the bluegrass sound got its start, where Johnny Cash met June Carter, and where a teenage Elvis Presley took to the stage in 1954, receiving what was probably his first and only luke-warm reception. Weeks after this cold reception, he was signed up for 52 Saturday night performances with the Grand Ole Opry’s biggest competitor. Renovated and revitalized in the



1990s, the Ryman Auditorium is now once again a world-class performance arena drawing contemporary artists – but everyone can feel the ghosts of the artistic past amid the ambience.

The inspiration of the past comes vibrantly alive when Blacc heads to the studio with a trio of both renowned and rapidly rising local musicians: 17 year-old bluegrass banjo star Willow Osborne; pedal steel guitar specialist Bruce Bouton, who has played with Garth Brooks, Rascal Flatts, Brooks & Dunn and Lady Antebellum, among many others; and 19 year-old Native American flute player Gareth Laffely, the youngest player ever to reach #2 on the Billboard New Age charts.

For Osborne the thrill was immense. “It was a crazy situation. My mom got an e-mail about the film and I had to read the e-mail a few times just to make sure it was my name and not a mistake,” she laughs. “My mind was blown just to think I was going to be in the same room as Aloe Blacc.”

When she met Blacc, her worries evaporated into musical communion. “He was amazing,” Osborne recalls. “I was trying to be cool but I was so excited. Also, after you’ve made a connection to someone listening to all their songs, I felt like I kind of knew him. I was nervous, and I was especially nervous about my playing, but everyone was so nice to me.”

Once she started playing, it was clear to all that Osborne belongs on the stage with her peers. Much like Jon Batiste, Osborne has been playing since before most children even start to form memories. She was just 4 years old when she saw a country music show in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee featuring banjo player Gary “Biscuit” Davis, Dolly Parton’s bandleader and a 4-time winner of the National Bluegrass Banjo Championships. For reasons that remain mysterious even to Willow, she was completely rapt the minute she saw him play. “I looked at my mom and said ‘I want to play the banjo, this is what I want to do with my life,’” Osborne remembers. “I told her ‘I want that happiness.’”

In another twist of fate, when Willow’s mother Gale went to a music store to buy her toddling daughter a first banjo, she met a man who advised her not to get the toy she assumed a 4 year-old would want but the real thing. He then offered to teach Willow banjo lessons. That man turned out to be Gary “Biscuit” Davis himself, who was the perfect mentor for Willow’s precocious start.

Willow had found her calling. Today, she knows exactly what music means to her: “I play for my own happiness and that of others. Truly, I couldn’t live without music.” She also has a deep understanding of why she is drawn to bluegrass and country. “Country music and bluegrass mean so much to people because it is really storytelling. You can listen to the great country songs and see other people who have been in your situation so you feel you will be OK. If you’re going through a tough situation, music can rip you apart but it can also put you back together.”

Like her musical compatriots in the film, Osborne also is drawn to the borderless nature of music. “Country music is truly a melting pot of instruments and people – and no matter where you come from or what language you speak, there’s a feeling you can connect through the music,” she muses. “I love to touch people with my music. When audiences respond in a personal way, that is what fulfills me as a musician. That’s why we do it.”

Osborne cherished the chance to work with Bouton and Laffely, merging three such distinctive sounds. “It was really cool,” she says. “I’d never played banjo with a flute before and I was interested to see how they were going to connect to each other, since they’re really different components. Gareth is such an amazing player that it was very inspiring. I think people will be shocked to see how well a banjo and flute can fit together -- I was really impressed with how it sounded. And Bruce, wow. He’s one of the world’s great steel guitar players so that made me want to play my best.”

*America’s Musical Journey* also marks the first time Osborne has appeared in a feature film, not to mention a giant-screen film, which was its own adventure for her and one she would love to repeat. “It was unreal to see the magnitude of equipment the crew brought in,” she laughs. “I knew it would be a lot but wow. It was also really fascinating and a little intimidating to have these huge cameras right there in your face while you’re playing. But truly, it was one of the most amazing experiences of my life. Greg and Barbara MacGillivray were so welcoming and so generous to me. Even though we were all together for only a few days, I still miss being with the crew.”

Osborne is particularly excited for audiences who might not be exposed to much country music to get to know more about Nashville and its musical history. “Nashville is the heart of country music, and if you love music you need to come here because you can’t walk down the street without hearing someone singing or playing,” she describes.

As for what Osborne hopes other young people take from the film, she says: “I really hope that kids see this film and say I want to play music. Music is so important, Life should be filled with music.”

## **BABY, DON’T YOU WANNA GO: CHICAGO**

Spiked with steely skyscrapers, lined with plaza after plaza of outdoor art, possessed of vibrant ethnic neighborhoods and ringing with the history of jazz, blues and house music, the Windy City is one of the nation’s most alluring cultural powerhouses. In *America’s Musical Journey*, Chicago is a focal point – and the city’s angular, architectural beauty and humming energy are captured in both sweeping aerials and down-to-earth dance scenes. Says Greg MacGillivray: “I was absolutely surprised by Chicago and found it to be one of the most fun and exciting cities I’ve visited, full of wonderful people, wonderful neighborhoods and wonderful places to see.”

It is also the city where 21-year-old Louis Armstrong arrived in 1922, and the city where some 500,000 African Americans headed to forge new lives during the Great Migration – the mass movement of more than 6 million African Americans from the Southern U.S. to the Midwest and Northeast from 1910 to 1970. In Chicago, New York and other Northern cities, the Great Migration would forge a then-new and now ever-changing urban culture that continues to exert massive influence across the world.

“Chicago was where over a million African-Americans settled during the Great Migration, so it’s an essential part of not only of Louis Armstrong’s musical journey but the larger story of America,” says Steve Judson.

For Judson and MacGillivray, a looming question was how to best capture the city’s palpable creative energy, as it exists right now. One way they did so is via a 21<sup>st</sup> Century form of entertainment: a flashmob – the millennial ritual in which a group of strangers suddenly converge in one place to carry out a dance, song or other creative act in unison. For the film, a Chicago flashmob fittingly breaks out into a dance to Aloe Blacc’s hit “Wake Me Up.”

Explains Judson: “We really wanted to capture the diversity of Chicago, part of which is the result of the Great Migration. You see that in the flashmob scene as both the true joy of community and a spirit of celebration come through. The flashmob also speaks to another important theme in the film: the spontaneity that lies behind great art.”

For cinematographer Brad Ohlund, that spontaneity was full of challenges, but also the kind of vibrancy that makes for alluring visuals. He recalls: “The flashmob scene truly was off the cuff because a flashmob isn’t choreographed perfection, but that is what adds to the charm of it. It was also a great chance to shoot in beautiful Millennium Park Plaza in the heart of downtown Chicago.”

Production manager Meghan MacGillivray had never experienced a flashmob in person before but loved using it as a means to explore the city in song and dance. “We hired a flashmob organizer and we had about 20 professional dancers along with volunteer dancers who all learned the dance on the internet,” MacGillivray explains. “It took us all day to shoot the scene because it’s really quite complicated but I think it shows the fun that comes out of that kind of sudden social gathering and highlights the city.”

Chicago is a rocking city, but also a rolling city in the water sense – lined as it is by the Chicago River and hugging the shores of Lake Michigan. The filmmakers took full advantage of its flow. “The riverboat scene through Chicago is one of our more immersive IMAX® moments,” notes Judson. “Moving down a river is a wonderful way to move through any environment and it was a great way for us

to capture Chicago's inimitable skyline. The city is such an amazing architectural center and it was important to us to bring audiences into that."

To incorporate more of the current cultural life of the city, MacGillivray started looking for home-grown Chicago dance styles that might pop on the giant screen – which is when she came across the fast and furious form of street dancing known as "Chicago footwork." The style, too, was born from a merging of influences. African tribal dances, traditional tap dance and fraternal step dances collided into the newly sped-up beats and polyrhythms of house music and the storytelling battles of Chicago's hip-hop scene to make Chicago footwork a phenomenon unto itself in the 1980s. The high-velocity technique -- featuring foot moves at a zippy 160 steps-per-minute that turn the body into a kind of percussion instrument itself – soon begat its own musical style, a series of influential dance collectives and has broken out onto dancefloors around the world.

The film features a typically fierce and fun footwork duet by two rising young Chicago dance stars: Eddie "Pause Eddie" Martin Jr. and Donnetta "Lil Bit" Jackson. Both have performed with the world-renowned Chicago FootWorkKingz and both serve as teachers and community leaders who bring footwork and hip-hop dancing to kids all around Chicago.

Pause Eddie describes what drew him to footwork as a teenager growing up on the roughhewn South Side of Chicago: "I started seeing it at parties, seeing how aggressive it can be, how fast it can be, and I was drawn to the feeling, the excitement and the peer pressure of it all at once. I was only 14 when I started and Chicago was to me then a place with very strong, gang-related violence. I decided to sacrifice everything to learn to dance."

Practicing for hour after dedicated hour in his basement, Pause Eddie honed his skills to a high level, but that was just the beginning. He soon realized he had something more to say and more to give. "It became so I didn't have to think about the moves, they were just automatically in my heart and my mind. From that moment, dancing became more about emotion and expression. As I got deeper into it, I realized that just doing the moves is not what was going to make me a good dancer. I had to go further."

By the time he was 16, Pause Eddie had joined FootWorkKingz as its youngest performing member – and he would become a leader of the troupe. Today, he sees footwork as inseparable from the life of the city. "Footwork is Chicago period," he says. "It's one of Chicago's many unique talents and it has inspired a lot of kids growing up in low-income housing. It has also become something people of every kind and every race love to watch and to do."

Similar to his compatriots in the film, Eddie found through music and dance a passion for uplifting others. "Kids in Chicago might make wrong decisions and I'm happy to be the one who can give them another option," he explains. "Chicago footwork is a culture I take very seriously. I take dance very seriously. When I teach it, I'm teaching a culture that saved my life. It was not easy to get respect in my world doing something positive – it's been a lot of hard work but it pays off. That is what I teach: success might not come over night but when you stay positive and you keep focused, it will come."

Donnetta Jackson had already been dancing for years, studying ballet and tap, when she first encountered Chicago footwork. At first sight, she thought it was cool but definitely not for her. Like all artists, though, she was open to change when the time was right. "I tried it one time and I thought no, I don't really like it – but then I tried it again," she recalls. She began to understand the lure of it: "It's so fast and emotional and it comes from everyday life, from the everyday struggle of real people. For many people, this is their let-out, this is what they can do to get away – you can let it all out on the dance floor."

Things especially took off when Jackson teamed up with Pause Eddie. "Our chemistry is amazing," she observes. "His creativity and musicality is out of this world and when you put it together with mine, it just makes a great package. He'd been doing footwork a lot longer, so I had a lot of catching up to do. I thought: I'm not about to look weak next to him – so he motivated me to be a better partner."

Like Pause Eddie, Jackson is excited to share Chicago footwork with new audiences in *America's Musical Journey*. "It's exciting for us to show the world what we do and share it in this positive way," she says.

That's exactly what happened on the day of the shoot, which just happened to be on one of those blustery Chicago days that chills the bones. MacGillivray had called the duo to rush down to the shoot in the late afternoon after learning that the next day was going to be rain-filled. They barely made it in time.

"When they arrived we said 'look, it's cloudy and we may only have 5 minutes of light left, so take off your coats and start dancing!'" MacGillivray remembers. "There was no time for rehearsal or even discussion. But what I saw them do was amazing. Looking through the camera I had the strange feeling that their feet were being blurred but that's just an illusion! I couldn't believe how fast they were going. Luckily, some clouds moved and we got a brief reprieve so that we could do a few more takes. But what I love is that you really get to feel the spontaneity and joy of that moment with the dancers."

Jackson jokes that the weather played a role in their inspiration: "Part of my motivation was the faster we danced, the sooner I could put on my jacket!" More seriously she adds: "No matter what, I always I know if I'm dancing from the heart, it's going to go well and with so little time we knew we just had to go hard for the cameras."

Chicago was also a chance for Blacc and the film crew to meet up with another true musical great and legend of the city: Ramsey Lewis, the octogenarian jazz composer and pianist who has released more than 80 albums and won three Grammy Awards. Lewis may be best known for his jazzy take on the Billy Page classic "The In Crowd," first performed in 1965, but he has also been a musical mentor to many, from the biggest musical stars to inner-city kids.

The film tags along with Blacc and Lewis at a typically boisterous downtown barbeque joint -- and as they chat amid the stunning views from atop the 1,499-foot-tall John Hancock Building. Says Blacc: "The stories Ramsey shared with me about his life were truly inspiring. I came to realize that his influence on the music I love goes beyond even what I thought it was. I was familiar with his legacy but not necessarily with his influence on so many other artists -- such as Earth, Wind and Fire [Lewis was a mentor to Earth, Wind & Fire's Maurice White]-- and how deep his influence goes beyond jazz. He has become like a mentor or an older brother figure to me. And another thing I love to see in Ramsey is that musicians don't seem to age. Maybe their bodies do but not their spirits."

Shaun MacGillivray observes that Lewis represents another important factor in American art: the links between the past and rising artists who need mentors and inspiration. "Ramsey is a fabulous musician but he also brings so much history with him. Aloe was already a huge fan so having the chance to watch them getting to know each other better and share their love of music despite being of different generations was a thrill. You can really feel the respect they feel for each other, not only as musicians but as human beings. It's a moving sequence and one of my very favorites in the film."

## **WALKING IN MEMPHIS: WHERE ROCK WAS BORN**

From the jazz and blues of Chicago, *America's Musical Journey* slides back into Memphis, Tennessee, from which the sultry heat of soul and the unpredictable explosiveness of rock and roll both emerged and caught fire around the world in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Nestled on the banks of the muddy Mississippi River, Memphis is as much a melting pot as New Orleans, a trade center built on traditions of exchange between Native Americans, French, English and Spanish settlers -- one rife with both unsettling reminders of slavery and of the inspiration of civil rights pioneers and resilient entrepreneurs. Up from this tumult and turmoil came some of the hottest sounds the world has yet heard.

Memphis is both the place from which W.C. Handy spread the Delta Blues at the turn of the century and where, 50 years later, Sun Studio churned out Elvis Presley's world-altering hits. But that is truly just the tip of Memphis' multilayered musical history. Memphis is also the home of Stax Records, which spread the rhythms and social conscience of soul around the world with such acts as Otis Redding, Sam & Dave and Booker T & The MG's. Today, Memphis remains a vital cultural wellspring, with smoky Beale Street clubs generating music of all kinds, including a booming hip-hop scene.

Stephen Judson knew he had to send Aloe Blacc down the trail of Memphis businessman and record producer Sam Phillips, whose Sun Recording Company and Sun Studio, established in 1950, were so integral to the phenomenon of rock and roll. So vast is his contribution that some historians list Phillips as not only one of the most important figures in American music but also one of the most influential Americans of the last century period. Fortunately, Sun Studio remains meticulously preserved, replete with rare 45 RPM wax cuttings and the very same vintage microphones from which rock's early legends transmitted the songs that created the very concept of mass youth culture.

"Phillips was such an important innovator," notes Judson. "There are many experts who say that the first rock and roll record ever was cut at Sun. It was also another place where artists shared with another. It was at Sun that Elvis Presley first met BB King and other blues artists, learning a lot from them, and that is very much in synch with the themes of the movie."

To capture some of the unprecedented excitement and entertainment that rock and roll brought to American life, Greg MacGillivray set up a dance number in a 50's diner to "Jailhouse Rock," the Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller song that became a number one hit for Presley. Once again, they aimed for a synthesis of divergent styles with four swing dancers joining two dancers from the Memphis Ballet and Lil Buck, a virtuoso in jookin' – another battling hip-hop offshoot that is local to Memphis. With its sliding, bouncing, spinning, stepping and pointed-toe dancing in sneakers, jookin' became the physical expression of Memphis' underground rap scene, one that caught the attention of everyone from Cirque Du Soleil to Madonna. Lil Buck might have started on the streets but he's since performed at the Super Bowl and on the ballet stage – and was thrilled to add a fresh jookin' touch to *America's Musical Journey*.

The MacGillivray Freeman team even followed the never-ending cult of Elvis into the sky, leading to another thrilling giant-screen moment: the chance for audience members to parachute in formation with The Flying Elvi skydivers, who pay tribute to the King of Rock by free-falling at 120 mph dressed in full Elvis impersonation regalia. The ten-member Flying Elvi crew has jumped in 42 states, combining their love of Elvis and thrilling showmanship, another blend that amused and amazed the filmmakers.

"The Memphis sequence is focused on how Elvis Presley helped start the rock movement," says Greg MacGillivray. "No other artist has ever had the success of Elvis. He still draws tourists from around the world to Memphis's Graceland mansion, where 600,000 visit each year. Elvis's influence doesn't end. You can still feel it everywhere in the world, in the county and especially in Memphis."

## **THE SOUL OF MOTOWN: GOSPEL IN DETROIT**

Once an economic powerhouse of the Midwest and the linchpin of the world-changing automotive industry, Detroit is renown as America's "Motor City." It also holds a special place in musical history as the birthplace of Motown – which became not only a perpetual musical hit factory but also a powerful, upbeat force of social change in Mid Century America. In 1959, Berry Gordy founded his record company with a mere \$800 loan. It turned out to be a very good bet. Over the next few decades, Motown would release more than 180 No. 1 songs and champion such artists as Diana Ross & The Supremes, Smoky Robinson and The Miracles, The Jackson Five, The Temptations, Stevie Wonder, Marvin Gaye and many more. Amid the social tumult of the 60s and 70s, their indelible songs brought together a divided nation as few other things could.

Aloe Blacc's whirlwind trip to Detroit takes in the Hitsville Studio where so much magic unfolded. Then, Blacc takes a deeper dive into the roots of Motown's spirited soul in a community church, where the Gospel-inspired Detroit Children's Choir makes their own joyful sound. Since the beginning of human culture, music has been an integral part of spiritual practices around the world – and spiritual music has in turn profoundly influenced popular music. Indeed, many of the Motown superstars initially got their start in music singing from the heart in a local community Gospel choir.

America's Gospel tradition has a long and complex history. It first developed underground in slave communities, where the lilting songs known as spirituals had a uniting and galvanizing effect at a time when freedom and justice were lacking. In that time when families and friends were often divided by

miles, songs worked as a kind of pre-technological texting system, sending out warnings, encouragement and secret messages throughout a slave community that had few other means of communication. Later, as the Great Migration unfolded, Southern church choirs steeped in the Gospel tradition came to the Midwest. There, the impassioned vocals and call-and-response rhythms spread even further – ultimately crossing over into feverishly infectious pop songs about everyday love and struggle.

Shaun MacGillivray says you can't really talk about soul and R&B without talking about Gospel. "Gospel became the training ground for so many amazing artists who took that tradition and the vocal chops they developed in church into many different forms of music where it blossomed into something new. We were excited to capture that idea using a children's choir who give you a sense of how all these artists who grew up singing in church were able to become inspired artists in so many genres."

The skill of the choir took everyone aback. "We didn't know they were going to be so good!" Greg MacGillivray muses. "It's wonderful to capture kids at that wonderful age of innocence where they're so expressive and having so much pure fun with the music. We didn't have much time to film and watching them deliver this great performance so organically was a great joy for all of us to capture on film."

Adds Judson: "The children's choir kind of stole the show in Detroit and also helped us to spotlight how spiritual choruses have built community, held communities up, and brought people together."

For Blacc, the influence of Gospel on American music is never-ending. He comments: "One of my biggest hits, 'I Need a Dollar,' was inspired by the field songs of chain-gang workers -- the kind of songs you would have heard in the plantations with that traditional blues structure. That structure will always be relevant in popular music. It's been the foundation of Gospel music that black churches have adopted and made part of their culture, it's endemic to R&B and soul and it went on to inform rock and roll and ultimately hip-hop. Gospel music is part of the glue that unites American musical forms."

## **DANCING THROUGH MIAMI: FROM SALSA TO ELECTRONICA**

Situated on Florida's tropical southeastern shore, Miami's sun-kissed beaches and ice-cream colored landscape are world-famed, but also a backdrop to an equally eye-popping cultural life – one rife with influences ranging from Cuba to the Caribbean and with music spanning from conga to salsa to Latin rock and electronica. Aloe Blacc's visit to Miami spotlights Miami's outdoor life (including gravity-defying scenes of pro kite surfer Susi Mai) and its electrifying festival culture. But at the center of it all is an enlivening encounter with one of Miami's musical muses: seven-time Grammy winner Gloria Estefan.

In the 1980s, Estefan and The Miami Sound Machine sparked a powerful wave of Latin music that hasn't quit since their runaway mainstream hit "Conga." The song celebrated one of the most unforgettable strains of Cuban music and culture, which in turn hearkens back to Congolese and West African influences, and became a worldwide hit, reaching the Top Ten in numerous countries. Estefan's own personal story is a familiar one in Miami: born in Havana, her parents fled to Florida after the Cuban Revolution. As a result, she grew up equally steeped in Cuban music and in the pop, rock and R&B of American radio, a mix that produced its own creative alchemy.

"There's so much wonderful music out of Cuba and it has had a big influence in America and especially in Florida," notes Steve Judson. "There's no better way to tell that story than with Gloria and Emilio Estefan. In the film, Gloria articulates how her parents came here with nothing, yet she went on to become wildly successful – that's the American story. When Aloe meets her and her husband, Emilio, you get a chance to see how musicians collaborate and also how he integrates Latin music into his song."

"Gloria is an icon so I always hoped she would be part of this film and that we could set a salsa dance number to 'Conga' -- and we got lucky because that's exactly what happened," says Greg MacGillivray. "The Estefans are remarkable people. They're both entrepreneurs and musicians and they've done a huge amount of service for Miami, building everything from parks to educational

programs for children. They're so energized and super-fun and Aloe had such a good time getting to know them and play music with them. You can really feel the connection Aloe made with them."

For Blacc, the emotions of that moment were spontaneous and heartfelt. "I've been a longtime fan; some of my earliest moments recognizing the power of pop music coincided with the emergence of Miami Sound Machine. I never expected to have the chance to play them this new song I'd just written," he recalls. "I was very honored to have Gloria make positive comments on a song I wrote for the film. I think it really touched her deeply and I hope I communicated to her what a difference she has made."

Adds the film's co-producer Meghan MacGillivray, who coordinated the salsa dance sequence in Little Havana, "It was great fun shooting in Little Havana, where the intensity of the natural colors and non-stop energy will give film audiences the same rush of the city."

Also captured in Miami is a recent musical phenomenon that has exploded: Ultra Fest, one of a growing crop of Electronic Dance Music (EDM) festivals, which are far more than concerts. They are a phenomenon of lights, graphics, music, dance and merriment that draws people of myriad backgrounds who revel in multiple musical styles, all grounded in synthesizers, drum machines or sequencers. The music might be electronic, but the youth movement it has sparked is focused on good old-fashioned togetherness and feel-good vibes. For Shaun MacGillivray, Ultra Fest was also a perfect venue to use immersive large-screen photography to very personal effect. "With the giant screen, you can actually feel transported right into that spectacle – and it really is a spectacle. Suddenly you are among the 70,000 people there, experiencing a light show, fireworks, dancing and of course the power of the music."

## **IF YOU CAN MAKE IT THERE: NEW YORK**

The quintessential American metropolis of Manhattan, bristling with live-wire energy 24/7, is in a constant state of change and flux, making it a magnet for arts and artists of all kinds. The city is not just one of America's great cultural powerhouses; it is a global epicenter of music, art, film, theater, dance, multimedia and new forms of entertainment just being born. Name a form of music and you will find it thriving in New York. The city has written its own essential chapters in the history of jazz, bebop, folk music, disco, rock and roll, Latin music, punk, rap and hip-hop.

New York was also one of Louis Armstrong's homes – the final stop on his American journey and the place where he lived out his final days. Armstrong first moved to Queens with his wife Lucille in the 1940s and remained there until his death in 1971, establishing himself as one of the many American musical greats who have taken the city into their hearts.

Says Steve Judson: "New York was the final chapter in Louis's life and New York is where he became an iconic global figure and we always knew it had to be part of a film about America's musical history. New York is such an important city to this story because it has always been the center of America's melting pot and the number one gateway for immigrants. And of course you have so much history that is still there: from the jazz clubs of Harlem to the folk clubs of Greenwich Village."

Continues Shaun MacGillivray: "Our shoot in New York City took us back to the roots of America's story in a city of immigrants: a city where you can see both the Statue of Liberty and hip-hop in Times Square – a city where today over 37% of residents were born in another country."

Greg MacGillivray observes that hip-hop is to the modern world what jazz was to Louis Armstrong's generation. "I love the fact that this music was born on the streets with kids just creating from sampled music because maybe they didn't have instruments but they did have turntables. I loved that they borrow from other people's work to create something new. And with that spirit of experimentation, they created a genre of music that became the hottest-selling music of today."

The film hones in visually on a spectacular visual centerpiece of New York: the Brooklyn Bridge, which played its own role in connecting people by forging a link from the immigrant neighborhoods of Brooklyn to Manhattan. An engineering marvel of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the 5,989-foot

bridge is one of the oldest suspension bridges in the United States, took 14 years to build at a time when horse-drawn carriages still plied the roads. Today, more than 150,000 cars per day pass over the bridge.

For the entire MacGillivray Freeman team, an especially moving moment in New York is Aloe Blacc singing “What a Wonderful World” – the inspirational ballad written by Bob Thiele and George David Weiss made indelibly famous by Louis Armstrong -- with a group of neighborhood kids sitting on the stoop of Armstrong’s one-time building in Queens. Says Judson: “I love the way Aloe subtly transforms the song. That moment brings so many things together including wrapping up Louis Armstrong’s story in a very personal and alive way.” The whole setting mirrors the way Louis used to sit on the very same steps and play to neighborhood children.

If New York was the final stop for Louis Armstrong, it is also a city where novel musical forms are constantly being born. In the 1970s, hip-hop emerged from the streets of the Bronx, setting off a whole new cultural shockwave.

Like every other form of American music, hip-hop sprang from a slew of influences, spanning from West African griots (traveling storytellers and musicians who spread oral history), to traditional church call-and-response, to improvisational poets who laced their words over beats (such as Gil Scott-Heron)) to the “break beats” of 1960s soul, to Jamaican “toasts,” to the spirit of neighborhood block parties. But it was in New York that hip-hop became a full-fledged movement of urban youth telling their own stories in their own way.

Since hip-hop is where Blacc got his start, he was especially passionate about touching on its history in *America’s Musical Journey*. “It seems truly fitting that the final city where Louis Armstrong lived was also the birthplace of a brand-new genre of music that has since taken over the world,” he notes.

In the film, Blacc describes hip-hop as being “born of necessity.” He expands on that idea: “I think hip-hop was about the necessity of communication, the necessity of telling your story. Hip-hop was a way, one that was not part of America’s norm at that time, for people to feel relevant and get a sense of community and self-identity through music and dance. In these communities where hip-hop was born, it was necessary to emote and be physical and tell stories in the way of the griot.”

From New York City, Blacc and the film crew made their own apt last stop: the nation’s capitol of Washington, D.C. There, in the shadow of such historic landmarks as the Lincoln Memorial, the Washington Monument and the Capitol Building, a transcendent moment unfolds as Blacc performs for an enthusiastic crowd on the National Mall.

“Whenever you can sing and look back to see the dome of Capitol over your shoulder that’s a real ‘pinch me’ moment,” Blacc muses. “It’s a powerful thing to think you’ve come all the way from a garage in Southern California to playing on the National Mall.”

Witnessing Blacc sing “What a Wonderful World” after such an epically fun and ear-opening journey, and before Blacc would head back to his beloved family waiting for his return in California, was especially moving for Greg MacGillivray.

“I adore coming back to ‘Wonderful World’ in the end,” the director says. “We all love the Louis Armstrong version of the song but I find the Aloe version is so poignant and of the moment. It’s celebratory of all the good we see in the world right now and it was a very emotional and fitting ending of our journey.”

## **DANCING ABOUT ARCHITECTURE: BANDALOOP’S DANCE MASH-UP**

In keeping with its spotlight on the mixing and mashing-up of influences, *America’s Musical Journey* opens with a visually breathtaking collision of forms – as the world-famous Bandaloop dance company glides over the glass and steel of downtown Dallas’s Hall Arts tower. A pioneer in vertical dance performance, Bandaloop takes music and motion literally into the atmosphere. Their work



seamlessly weaves modern dance choreography, acrobatics, climbing, architecture and musicality, all spiked with a dose of danger, to provide a completely original experience and different perspective.

For Greg MacGillivray, who had only briefly seen a magazine article about the group, that combination – one that visually demonstrates how combined elements in art can become far greater than the parts -- was not only right on theme but a fantastic subject for large-format photography. “It’s about as unique a dance form as you can find and I knew we had to show them in this movie – we just had to find a way,” he says.

Adds Shaun MacGillivray: “An important theme of the film is how the willingness and freedom to take creative risks created the culture of American cities. The minute we saw Bandaloop we felt being able to dance on skyscrapers was an amazing fit with our story. It was also a chance to showcase a unique form of artistry. The question was how we could film Bandaloop in a way that no one has ever seen it before that would look amazing on the giant screen.”

After briefly exploring having Bandaloop dance on the Empire State Building, it became clear the logistics would be prohibitive. So co-producer Meghan MacGillivray set up a shoot with Bandaloop in Dallas, another highly musical city, where they were already booked to dance on the Hall Arts building. As it turned out the reflective surface there amped up the beauty even more than the filmmakers imagined.

“The reflections were magical,” muses director of photography Brad Ohlund. “What’s wonderful is you almost don’t know what is a reflection and what isn’t. That’s not something you can plan for. We usually like to wait for a sunny day but the day of the dance was partly cloudy. Yet those white clouds against the blue patches of sky only added to the magic of the reflections and gave it more brilliance.”

It took tight coordination between Ohlund’s crew and the dancers to pull it off—and it took working with the same rock-climbing camera team used in *National Parks Adventure* to set up special rigging on Hall Arts, allowing the IMAX® camera to film the dancers up close and personal -- despite being 400 feet off the ground. The MacGillivray Freeman team loved working with the dancers. “It would have been impossible for them to be any more cooperative. And cooperation was 100% essential on that wall,” Ohlund points out. “They rehearsed for 3 days ahead of their performance, so we did a lot of coordination during that time.”

One of the dancers on the wall, and also an associate artistic director of Bandaloop, is Melecio Estrella. Though Bandaloop has to be seen to be believed, he has a pithy way of describing what they do: “We are a dance company that uses rock climbing technology to turn vertical spaces into dance floors.”

Amelia Rudolph, a dancer who took up rock climbing in the 80s, founded Bandaloop in 1991 after starting to wonder what it would be like to dance on a rock wall. That singular spark to her imagination became a 25-year journey of creatively defying gravity on mountainsides, monuments, bridges, billboards and skyscrapers.

Estrella’s personal background as a gymnast-turned-dancer made him a natural for Bandaloop. He notes that adaptation and hybridization, two core ingredients of American artistry, lie at the heart of the Bandaloop approach. “What Bandaloop looks for when recruiting dancers is the skill of being able to adapt -- being able to react and change within a very small window of time, especially because we have such limited rehearsal. You have to be able to adapt to different architectural elements and weather. There can be crazy winds or thick clouds. We’re actually dancing with the elements,” he describes.

Estrella notes that combinations are as important to Bandaloop as to American music. “The hybridization of dance and climbing has given us the opportunity to do things that dancers have only been able to dream of doing previously – for example, having a jump that lasts for 10 seconds instead of half a second. The climbing equipment allows us to slow down the dance enough that it shifts your perception. We’ve found a way to play with time. This would never have happened unless Amelia had decided to combine two things into something new.”

Another key to Bandaloop's success has been community, another anchor of American artistry. "The way we work is really collaborative. We all come from different kinds of training and background, but the result is that Bandaloop emerges from all of us combining our stories together," says Estrella.

Overcoming fear can be a factor for a Bandaloop dancer, Estrella admits. But he explains that once a dance is imprinted in his body, the fear lifts and pure expression takes over. "Unlike dancing on the ground, we have to learn to deal with our adrenaline, our fear and the body telling us this is not normal," he laughs. "During the rehearsal process, I think fear is there to keep me vigilant and more aware. My fear is a mechanism of safety at that point. But by the time I'm performing, I let go of fear to just be in the dance and fully enjoy the experience. Suddenly, I'm moving and it's just happening."

The dance in Dallas was a favorite for the troupe because of the glass structure. "It's really enjoyable to dance on glass," Estrella notes. "You can dance barefoot, you can slide on the glass and I think it brings out more playfulness. Not all the buildings we dance on are that big also – and the more rope play you have, the more you get that special quality of floating." And for the curious, it must be noted that no glass was broken nor has been broken during their performances.

Estrella's home city of Oakland is another place full of music, musicians and vital creative connections. Estrella explains why Oakland is a city of continual inspiration to him: "It's about having my artistic community there. There are elders and people learning from the elders and youth who are hungry and open and all these generations are coming together and working together."

That very simple idea of people coming together– from a span of generations, a multiplicity of different backgrounds, a whole slew of genres, an infinite tableau of ideas – is what *America's Musical Journey* posits lies beneath America's never-ending influence in popular culture. While the film has just 45-minutes to survey how that has played out in history, on the stage and in the streets of America, the filmmakers hope it has the effect of a tune that you can't get out of your head. To add to that effect, the post-production crew mixed *America's Musical Journey* in 12 channels. "The sound quality of this film will be exceptional and that will be an outstanding addition to the experience," notes Greg MacGillivray.

He continues: "We can't wait to share this film with audiences. It's been one of the most enjoyable films we've made and it's exciting to us visually, musically and personally. At the heart of it all is the twining of these two stories separated by 100 years but connected by music: that of Louis Armstrong's rise to a global icon and that of Aloe Blacc in 2017 tracing Armstrong's pioneering steps to see what it all means to him and America's musical legacy now."

Sums up Shaun MacGillivray: "We had so many different stories to tell and so many different amazing places to show, but our hope is that the film will be a primer to spark curiosity. We hope kids and people of all ages seeing this film will get excited about learning more about all these unique and vibrant cultures that make up the cities we all live in -- and have a greater appreciation of how music unites us all with a universal language. And above all, we hope that audiences will come away with a new appreciation for the ethnic diversity which underlines our musical creativity, and in particular, the profound influence that African Americans have had on our music."

## ABOUT THE NARRATOR

### MORGAN FREEMAN

Academy Award-winning actor Morgan Freeman is one of the most recognizable figures in American cinema. His works are among the most critically and commercially successful films of all time. Freeman ranks 2<sup>nd</sup> among worldwide top-grossing actors of all time, with his films having earned over \$4 billion in cumulative ticket sales. Whether a role requires an air of gravitas, a playful smile, twinkle of the eye, or a world-weary, yet insightful soul, Freeman's ability to delve into the core of a character and infuse it with a quiet dignity has resulted in some of the most memorable cinematic characters committed to film.

In 2005 Freeman won the Best Supporting Actor Academy Award for his role in "Million Dollar Baby." Freeman also received an Academy Award nomination in 1987 for Best Supporting Actor for "Street Smart," in 1994 for Best Actor for "The Shawshank Redemption," and in 2010 for Best Actor for "Invictus." He also won the Golden Globe for Best Actor for his performance in "Driving Miss Daisy" in 1990.

Freeman was honored with the Screen Actors Guild Life Achievement Award this year, recognizing his career achievement and humanitarian accomplishments. Freeman was honored with the Cecil B. DeMille Award at the 2011 Golden Globe Awards. That same year, Freeman received the 39<sup>th</sup> AFI Lifetime Achievement Award. In 2000, Freeman received the coveted Kennedy Center Honor for his distinguished acting, and was honored with the Hollywood Actor Award from the Hollywood Film Festival.

In 2010, Freeman won the National Board of Review Award for Best Actor for his performance as Nelson Mandela in "Invictus." In addition to his Academy Award nomination for Best Actor, he also received a Golden Globe nomination and a Broadcast Critics Association nomination. The picture was produced by Revelations Entertainment, the company he co-founded in 1996 with Lori McCreary with a mission to produce films that reveal truth. Since its inception, Revelations has continued to be the frontrunner in the field of digital technology. Revelations' features include "5 Flights Up," starring Freeman, "Invictus," "The Code," "The Magic of Belle Isle," "Levity," "Under Suspicion," "Mutiny," "Bopha!," "Along Came a Spider," "Feast of Love," "10 Items or Less," "Maiden Heist" and the Peabody Award-winning ESPN 30 For 30 documentary, "The 16<sup>th</sup> Man."

Freeman is an executive producer with McCreary on the Revelations Entertainment series "Madam Secretary" for CBS, starring Téa Leoni, which debuted in September 2014 and aired its fourth season in October, 2017.

Freeman hosted and was an executive producer for the Revelations Entertainment, three-time Emmy nominated series "Through the Wormhole with Morgan Freeman," which recently completed its seventh season for Science Channel. Also through Revelations, he hosted the Emmy nominated event series "The Story of God with Morgan Freeman" on the National Geographic Channel, which completed its second season. Through Revelations, he also hosts "The Story of Us with Morgan Freeman," on the National Geographic Channel. Freeman's will be seen next in Disney's "The Nutcracker and the Four Realms."

Most recently, Freeman starred in Broad Green Pictures' "Just Getting Started," Warner Bros.' "Going In Style," Paramount Pictures' "Ben-Hur," Summit Entertainment's "Now You See Me 2" Focus Features' "London Has Fallen," Universal's "Ted 2," "Last Knights," "Lucy," "Dolphin Tale 2," "Transcendence," "The Lego Movie," "Last Vegas," "Now You See Me," "Oblivion," "Olympus Has Fallen" and "The Dark Knight Rises."

Freeman recently narrated the documentary "The C-Word," IMAX documentary "Island of Lemurs: Madagascar," Science Channel's "Stem Cell Universe with Stephen Hawking" and history documentary "We the People." Past narrations include two Academy Award-winning documentaries, "The Long Way Home" and "The March of The Penguins."

Other credits include “Dolphin’s Tale,” “Born to be Wild 3D,” “The Dark Knight,” “The Bucket List,” “Glory,” “Clean and Sober,” “Lean on Me,” “Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves,” “Unforgiven,” “Se7en,” “Kiss the Girls,” “Amistad,” “Deep Impact,” “Nurse Betty,” “The Sum of All Fears,” “Bruce Almighty,” “Nurse Betty,” “Coriolanus,” “Attica,” “Brubaker,” “Eyewitness,” “Death of a Prophet,” and “Along Came a Spider.”

After beginning his acting career on the off-Broadway stage productions of “The Niggerlovers” and the all African-American production of “Hello Dolly”, Freeman segued into television. Many people grew up watching him on the long-running Children's Television Workshop classic “The Electric Company,” where he played the ironic Easy Reader among several recurring characters. Looking for his next challenge, he set his sights on both Broadway and the silver screen simultaneously and quickly began to fill his resume with memorable performances.

In 1978 Freeman won a Drama Desk Award for his role as Zeke *in* “The Mighty Gents.” He also received a Tony Nomination for Best Performance by a Featured Actor.

His stage work continued to earn him accolades and awards, including Obie Awards in 1980, 1984 and 1987 and a second Drama Desk Nomination in 1987 for the role of Hoke Colburn, which he created for the Alfred Uhry play “Driving Miss Daisy” and reprised in the 1989 movie of the same name.

In his spare time, Freeman loves the freedom of both sea and sky; he is a long-time sailor and has earned a private pilot’s license. He also has a love for the blues and seeks to keep it in the forefront through his Ground Zero club in Clarksville, Mississippi, the birthplace of the blues. In 1973 he co-founded the Frank Silvera Writers' Workshop, now in its 37th season. The workshop seeks to serve successful playwrights of the new millennium. He is a member of the Board of Directors of Earth Biofuels, a company whose mission is to promote the use of clean-burning fuels. He also supports Artists for a New South Africa and the Campaign for Female Education.

Freeman has been named on the Forbes “Most Trustworthy Celebrities” list each of the five times it has been published since 2006.

## **ABOUT THE CAST**

### **ALOE BLACC:**

With “Wake Me Up”—the mega-hit Aloe Blacc sang and co-wrote for Swedish DJ Avicii and saw climb to #1 in over 100 countries across the globe— the Grammy-nominated singer/songwriter proved he has an irresistible power to capture the complexities of human emotion.

Blacc’s third solo album *Lift Your Spirit* (XIX Recordings/Interscope Records) pushed further into a folk/soul/pop fusion that’s both undeniably joyful and eye-opening in message. Adding an of-the-moment twist to the music of legends like Sly Stone and Stevie Wonder, *Lift Your Spirit* was built on songs that pair Blacc’s poetic yet incisive lyrics with huge hooks and relentless feel-good grooves. Featuring the hit single “The Man,” a song that topped the charts with sales of more than 2.7 million, *Lift Your Spirit* received a GRAMMY nomination for Best R&B Album at the 57<sup>th</sup> Grammy Awards.

With “Wake Me Up” having sold 6 million copies in the U.S. and streamed half a billion plays, Blacc notes that one of his main ambitions is to use his popularity to affect social change while continuing to infuse his music with a mindful positivity. His new single “King Is Born,” off his forthcoming album, is available now on all DSPs.

### **JON BATISTE:**

Jon Batiste is a globally celebrated musician, educator, bandleader and TV personality whose musical skill, artistic vision and exuberant charisma make him a triple threat with unlimited potential. Recognized for his originality, jaw-dropping talent and dapper style, Jon transitions from commanding the piano with virtuosic skill to soulfully crooning to wailing on the “harmonaboard” (a kind of harmonica and keyboard) to curating unique “social music” experiences all over the world. Born into a long lineage of Louisiana musicians, Batiste eventually went on to receive both his undergraduate and masters degrees in piano from the Juilliard School and formed his band, Stay Human.

The Forbes 30 under 30 honoree balances a demanding performance schedule—which often includes his signature, impromptu ‘love riot’ street parades—with his role as bandleader with the Late Show with Stephen Colbert, Artistic Director At Large of the National Jazz Museum in Harlem, public speaking engagements, master classes and occasional acting gigs. He played himself on the HBO series *Treme* and most recently appeared in director Spike Lee’s *Red Hook Summer*.

The New York City-based musician has released several self-produced albums, including “MY N.Y.” which was recorded entirely on the street corners and subways of NYC and “Jazz is Now” featuring his singular approach to jazz standards and jazz composition in the classic piano trio format. Jon’s only label partnership to date occurred when he partnered with Razor & Tie, the small Greenwich village based record label, for his 2013 release entitled “Social Music” which went on to spend over a month atop the both Billboard jazz charts and iTunes jazz charts as the #1 jazz album in the world.

He is strongly committed to the education and mentoring of young musicians. He has led his own Social Music Residency and Mentoring Program sponsored by Chase, as well as hundreds of master classes throughout the world. He has also led several cultural exchanges beginning in 2006 when he led a cultural exchange program with the Netherlands Trust bringing students from the USA and Holland to perform with him at both The Royal Concert Gebouw and Carnegie Hall.

### **GLORIA ESTEFAN:**

With seven Grammy Awards and over 100 million albums sold worldwide, Gloria Estefan is the most successful Latin crossover performer in the history of pop music. In addition to her 38 #1 hits across the Billboard charts, Gloria recorded the Oscar®-nominated song “Music of My Heart,” and has received numerous honors and awards over the course of her illustrious career. She has been presented

with a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, inducted into the Songwriters Hall of Fame, named BMI Songwriter of the Year, and received an American Music Award for Lifetime Achievement, an MTV Video Music Award, two ACE Awards, and multiple Billboard Awards for her many chart-topping hits.

Gloria has also been honored with the Ellis Island Congressional Medal of Honor, the Hispanic Heritage Award, the National Music Foundation's Humanitarian of the Year Award, a National Artistic Achievement Award from the US Congress, among many others. Most recently, President Obama honored Emilio & Gloria Estefan with the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the Nation's highest civilian honor, presented to individuals who have made meritorious contributions to the United States, to world peace, and to cultural endeavors. Gloria, along with husband Emilio, serve as Executive Producers to the Tony-Award nominated Broadway smash musical *On Your Feet!* based on their lives and music.

### **EMILIO ESTEFAN:**

Emilio Estefan is a world-renowned music, television and film producer who has been instrumental in shaping, developing and directing the careers of his superstar wife, Gloria, as well as Shakira, Ricky Martin, Jennifer Lopez, Marc Anthony and Jon Secada among many others. Emilio has achieved incredible success throughout his career, boasting more than 40 years of industry-leading achievements, including the Presidential Medal of Freedom, a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, and induction into the Latin Songwriters Hall of Fame just to name a few.

With a resume that includes 19 Grammy Awards, Emilio has experimented and pushed the envelope of blending Latin, pop and world rhythms creating a unique style and personality that has created chart-topping worldwide hits. It is this vision that transcends the music field and spills over into film, television, hotels and restaurants, among other business endeavors including serving as the Executive Producer of the Tony-Award nominated smash Broadway musical, *On Your Feet!* Most recently, Emilio Estefan (director, producer, musician), Gloria Estefan (actor, musician, singer), and director Kenny Ortega celebrated the World Premiere of their film *A Change of Heart*, at the 34th edition of Miami Dade College's Miami Film Festival on March 10, at the Olympia Theater in Downtown Miami. *A Change of Heart* stars a diverse cast including Jim Belushi, Virginia Madsen, Kathy Najimy, William Levy, Aimee Teegarden, Eduardo Yañez, Cody Horn and Gloria Estefan.

### **RAMSEY LEWIS:**

Ramsey Lewis has been an iconic leader in the contemporary jazz movement for over 50 years with an unforgettable sound and outgoing personality that has allowed him to cross over to the pop and R&B charts. The Ramsey Lewis Trio, with bassist Eldee Young and percussionist Redd Holt, became a fixture on the Chicago jazz scene, releasing their debut album, "Ramsey Lewis & His Gentlemen of Jazz" in 1956. Lewis earned his first gold record, as well as a Grammy award for Best Jazz Performance, for their swinging version of Dobie Gray's hit "The In Crowd." Through the years, Lewis' trio has undergone membership changes, all the while staying true to Lewis' high musical standards.

After Young and Holt left Lewis' trio to form their own group, the pianist hired a new rhythm section with Cleveland Eaton on bass and Maurice White on drums. When White left the band to form Earth, Wind & Fire, Morris Jennings signed on as the trio's new percussionist. White returned to produce Lewis' 1974 smash album entitled "Sun Goddess," in which Lewis first experimented with electronic keyboards and featured Earth, Wind & Fire on the album. In 1983, Lewis returned to the studio with Young and Holt for the album "Reunion."

Throughout his illustrious career, Lewis who is a NEA Jazz Master, has also joined forces with countless other artists to create new and innovative music. In 1984, he collaborated with Nancy Wilson on *The Two of Us*; in 1988, he recorded with London's Philharmonic Orchestra for the album *A Classic Encounter*; and in 1989, Lewis and Dr. Billy Taylor cut a set of piano duets in *We Meet Again*. In 1995, Lewis launched the side project *Urban Knights*, in which he collaborated with a handful of successful crossover jazz stars, including Grover Washington, Jr., Earl Klugh, and Dave Koz. In 1997,

Lewis added disc jockey to his resume, hosting a popular show on Chicago's WNUA-FM that ran until 2009. A new show was syndicated in 2006 under the name Legends of Jazz with Ramsey Lewis and was broadcast on jazz radio stations across the country. In 2006, a well-received 13-episode Legends of Jazz television series hosted by Lewis was broadcast by PBS on public TV nationwide and featured live performances by a variety of jazz artists including Larry Gray, Lonnie Smith, Joey DeFrancesco, Dave Brubeck, Chick Corea, Kurt Elling, Benny Golson, Pat Metheny and Tony Bennett. Lately he has been touring with Philip Bailey (Earth, Wind & Fire), John Pizzarelli and Dee Dee Bridgewater as well as doing dates in celebration of the 50th anniversary of "The In Crowd".

The three-time Grammy® winner released "Taking Another Look – Deluxe Edition" on July 24, 2015, featuring a new electric quintet with Henry Johnson on guitar, Michael Logan on keys, Joshua Ramos on bass and Charles Heath on drums. On the CD, Lewis rekindles his 1974 career-defining album "Sun Goddess" through a collection of re-recorded tracks from the original disc perfectly balanced with five new tunes.

## **DOCTOR JOHN:**

The legendary Dr. John is a six-time Grammy Award-winning musician and Rock & Roll Hall of Fame inductee. Known throughout the world as the embodiment of New Orleans' musical legacy, Dr. John is a true icon in American culture. His colorful musical career began in the 1950s when he wrote and played guitar on some of the greatest records to come out of the Crescent City, including recordings by Professor Longhair, Art Neville, Joe Tex, Frankie Ford and Allen Toussaint.

Dr. John headed west in the 1960s, where he continued to be in demand as a session musician, playing keyboards on records by Sonny and Cher, Van Morrison, Aretha Franklin and The Rolling Stones' "Exile On Main St." During that time he launched his solo career, developing the charismatic persona of Dr. John The Nite Tripper. A legend was born with his breakthrough 1968 album "Gris-Gris," which introduced to the world his unique blend of voodoo mysticism, funk, rhythm & blues, psychedelic rock and Creole roots. Several of his many career highlights include the masterful album "Sun, Moon and Herbs" in 1971 which included cameos from Eric Clapton and Mick Jagger and 1973's "In The Right Place," which contained the chart hits "Right Place Wrong Time" and "Such A Night."

In addition to his six Grammy wins (1989, 1992, 1996, 2000, 2008 and 2013), he has received six other Grammy nominations over the years. In 2007 he was nominated for "Sippiana Hericane," his Hurricane Katrina benefit disc. After Hurricane Katrina Dr. John immediately stepped up to the plate with generous relief fund-raising concerts and recordings. In 2007 he was inducted into the Louisiana Music Hall of Fame and Blues Hall of Fame. In 2008 he released "City That Care Forgot," winning him a Grammy for Best Contemporary Blues Album. His album "Locked Down", released in 2012 with Dan Auerbach of The Black Keys won a Grammy for Best Contemporary Blues Album. In 2013 Dr. John was awarded an honorary doctorate from Tulane University alongside His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

In 2014, Dr. John released critically acclaimed tribute to Louis Armstrong "Ske-Dat-De-Dat: The Spirit of Satch," with co-producer and arranger Sarah Morrow, his longtime music director. In 2015, Dr. John was awarded the Louie Award from the Louis Armstrong House Museum, and he received the Jazz Foundation of America's Hank Jones Award in October, 2016 at "A Great Night in Harlem" which has pledged \$1 Million to help musicians recovering from the 2016 Louisiana flood.

Dr. John & The Nite Trippers released "The Bare Necessities," produced by Morrow, for Disney's blockbuster "The Jungle Book" soundtrack in spring, 2016. In fall, 2016 Dr. John released the double live album and DVD "The Musical Mojo of Dr. John: A Celebration of Mac & His Music" with performers including Bruce Springsteen, Widespread Panic, Mavis Staples, Morrow, John Fogerty and many more. After more than half a century of creating music for others and himself, Dr. John continues to write, arrange, produce and interpret music with a passion.

## **WILLOW OSBORNE:**

Starting her musical journey at age 4, Willow Osborne was taught by her friend & mentor, Gary "Biscuit" Davis, the 4-time International Banjo Champion. Willow's stage presence, vocal, and instrumental skills have given her the rare opportunity to perform as the Youth Performer at the Country Tonite Theatre in Pigeon Forge for the past 4 years. Dollywood Theme Parks "Bluegrass and Barbeque Festival" have honored her with her own show for the past 3 years. Willow has also appeared on PBS with Rhonda Vincent and The Rage; had the honor of playing with Jens Kruger in the TV documentary about his life; and performed on "WoodSongs" with The United States Navy Bluegrass Band and Pat Flynn.

### **THE FISK JUBILEE SINGERS:**

The Fisk Jubilee Singers are vocal artists and students at Fisk University in Nashville who sing and travel worldwide. The original Jubilee Singers introduced "slave songs" to the world in 1871 and were instrumental in preserving this unique American musical tradition. They broke racial barriers in the US and abroad in the late 19th century and entertained Kings and Queens in Europe. At the same time, they raised money in support of their beloved school, which they continue to do today.

In 1999, the Fisk Jubilee Singers were featured in a PBS award-winning television documentary series, *Jubilee Singers: Sacrifice and Glory*, produced by WGBH/Boston. In 2008, the Fisk Jubilee Singers were selected as a recipient of the 2008 National Medal of Arts, the nation's highest honor for artists and patrons of the arts. The award was presented by President George W. Bush and First Lady Laura Bush during a ceremony at the White House.

### **PAUSE EDDIE:**

Eddie "Pause Eddie" Martin Jr. is an explosive dance machine whose incredible musicality does not skip a beat! Trained by King Charles Creation Battle Clique, and performing with world renown FootworkKINGz from Chicago, he amazes people with his aggressive moves. Pause Eddie has appeared on *America's Best Dance Crew*, *America's Got Talent*, Willow Smith's "Fireball" music video ft. Nicki Minaj, Chance The Rapper "Sunday Candy" & "Angels," *World Of Dance* w/ Ian Eastwood, and commercials for Ssense, IBM, Nike Tour and more.

As an instructor, Eddie has taught with Kuumba Lynx, as well as taught footwork and hip-hop in different parts of Chicago with After School Matters and Chicago Housing Authority. As of now, Pause is one of the global teachers for Chicago Footwork. He also engages in improvised footwork "dance battles" and performs professionally.

His dream at age 15 was to become a well-rounded and successful dancer/choreographer, and his dreams saved his life growing up in Chicago. Eddie's determined drive comes from the people he admires and the close friends who motivate him to always become better. Eddie is a leader, motivator, hard worker and grinder – always representing Peace, Love, Respect, and Positive Energy .

### **DONNETTA "LIL BIT" JACKSON:**

Donnetta 'Lil Bit' Jackson, partner with Pause Eddie, is key to one of the top dancing duos of Chicago Footwork. Together, they also serve as the artistic and co-artistic directors of Creation Battle Clique. Both are also members of the world renown Chicago FootworkKINGz. They competed on MTV's *America's Best Dance Crew*, and can also be seen in Chance the Rapper's videos "Sunday Candy" and "Angels." They started teaching together in their own city for the Chicago non-profit After School Matters, which offers educational programs to more than 15,000 public high school teens. They then went on to teach at different festivals including "I Love This Dance" in Paris and "Ladies of Hip



Hop” in New York. Their goal is to spread the knowledge and foundation of the culture and to always stay true to Creation and Chicago.

### **THE FLYING ELVI:**

Long time renowned Las Vegas Show Producer Dick Feeney took the concept of The Flying Elvi from the unique sequence featured in the 1992 movie, “Honeymoon in Vegas,” which first showed 10 Elvis Presley clad skydivers jumping out of a plane and formed the professional touring show entitled The Flying Elvi which has been entertaining audiences across the country for over 15 years. The Flying Elvi, owned and managed by Dick and his wife, Melissa, consists of ten Elvis Presley-clad jumpers who skydive into events around the world from altitudes of 5,000 – 12,000 feet, free-falling at speeds up to 160 miles an hour. The act combines a spine-tingling aerial skydiving performance of smoke trails, pyrotechnic fireworks and precision maneuvers with an over-the-top entertaining stage show.

Even though they are good at what they do, they haven’t quit their day jobs. On the ten member crew, two are teachers, others are health inspector, welder, free-fall camera man, pilot, commercial builder, realtor, truck driver, sky diving instructor, business owner and a newspaper writer. They each average about 3000 jumps and some of their memorable jumps have taken place at the inaugural race at the Texas Motor speedway and delivering pizzas for Pizza Hut via parachute into Qualcomm Stadium in San Diego. They have performed at more than 1000 events in 42 states as well as the Bahamas and in the Virgin Islands.

### **LIL BUCK:**

Charles "Lil Buck" Riley is a dancer and leader of the style known as jookin’ – a cross between ballet and hip-hop. He has performed in the Cirque du Soleil show “Michael Jackson: One” and his 2011 YouTube collaboration, “The Swan,” with cellist Yo-Yo Ma went viral and has been viewed more than 2.4 million times. Riley has performed on “The Ellen DeGeneres Show” and with Madonna during her Super Bowl XLVI halftime show, later joining her MDNA tour. He performed with Ma at the U.S.-China Forum on the Arts and Culture, and is a 2014 Harman-Eisner Artist in Residence at the Aspen Institute.

### **MAYA JUPITER:**

A true “activist,” rapper/songwriter Maya Jupiter (of proud Mexican and Turkish descent) began writing lyrics at the age of 14 in her hometown of Sydney, Australia and quickly discovered how music, particularly hip-hop, could be used as a tool to positively effect change in her community. Her rhymes inspire listeners to address real social issues, while expressing a unique, captivating sound.

Maya debuted her first album in 2003 titled, “Today” (Mother Tongues). Her second album was created in collaboration with Grammy-winning Chicano rock artists Quetzal Flores and Martha Gonzalez and features her powerful lyrics woven through Son Jarocho, Hip Hop and Soul melodies.

Maya’s activism started in her early 20s when she began a hip-hop workshops for under-served youth in south and west Sydney. In 2012 she became an official Ambassador for “The Line Campaign” against Domestic Violence in Australia. Maya continues her activism in Los Angeles with Peace Over Violence as a spokesperson for their “Denim Day” Campaign. She is also the Monday host of KPFK’s Global Village Radio Show and appears at times in concert with her husband, Aloe Blacc. Married in 2010, they have two young children, Mandela and Satya.

### **AMELIA RUDOLPH:**

Amelia is a choreographer, community leader and dancer/athlete. Her work is informed by aesthetics, non-traditional relationships with gravity, ecology, natural and built spaces, community and

human relationships. She founded BANDALOO in 1991, bringing together dance, climbing and varied off-the-ground movement through site-reactive work on cliffs, urban structures and in theaters. She is a co-leader for Creative Capital's Professional Development Program, teaches youth in Oakland through Destiny Art Center, is an active and dynamic performer, and serves on the board of Dance USA.

Amelia holds Bachelors and Masters degrees in comparative religion from Swarthmore College and the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley. Her intellectual and artistic sensibilities inform her work inspiring practical, spiritual, theoretical and political creativity. Her choreography has explored dance in theaters and on buildings and cliffs all over the US and around the world. Amelia is continually challenged and inspired by her experiences in nature, with her dancers and with communities that unearth and clarify her values, identity and art.

Since 2000 she has been named an Irvine Fellow and awarded funding and commissions from the National Dance Project, Creative Capital, National Performance Network, the National Endowment for the Arts, The Creative Work Fund, San Francisco Foundation, the Irvine Creation to Performance Program, City of Oakland, the Zellerbach Family Foundation, and The Center for Cultural Innovation among others. In 2009 she received a major commission with Aeriosa from the Arts Partners in Creative Development in Canada as part of the Cultural Olympiad. In 2010-11 the company was awarded major grants from the Rainin, Wattis and Irvine Foundations as well as the San Francisco Arts Commission, for new work for BANDALOO's 20th anniversary season in 2011. BANDALOO is a multi-year grant recipient for organizational support from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

#### **MELECIO ESTRELLA:**

Melecio Estrella has been a Bay Area performing artist, director, and teacher for the past 18 years. He is co-artistic director of Fog Beast, assistant artistic director of BANDALOO and a longtime member of the Joe Goode Performance Group. His recent engagements include making dances on the cliffs of Tienmen Mountain in the Hunan province of China, Art and About in Sydney Australia, The Africa Cup in Gabon, The Barents Spektacle in Kirkenes Norway, and the JFK Centennial at The Kennedy Center. His choreographies have been commissioned by Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, the San Francisco Opera Center, and numerous universities around the US. As a performer Melecio has also appeared with the San Francisco Opera, Faye Driscoll, Rachael Lincoln, Scott Wells and Damara Ganley among others.

## ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

**GREG MACGILLIVRAY** (Director) is a giant-screen documentary filmmaker who has produced and directed many of the most successful films shown in IMAX® theatres, including the box-office hit *Everest* and the Academy Award®-nominated films *The Living Sea* and *Dolphins*. His 2012 film, *To The Arctic*, received the Best Film of the Year award from the Giant Screen Cinema Association, and he most recently directed *National Parks Adventure* and *Dream Big*. With 38 giant-screen films to his credit, MacGillivray has shot more 70mm film than anyone in cinema history—more than two million feet. He is the first documentary filmmaker to reach the \$1 billion benchmark in worldwide ticket sales. An ardent ocean conservationist, MacGillivray and his wife Barbara founded the One World One Ocean Foundation, a non-profit public charity devoted to ocean science education through giant-screen films and companion programming.

**SHAUN MACGILLIVRAY** (Producer) is President of MacGillivray Freeman Films and Managing Director of the company's One World One Ocean Campaign, a multi-year, multi-platform ocean media initiative aimed at inspiring greater public awareness about the world's oceans. He is producer of the company's award-winning 3D giant-screen films *Dream Big*, *National Parks Adventure*, *Humpback Whales*, *Journey To The South Pacific*, *To The Arctic* and *Grand Canyon Adventure*. The son of Academy Award-nominated filmmaker Greg MacGillivray, Shaun grew up on film locations all around the world.

**STEPHEN JUDSON** (Screenwriter/Editor) has directed five films for IMAX® theatres, including most recently *The Alps* and *Journey into Amazing Caves*. He served as a producer, director, writer and editor on the giant-screen blockbuster *Everest*. Since 1982, Judson has edited all but two of MacGillivray Freeman's giant-screen films, making him the most experienced editor in the giant-screen field. He has written or co-written many MFF films, including the Oscar®-nominated *Dolphins*. He also serves as the company's Vice President for Production and Post Production. Before joining the MacGillivray Freeman team, Judson worked as a writer/director/editor in Hollywood, including long stints at ABC and Universal Studios. A graduate of Yale University with an M.A. from the USC cinema school, Judson is a member of the Writer's Guild of America, and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

**JASON “JP” PAUL** (Editor) joined MacGillivray Freeman in 2011 as the in-house sound supervisor and digital editor for the award-winning One World One Ocean campaign. Since then, he has worked on many projects, from sizzle reels to behind-the-scenes webisodes and trailers. He served as editor most recently on *National Parks Adventure* and *Dream Big*. He also designed the audio and visual components of the interactive, traveling museum exhibit, “Sea Monsters Revealed.” Jason is passionate about telling stories through the immersive medium of IMAX, and credits his years of working directly alongside Greg MacGillivray and Steve Judson with his ability to use the unique IMAX format to create a powerful and emotionally engaging story.

**BRAD OHLUND** (Director of Photography) has worked in the giant-screen industry for 25 years. His projects with MacGillivray Freeman Films include the giant-screen films *Dolphins*, *Adventures in Wild California*, *Journey Into Amazing Caves*, *Coral Reef Adventure*, *Mystery of the Nile*, *Greece: Secrets of the Past*, *Hurricane on the Bayou*, *Grand Canyon Adventure*, *Arabia*, *To The Arctic*, *Journey To The South Pacific*, *Humpback Whales*, *National Parks Adventure* and *Dream Big*. After attending Brooks Institute of Photography in Santa Barbara, California, Ohlund began his career with the classic film *To Fly!* Since then, his broad and varied assignments have included filming underwater reefs in the South Pacific and primitive tribes in New Guinea and Borneo. He has filmed from a plane through the eye of a hurricane and captured the fury of an approaching tornado with an IMAX camera.

**BARBARA MACGILLIVRAY** (Director of Research) met Greg in the 9th grade—she sold tickets for his first surfing film in 1964—and making films has always been a part of their relationship. Over the years she has worked multiple capacities with pre-production and production of the films, doing research and still photography on location while bringing their two children, Meghan and Shaun, along with them whenever possible. With a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology, Barbara has also worked for 25 years in Children, Youth Services for the Orange County Health Care Agency as a Licensed Clinical Psychologist. Since 2010, she has worked at the company fulltime starting with the launch of the One World One Ocean

Campaign and has done all the science research for the subsequent films, beginning with *Journey to the South Pacific* which she counts as one of the most exciting and challenging locations the company has ever filmed in. Every film with its passionate and poetic educational messaging becomes a favorite and *America's Musical Journey* is no exception. "This newest film celebrates in such a joyous manner the tremendous contribution of America's unique ethnic diversity to our musical culture and even more specifically, the significant influence of the West African rhythms and movement brought over by the enslaved on all our musical genres."

**MEGHAN MACGILLIVRAY** (Co-producer/Unit Production Manager) is involved in every aspect of production from start to completion. Currently, Meghan makes sure every shoot goes off without a hitch, managing all aspects of pre-production, and then is on location to ensure that everything goes seamlessly. Daughter of Greg and Barbara MacGillivray, she grew up in Laguna Beach surrounded by the ocean and a film legacy. Meghan has worked at MacGillivray Freeman Films part-time at the company while earning her Masters in English at Chapman University and began working full time in 2010 starting in social media and research, until attaining her current position in 2014 with the making of *Humpback Whales*. When not working she spends all her time with her husband and 2 small sons, who also frequently come on location, as she did growing up.

**RON GOODMAN** (Aerial Photography) is president of SpaceCam Systems, Inc., the company he founded in 1989 that is regarded as the world leader in high-end gyro-stabilized cinematography. As SpaceCam designer, in 1996 he was the recipient of the Academy Award of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences for Scientific and Engineering Achievement. Recently, Ron completed design of the revolutionary SnakeHead Camera System, a fully articulated, computer-controlled, gyro-stabilized, horizontally-oriented periscope. Supporting full frame 70/15P format, SnakeHead is designed to capture the imagery associated with fast aircraft. Ron is also vice-president of StarDance Pictures Inc. and a script writer with several films to his credit.

A native of Canada, Ron has been based in Los Angeles for over 20 years. As a young cameraman and inventor, he spent 14 years in Europe where he established a reputation as a leader in aerial cinematography, contributing key material to *Star Wars* and *Superman* films and the longest single uncut shot in film history -- the final sequence in Antonioni's *The Passenger*. In 1976, Ron won the Scandinavian Commercial Cinematography award. Over the years, many winning sequences for the Academy Award® for Cinematography have featured Ron's aerial work. He also earned the Giant Screen Cinema Films (GSCA) Best Cinematography Award in 2001, 2004 and 2007. In 2007, he also received the GSCA Film Achievement Award for his work on *The Alps*.

During his period in Europe, Ron made many engineering improvement to the original Wescam camera system, finally culminating in the launch of the "X Mount" in 1980, which was later renamed GyroSphere. At SpaceCam, he designed a totally new gyro-stabilized camera system that remains the standard in the film industry for aerial cinematography.

Today, SpaceCam is utilized in 80% of large Hollywood features. Ron also successfully developed an IMAX® version of the system and has participated on numerous IMAX® films.

## **ABOUT THE PARTNERS**

### **MACGILLIVRAY FREEMAN FILMS**

MacGillivray Freeman Films is the world's foremost independent producer and distributor of giant-screen 70mm films with 40 films for IMAX and giant-screen theatres to its credit. Throughout the company's 50-year history, its films have won numerous international awards including two Academy Award® nominations and three films inducted into the IMAX Hall of Fame. MacGillivray Freeman's films are known for their artistry and celebration of science and the natural world. It is the first documentary film company to reach the one-billion-dollar benchmark for worldwide box office. For more information about the company, visit [www.macgillivrayfreemanfilms.com](http://www.macgillivrayfreemanfilms.com).

## BRAND USA

Brand USA, the destination marketing organization for the United States, was established by the Travel Promotion Act as the nation's first public-private partnership to promote the United States as a premier travel destination and to communicate U.S. entry/exit policies and procedures to worldwide travelers. The organization's mission is to increase international visitation to the USA in order to fuel the U.S. economy and enhance the image of the United States worldwide. Formed as the Corporation for Travel Promotion in 2010, the public-private entity began operations in May 2011 and does business as Brand USA. According to studies by Oxford Economics, over the past four years, Brand USA's marketing initiatives have helped welcome 4.3 million incremental visitors to the USA, benefiting the U.S. economy with nearly \$30 billion in total economic impact, which has supported, on average, 51,000 incremental jobs a year.

For industry or partner information about Brand USA, visit [TheBrandUSA.com](http://TheBrandUSA.com). For information about exceptional and unexpected travel experiences in the United States, please visit Brand USA's consumer website [VisitTheUSA.com](http://VisitTheUSA.com) (global).

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- [trivago](http://trivago.com)®, a leading online hotel search platform with sites in 55 countries worldwide
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- [Egencia](http://Egencia.com)®, a leading corporate travel management company
- [Orbitz](http://Orbitz.com)® and [CheapTickets](http://CheapTickets.com)®, leading U.S. travel websites, as well as [ebookers](http://ebookers.com)®, a full-service travel brand with websites in seven European countries
- [Travelocity](http://Travelocity.com)®, a leading online travel brand in the U.S. and Canada delivering customer service when and where our customers need it with the Customer First Guarantee
- [Hotwire](http://Hotwire.com)®, inspiring spontaneous travel through Hot Rate® deals
- [Wotif Group](http://Wotif.com), a leading portfolio of travel brands including [Wotif.com](http://Wotif.com)®, [Wotif.co.nz](http://Wotif.co.nz), [lastminute.com.au](http://lastminute.com.au)®, [lastminute.co.nz](http://lastminute.co.nz) and [travel.com.au](http://travel.com.au)®
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