

## The Yale Film Study Center Receives a 2020 NFPF Preservation Grant



September 30, 2020

The Yale Film Study Center has received a grant from the [National Film Preservation Foundation](#) [1] to support preservation of *Tony Williams in Africa*, a 1973 documentary by filmmaker, musician, Yale alumnus, and Professor Emeritus Willie Ruff '53 B.M., '54 M.M. The 37-minute short follows American jazz drummer Tony Williams to Senegal, and features Super 8mm footage of Williams jamming outdoors with West African drummers as locals look on, as well as 16mm footage of Williams, Ruff, and pianist Dwiki Mitchell sharing music and images from the Senegal trip with New Haven school children.

A lifelong interest in African "talking drums" inspired Ruff to make the film. "Everybody in the village who spoke a language could understand what the drummer in that language was saying on the drums," Ruff observed. "It wasn't a code; it was a language." The film was made with the support of a National Endowment for the Arts travel grant for Ruff and Williams. "He was such a master and a natural," Ruff said of Williams, whose friends claimed he came to see the film as "the most important legacy he left."

Willie Ruff was born in Sheffield, Alabama, in 1931, attended the Yale School of Music as an undergraduate and graduate student, and returned to Yale to teach in 1971. Ruff taught, performed as half of the Mitchell-Ruff Duo, and made films about the history of music around the world before retiring from teaching at Yale in 2017. He has since returned to Alabama, where he continues to play and work on various projects. In 2017, Ruff donated his film collection to the Yale Film Study Center, and in 2019, the FSC completed preservation of Ruff's best-known work, *The Beginnings of Bebop*, starring Dwiki Mitchell and Dizzy Gillespie.

With the NFPF's support, the FSC will be able to create a new 16mm preservation negative and screening print of *Tony Williams in Africa*, as well as digital preservation elements, from the original Super 8mm and 16mm film and

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magnetic soundtrack.

Read about the [47 films](#) [2] to be saved through the 2020 NFPF Preservation Grants.

**Source URL:** <https://web.library.yale.edu/film/news/nfpf2020>

### Links

[1] <https://www.filmpreservation.org>

[2] <https://www.filmpreservation.org/blog/2020/9/30/47-orphan-films-saved-through-the-2020-nfpf-grants>