

MACGILLIVRAY FREEMAN'S
HURRICANE
ON THE **BAYOU**

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

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**“Hurricane on the Bayou” Offers An Emotional, Music-Driven
Giant Screen Ode To The Vital Swamps and Undying Spirit of New Orleans**

*A New IMAX® Theatre Film from the Producers of “Everest,” Shot In the Midst of Katrina,
Makes a Musical Journey With Four Musicians As They Sound The Call To Restore The Vital
Wetlands of Louisiana and Give New Orleans Hope for the Future*

Narrated By Meryl Streep

A powerfully moving giant screen film unlike any other, MacGillivray Freeman's **HURRICANE ON THE BAYOU** carries audiences behind today's news headlines on a journey deep into the soul-stirring heart of Louisiana — before, during and after the unprecedented devastation of Hurricane Katrina. Unfolding against the poignant backdrop of the most costly natural disaster in America's history and featuring state-of-the art CGI special effects depicting Katrina's fury, **HURRICANE ON THE BAYOU** follows a group of four musicians, both legendary and rising, as they uncover the electrifying culture of New Orleans; explore the beautiful, alligator-filled bayous on airboats; recount their personal stories of Katrina; and most of all, bring the focus to the rapidly disappearing wetlands that are New Orleans' first line of defense against deadly storms. Although these wetlands are vanishing at the astonishing rate of one acre every 30 minutes, the wealth, cultural vitality and very future of New Orleans depend on their preservation.

Produced and distributed by **MacGillivray Freeman Films** (*Everest, Coral Reef Adventure*) with Executive Producer **Audubon Nature Institute**, presented by **The Weather Channel**, and narrated by Academy Award®-winning actress **Meryl Streep**, **HURRICANE ON THE BAYOU** is both a haunting document of a Katrina's powerful effects, a profound musical celebration of the city that has been called the “soul of America,” and a compelling call to restore New Orleans and protect the vital wetlands from which the city's unique identity first arose. The film opens in select IMAX theatres worldwide on December 22.

In early 2005, two-time Academy Award®-nominated director **Greg MacGillivray** began shooting **HURRICANE ON THE BAYOU** as a story he hoped would sound the alarm on the destruction of Louisiana's vital wetlands and how a hypothetical hurricane could lead to a massive flood in New Orleans. Yet he could never have predicted that the very nightmare he was exploring on film was about to

become real life – and that New Orleans would fall victim to a history-changing catastrophe in the middle of the film’s production. Now, just as the MacGillivray Freeman filmmaking team had done in the wake of tragedy while filming its award-winning film *Everest*, they switched gears while in motion, broadening the story to provide an eye-opening visual panorama of all that Katrina had wrought – and creating a larger-than-life look at what the nation would stand to lose without the rollicking music, rich culture and astonishing natural beauty of New Orleans and its surrounding areas.

“We set out originally to tell the story of a future, hypothetical hurricane and how the rapid erosion of the wetlands left New Orleans more vulnerable to flooding,” says Greg MacGillivray, “but when Katrina struck in the middle of doing that, we were no longer filming what *might* happen, we were suddenly more like news reporters filming what *did* happen. We had to completely rethink the film, which evolved into a much broader and more deeply emotional story than we ever imagined. We realized we had a unique ability to capture footage of how Katrina impacted New Orleans with the tremendous sense of scale that IMAX theatre photography brings with it—and to tell this story in a way that captures the humanity of it, the essential role of the wetlands environment and the undeniable, musical magic of the city all at once. The footage is unlike any other footage that has been seen.”

In *HURRICANE ON THE BAYOU*, America’s leading lady of the screen, Meryl Streep, introduces the audience to four charismatic New Orleans musicians: the legendary singer, songwriter, pianist, producer and Rock n’ Roll Hall of Fame inductee **Allen Toussaint**; the impassioned Cajun blues guitarist and wetlands activist **Tab Benoit**; the 14-year-old fiddling prodigy and rising teen sensation **Amanda Shaw**; and the man who discovered Amanda and helped produce her first album, the high-energy zydeco accordion master **Chubby Carrier**. Through their eyes the tragedy the city faced during Katrina and its burning hopes for a revitalized future unfold.

The film begins in the bayou itself, as a family of alligators frolic in the water to the tune of the Cajun classic “Iko Iko.” The story then sets off on an historical exploration of how New Orleans rose up hundreds of years ago out of an untamed swampland – and went on to become celebrated around the world as “The Big Easy,” a place where a feeling of joyful freedom permeated the music, the food and the city’s inimitable talent for turning “good times” into an art form. Here, a spicy gumbo of African, Native American, Cajun, Creole and Southern influences forged a completely unique culture. Louisiana’s coastal location (the state contains an astonishing 48% of all the coastal wetlands in the continental U.S.) was both a boon and a bane to the city. New Orleans evolved into the busiest port in the U.S.—but, after engineers diverted the Mississippi River, depleting the wetlands, the city became increasingly vulnerable to the killer winds and rising waters of seasonal hurricanes.

Today, the situation grows more and more dangerous as every year Louisiana loses enough land to make up the island of Manhattan. Setting out for the mystery-tinged bayous with Tab Benoit and Amanda Shaw, *HURRICANE ON THE BAYOU* reveals how in the last 50 years, the natural coastal buffer that once sheltered New Orleans from severe storms has drastically deteriorated, endangering many

unique animal and plant species and leaving the city wide open to Mother Nature's ferocious forces. Spectacular flights over the Gulf of Mexico reveal the shocking reality that every half an hour, Louisiana loses a section of wetlands the size of a football field. Meanwhile, a side-trip into the vital swamplands probes how the bayou provides a fragile home to a family of alligators with newborn babies. Here, Tab Benoit explains that hope for New Orleans' future will lie in concerted efforts to not only preserve but restore these wetlands by redirecting the Mississippi River's silt and re-planting vital foliage.

Ultimately, the story builds to the monster storm that was Katrina and the crisis it brought to New Orleans, causing families to be separated, homes to be lost and, along with Hurricane Rita, more than one hundred square miles of wetlands and marshes to be destroyed by saltwater. Visceral, state-of-the-art CGI effects created by Hollywood specialists Sassoon Film Design recreates the fury of the storm, made all the more dramatic by the sheer size of the IMAX theatre screen. Then, haunting, never-before-seen aerial footage of the storm's aftermath provides a new perspective on the city that is different from what most people saw on television. Finally, returning to New Orleans in the bittersweet 2006 Mardi Gras season, the film reveals a city in the first throes of recovery – and reunites Allen Toussaint, Amanda Shaw, Chubby Carrier and Marva Wright for a passionate performance of a resonant modern hymn (written by the film's composer Steve Wood) in the oldest Cathedral in North America, New Orleans' elegant St. Louis Cathedral.

"HURRICANE ON THE BAYOU is not just the moving story of how four remarkable musicians survived Katrina and are facing the future, nor it is just the story of how the destruction of the wetlands is wreaking devastation for both humans and animals," Greg MacGillivray summarizes. "I think it is really about the tremendous value of New Orleans and Louisiana to our nation. I hope we reveal what a treasure this city is – a wild swampland that turned into a fantastic center for music, food and the enjoyment of life itself. To lose New Orleans would be an unthinkable tragedy."

"Ultimately, nothing can shake the spirit of the people of New Orleans. Our city is already recovering, as it has from previous hurricanes many times in its long history," says Audubon Nature Institute President and CEO Ron Forman. "New Orleans will endure as one of the world's greatest cities and Audubon is committed to helping ensure its future. We will continue to educate people about the need to restore our wetlands as a key defense against any hurricanes to come."

HURRICANE ON THE BAYOU is produced by MacGillivray Freeman Films Educational Foundation and distributed by MacGillivray Freeman Films. Executive produced by Audubon Nature Institute with major funding from the State of Louisiana. Presented by The Weather Channel. Fueled by Louisiana's vast array of musical talent, the film's release will be accompanied by a soundtrack featuring such artists as Aaron Neville, Dr. John, Fats Domino, Mavis Staples, The Rebirth Brass Band and Zydeco Force. Proceeds from the CD will go to support the Audubon Nature Institute's educational programs to teach people of all ages about the importance of saving Louisiana's vanishing wetlands.

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