



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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“AMERICAN IDOL” MEETS AFGHANISTAN: SUNDANCE WINNER “AFGHAN STAR” COMES TO DVD

New York (January 28, 2010) — In Afghanistan, you risk your life to sing. After a buzzworthy debut at the 2009 Sundance Film Festival—where it snapped up World Cinema Documentary Audience & Directing Awards—**AFGHAN STAR** has been lauded by everyone from **Oprah Winfrey (who called it a “fantastic documentary”)** to **Jon Stewart**. And the film has had audiences cheering during its national theatrical rollout to more than 90 U.S. cities. **AFGHAN STAR comes to DVD on March 30, 2010.**

After thirty years of war and five devastating years of Taliban rule, pop culture is beginning to return to Afghanistan. Since 2005, millions have been tuning in to Tolo TV’s wildly popular **American Idol**-style series **Afghan Star**. Like its Western predecessors, contestants compete for a cash prize and record deal. More surprisingly, the contest is open to everyone across the country despite gender, ethnicity or age. And when viewers vote for their favorites via cell phone, it is, for many, their first encounter with the democratic process.

This timely and moving film follows the dramatic stories of four young finalists—two men and two very brave women—as they hazard everything to become the nation’s favorite performer. By observing the Afghani people’s relationship to their pop culture, **AFGHAN STAR** is the perfect window into a country’s tenuous, ongoing struggle for modernity. What Americans consider frivolous entertainment is downright revolutionary in this embattled part of the world.

AFGHAN STAR IS ALSO MAKING ITS U.S. TELEVISION DEBUT THIS SPRING ON HBO.

Zeitgeist’s DVD release of **AFGHAN STAR** features an anamorphic transfer enhanced for widescreen televisions. Supplemental materials include a **new video interview with director/producer Havana Marking**; theatrical trailers; and optional English subtitles for the deaf and hearing impaired.

AFGHAN STAR Film/DVD info: 2009 • 88 minutes • UK/Afghanistan • Color • In English, Dari and Pashto with optional English subtitles • 1.78:1 theatrical aspect ratio • Stereo • Not Rated

Note: Zeitgeist’s DVD release of Afghan Star is available in the U.S. only.

Celebrating more than 20 years as one of America’s preeminent independent distributors, New York-based Zeitgeist Films has built an impressively diverse catalogue of foreign, documentary and arthouse titles by such renowned directors as Todd Haynes, Jan Svankmajer, Peter Greenaway, Abbas Kiarostami, Guy Maddin, Kirby Dick, Atom Egoyan, Agnès Varda, François Ozon, Derek Jarman, Yvonne Rainer, Olivier Assayas, Philippe Garrel, Nuri Bilge Ceylan, Carlos Saura and the Quay Brothers. Recent releases include Oscar winner **Nowhere in Africa**; blockbuster doc **The Corporation**; dance doc hit **Ballets Russes**; Oscar nominee **Sophie Scholl—The Final Days**; Oscar nominee **My Country, My Country**; Sundance winner **Into Great Silence**; 2008 Oscar nominee **Trouble the Water**; and the Cannes-winning Kazakh charmer **Tulpan**. Launched in 2001, Zeitgeist Video has released dozens of highly praised DVDs, including the remastered Two-Disc Edition of Quay shorts, entitled **PHANTOM MUSEUMS**; a Four-Disc Box Set of Jarman masterworks entitled **GLITTERBOX**, with Oscar winner Tilda Swinton; an Essential Edition of Assayas’ cult fave **Irma Vep** starring Maggie Cheung; and the “Repressed & Remastered” Edition of Maddin’s 1992 mountain film classic **Careful**.



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CRITICAL ACCLAIM FOR *AFGHAN STAR*

“Engrossing! The movie uses the talent show *Afghan Star* as a prism through which to examine the fragmented tribal culture of Afghanistan.... Daoud Sediqi, the show’s presenter and director, is as gung-ho a television personality as Ryan Seacrest.” —Stephen Holden, *The New York Times*

"As you watch it it's so clear the difference between the cultures and what we take for granted here. **We see *American Idol* here and we say 'oh... that's just pabulum for the people'... but over there, it is an active act of rebellion... and incredible courage.**" —Jon Stewart, *The Daily Show*

“Remarkable! This eye-opening documentary shows how the fizzy *American Idol* concept becomes something profound and unique when set in war-ridden Afghanistan.... This is a competition **not to be forgotten.**” —Kenneth Turan, *Los Angeles Times*

“Wonderful! Takes us somewhere few movies have...the film’s hard-won good vibes had the audience cheering!” —Ty Burr, *Boston Globe*

“*Slumdog Millionaire*, the documentary! It’s like *The Hills* interwoven with life-and-death politics.... It’s truthful and it’s fun.” —*Seattle Weekly*

“*Afghan Star* has everything: drama, suspense, songs, landscapes and large-as-life characters. There is even a message: that the showbiz cheesiness we Americans might deride can be a source of hope for people literally dying to sing.” —Stuart Klawans, *The Nation*

“Marking has found attractive, charismatic subjects to propel *Afghan Star* to its appropriately nail-biting conclusion. But even more memorable are the snippets of Afghan life she gathers to create a lively, textured depiction of a beautiful if confounding country.” —Ann Hornaday, *Washington Post*

“WILD APPLAUSE [Highest Rating] **Remarkable!** Succeeds at dramatizing the lives of Afghans, but those we see on screen are real flesh-and-blood characters.” —*San Francisco Chronicle*

“Alert to every detail of the country’s cities, streets, mosques, homes and people.... **This is history with a beat to it.**” —*Seattle Times*

“An informed and entertaining dispatch about the collision of culture, ideology and history that ultimately suggests a dark, more rueful *Afghani Slumdog Millionaire.*” —*Screen International*

“A pleasantly uplifting film, one built upon hope and the strength of the human spirit.”
—*Times-Picayune* (New Orleans)

“If you never understood ‘American Idol’ mania, this documentary about a Middle Eastern version will shed light on both its democratic ideal and its energizing solidarity.... Fascinating.” —*New York Daily News*

“★ ★ ★½ Excellent, illuminating!” —Steven Rea, *Philadelphia Inquirer*