

TREASURES FROM THE YALE FILM ARCHIVE

AN ONGOING SERIES OF CLASSIC AND CONTEMPORARY FILMS PRESENTED IN 35MM BY THE YALE FILM STUDY CENTER

WEDNESDAY
MARCH 4, 2020
7 PM • WHITNEY
HUMANITIES CENTER

AN EVENING WITH WILLIE RUFF

PRESENTED WITH SUPPORT FROM
PAUL L. JOSKOW '70 M.PHIL., '72 PH.D.



Dwiki Mitchell and Dizzy Gillespie in **THE BEGINNINGS OF BEBOP** (1981)

Willie Ruff, born in Sheffield, Alabama in 1931, attended the Yale School of Music as an undergraduate (1953) and graduate student (1954), 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 in 2017. His film collection is part of the Yale Film Archive.

TONY WILLIAMS IN AFRICA (1973, 16mm, 37 min.)

Ruff's film about the American jazz drummer Tony Williams traveling to Senegal features Super 8 footage of Williams and African drummers, as well as a framing section with Ruff, Williams, and pianist Dwiki Mitchell presenting the film on 16mm to local children. As Ruff wrote later, "[i]t took me about a year to finish it, mainly for teaching purposes, and I began using it almost immediately in classes at Yale. Tony saw it then and declared it to probably be the best work of his life. The fact is, he didn't understand what I was really after during the entire grueling enterprise, until he saw it on the Moviola, and I am told that he never stopped talking about it for the rest of his short life [as] one of his finest musical accomplishments. For me, it was special in every way, for I had wanted to make a film about the talking drum, and its legal removal in all the slaveholding states in America. I had to shoot it myself on Super 8 because my grant from the NEA was so small I couldn't afford to fly a 16mm camera crew to Africa." This original 16mm print was donated to the Film Study Center by the filmmaker in 2017.



THE SOUL OF ST. SIMONS ISLAND, GEORGIA (1981/2015, digital, 22 min.)

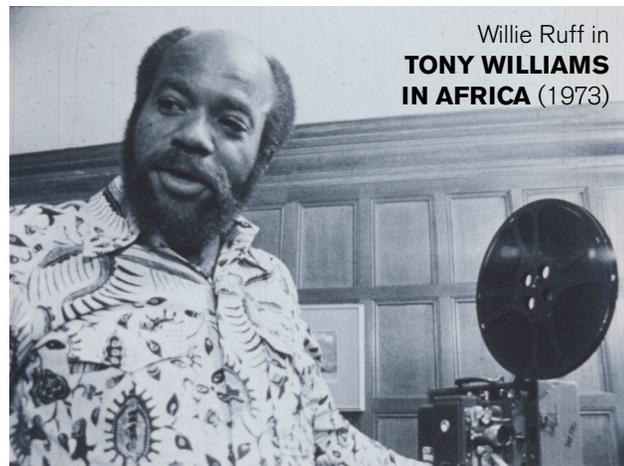
With support from a National Endowment for the Arts grant, Willie Ruff, Dwiki Mitchell, and Dizzy Gillespie traveled to the Sea Islands of Georgia in 1980 to meet legendary singer Bessie Jones. As Ruff said later, they visited Jones because she represented an experience that was "as far back as we could get where there was a traceable continuity. Her grandfather had been a slave child when he arrived in North America at seven years old, and he brought not only memory of some games he had learned as a small child in Africa, but they kept learning more. She was just full of stories and riddles and dances and musical ring games." The film documents conversations between Jones and Gillespie, and Jones and her students teaching Gillespie how to play several games. After revisiting the footage in 2015, Ruff completed an edit of the film, which will screen digitally tonight.

THE BEGINNINGS OF BEBOP (1981, 16mm, 26 min.)

After shooting completed on the film that would become **THE SOUL OF ST. SIMONS ISLAND, GEORGIA**, Ruff, Mitchell, and Gillespie returned to New York City around noon on the final day of Gillespie's week-long commitment for the project. As Ruff described it later, they had the idea to create another film in that spare time: "I had from noon to five o'clock to improvise a format, and Dizzy came up with the brilliant idea to walk Mitchell through Harlem and Miles' house and Carnegie Hall just as Bessie Jones walked him through St. Simons Island."

Preserved by the Yale Film Study Center in 2019 from the Ektachrome original reversal positive A/B rolls, with audio from original magnetic and preservation optical track sources, at Fotokem and Audio Mechanics, Burbank, California.

For more on Willie Ruff and Bessie Jones, visit "The Struggles and Triumphs of Bessie Jones, Big Mama Thornton, and Ethel Waters," an online exhibition by Daniella Posy for the Oral History of American Music, at onlineexhibits.library.yale.edu/s/ohamstruggles



NEXT UP: JOIN US FOR A SPECIAL EVENT HONORING THE LEGENDARY FILMMAKER BARBARA HAMMER (1939-2019). TREASURES PRESENTS A SCREENING OF 16MM SHORT FILMS FROM THE YALE COLLECTION, INCLUDING **WOMEN I LOVE**, **SYNC TOUCH**, AND **NO NO NOOKY T.V.** INTRODUCED BY PROF. RON GREGG, THIS SPECIAL TRIBUTE TO A PIONEER OF QUEER EXPERIMENTAL FILMMAKING HAPPENS **THURSDAY, MARCH 26, AT 7PM.**