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Brain Hemorrhage Leads to Tragedy and Triumph for Rising Young Musician In P.O.V. Documentary “Life. Support. Music.,” Tuesday, July 7, 2009, on PBS

Stricken New York Singer-Songwriter Finds Key to Recovery in Family and Community

“Heart-wrenching and inspirational.” — The Boston Globe

At age 34, Jason Crigler was a rising star in New York City’s East Village music scene. He was awaiting his first CD release and expecting a new baby with his wife, Monica. Meanwhile, he had plenty of gigs, both as a backup guitarist for such popular performers as John Cale, Marshall Crenshaw and Linda Thompson and as a performer in his own right. It was during one of these latter shows in the summer of 2004 that Jason abruptly fled the stage in pain and confusion. Later, in the emergency room, Monica and the rest of the couple’s family learned the awful truth: The young, healthy musician had suffered a life-threatening brain hemorrhage. In the opinion of the doctors, even if Jason made it through the night, he would remain in a vegetative state.

In the face of this daunting medical pronouncement, and after Jason did make it through the night, Monica and the Crigler clan took a courageous decision — they would believe in Jason and, joining forces, conduct an intensive, round-the-clock care and rehabilitation program to bring him back to the life they believed was still in him. As poignantly documented in the new documentary **Life. Support. Music.**, by Jason’s friend, filmmaker Eric Daniel Metzgar (“The Chances of the World Changing,” P.O.V. 2007), the Crigler family didn’t just confound the doctors and conventional wisdom about what can be accomplished for brain-damaged people — they even astounded themselves.

Life. Support. Music. has its national television premiere on **Tuesday, July 7, 2009**, at 10 p.m. on PBS as part of the 22nd season of **P.O.V.** (Check local listings.) American television’s longest-running independent documentary series, P.O.V. has received an Emmy for Excellence in Television Documentary Filmmaking. The series continues on Tuesdays at 10 p.m. through Sept. 22, and returns with two specials in November and January.

“I was whisked away in an ambulance and that’s the last thing I remember for a year and a half” is the way Jason remembers the ordeal portrayed in **Life. Support. Music.** But for Monica (who would give birth to a girl, Ellie, during that time) and the couple’s families — the Criglers and, on Monica’s side, the Cohens — it was a time of intense activity, tight schedules, setbacks, constant worry and dedicated optimism in the face of seemingly impossible odds. Friends also lent a hand, and musicians Norah Jones, Crenshaw, Thompson and others held benefits. But nothing could replace the collective effort at extended, round-the-clock rehabilitation — which few brain-damage victims can have — provided by Jason’s extended family.

What amazes is not just the effort the family mounted, but their unwavering belief in Jason’s full recovery. “Scientifically, he wasn’t there,” says Dr. Christopher Carter, who treated Jason. But the

family always believed he was there.

Weaving early footage shot by the staff of Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital in Boston showing Jason's first excruciatingly slow steps at rehabilitation and home movies taken after he came home with the agonized reflections of Jason's family, doctors and friends, Metzgar has crafted a painful yet poetic account of his friend's return from nowhere. If anything, the early footage seems to confirm the doctors' expectations — Jason looks mentally absent, with serious motor-function impairments.

When Jason was at Spaulding, the family arranged to visit him daily to supplement the staff's efforts. Upon his release — and against the advice of some specialists — the family decided to care for him at home in Cambridge, Mass., near his wife's parents' residence, rather than place him in a nursing facility. At that point, the \$1 million cap on Jason's medical insurance had been reached, and while the family awaited a decision on a pending Medicaid application, they were essentially on their own in providing for his care.

Once Jason got home — the point at which most brain-damaged people are considered to have recovered as much as they are able — the family continued their constant rounds of care, rehabilitation and stimulation. Progress was slow and set-backs were devastating, yet the family's optimism shines through in the film. The moment Jason picked up a guitar and began to play again was the milestone that seemed to validate the family's faith. For Jason, it was both a thrilling and bittersweet return to music. "I had trouble connecting," he says in the film.

Then, at Jason's first concert in New York after his injury, something clicked and he suddenly connected with the music. "It's the first gig I played that I felt really good," he later said. That was the moment, a year and a half after his brain hemorrhage, when things turned around.

At an extraordinary get-together afterwards, the family members recall the journey they have taken together with some degree of astonishment as well as quiet relief. Though they allow that Jason might be 90% recovered, and that the effort to achieve full recovery will continue, they realize their collective effort has succeeded against all odds — and transformed their own ideas of family and faith.

"I knew Jason before this tragedy struck," says filmmaker Metzger. "I got a call — 'Jason's in the hospital. It's touch and go.' A few hours later I was looking down at Jason on a hospital bed.

"For months, I was in the email loop, receiving occasional updates about Jason's condition, Monica's pregnancy, the surgeries, the setbacks. But these updates, sent by the Criglers to their vast web of friends, were more than just informational. There was an incandescent love in these letters. Later, when the Criglers asked if I would consider making a documentary about the whole saga, I knew their beautiful optimism amid the heaps of suffering would be the story. Of course, I underestimated the entire thing."

Life. Support. Music. is a production of Merigold Moving Pictures.

About the Filmmaker:

Eric Daniel Metzgar

Eric Daniel Metzgar is a Brooklyn-based filmmaker who owns and operates Merigold Moving Pictures. In 2006, he completed his first feature-length documentary "The Chances of the World Changing," which was nominated for a 2007 Independent Spirit Award, won several festival honors and was broadcast as part of P.O.V.'s 20th season in 2007. Eric's newest film, "Reporter," which follows Pulitzer Prize-winning *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof through Congo, screened at this year's Sundance Film Festival. His short film "Beholder," created for the 2008 International Documentary Challenge, won awards for Best Original Vision, Best Writing and Best Use of First Person Genre. Metzgar is also an award-winning cinematographer and has shot for several Oscar-nominated directors, including Edet Belzberg, Dana Adam Shapiro, Liz Garbus and Steven Cantor.

Eric grew up in Richmond, Va., and attended the University of Georgia, where he studied journalism and wildlife management. He graduated in 1998 with a bachelor's degree in journalism.

Credits:

Producer/Director/Cinematographer/Editor: Eric Daniel Metzgar
Original Music: Eric Liebman

Awards & Festivals:

- ENEL Cuore Award for Best Social Documentary, Rome International Film Festival, 2008
- Audience Choice Award, Boston Independent Film Festival, 2008
- Audience Choice Award, Aspen Film Festival (Carbondale), 2008
- Audience Choice Award, Salem Film Festival, 2008
- Best Documentary (Honorable Mention), Newport International Film Festival, 2008
- Full Frame Documentary Film Festival (World Premiere), 2008
- Hot Docs International Documentary Film Festival, 2008
- Newport International Film Festival, 2008
- Silverdocs: AFI/Discovery Channel Documentary Festival, 2008
- Rome International Film Festival, 2008
- True/False Film Festival, 2008
- Boston Independent Film Festival, 2008
- Jackson Hole Film Festival, 2008
- Philadelphia International Film Festival, 2008
- Maine International Film Festival, 2008
- Dokufest International Documentary Festival, Kosovo, 2008, *Opening Night Film*
- Denver STARZ Film Festival, 2008

(For a full list of festivals and screenings, go to <http://www.lifesupportmusic.org/>.)



Produced by American Documentary, Inc. and beginning its 22nd season on PBS in 2009, the award-winning P.O.V. series is the longest-running showcase on American television to feature the work of today's best independent documentary filmmakers.

Airing June through September with primetime specials during the year, P.O.V. has brought more than 275 acclaimed documentaries to millions nationwide, and has a Webby Award-winning online series, *P.O.V.'s Borders*. Since 1988, P.O.V. has pioneered the art of presentation and outreach using independent nonfiction media to build new communities in conversation about today's most pressing social issues. More information is available at www.pbs.org/pov.

P.O.V. Interactive (www.pbs.org/pov)

P.O.V.'s award-winning Web department produces special features for every P.O.V. presentation, extending the life of our films through filmmaker interviews, story updates, podcasts, streaming video, and community-based and educational content that involves viewers in activities and feedback. P.O.V. Interactive also produces our Web-only showcase for interactive storytelling, *P.O.V.'s Borders*. In addition, www.pbs.org/pov has launched the *P.O.V. Blog*, a gathering place for documentary fans and filmmakers to discuss and debate their favorite films, get the latest news and link to further resources. The P.O.V. website, blog and film archives form a unique and extensive online resource for documentary storytelling.

P.O.V. Community Engagement and Education

American Documentary | P.O.V. works with local PBS stations, educators and community organizations to present free screenings and discussion events to inspire and engage communities in vital conversations about our world. As a leading provider of quality nonfiction programming for use in public life, P.O.V. offers an extensive menu of resources, including free discussion guides and curriculum-based lesson plans. In addition, P.O.V.'s *Youth Views* works with youth organizers and students to provide them with resources and training so they may use independent documentaries as a catalyst for social change.

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American Documentary, Inc. (www.amdoc.org)

American Documentary, Inc. (AmDoc) is a multimedia company dedicated to creating, identifying and presenting contemporary stories that express opinions and perspectives rarely featured in mainstream media outlets. AmDoc is a catalyst for public culture, developing collaborative strategic engagement activities around socially relevant content on television, online and in community settings. These activities are designed to trigger action, from dialogue and feedback to educational opportunities and community participation. Simon Kilmurry is executive director of American Documentary | P.O.V.

DVD REQUESTS: Please note that a broadcast version of this film is available upon request, as the film may be edited to comply with new FCC regulations.



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